

Former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko allowed to remain free in treason case amid war crisis

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A Ukrainian judge decided last week that former President Petro Poroshenko could remain free while facing charges of treason. Despite an earlier court order, Poroshenko was not arrested upon his recent arrival at the Kiev airport, and a judge subsequently rejected a request that he be placed under arrest and bail set at \$35 million.

Poroshenko, who was known as the “chocolate oligarch,” became the country’s president in the wake of the US-backed February 2014 putsch in Kiev that overthrew the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich. He initiated the ongoing civil war in eastern Ukraine against Russian-backed separatists that has killed over 14,000. His right-wing, militaristic regime was plagued by economic crisis and corruption, which ultimately led to his overwhelming defeat to Volodymyr Zelensky in the 2019 presidential elections.

According to the prosecution’s charges, Poroshenko purchased \$54 million in coal from separatists in eastern Ukraine in cooperation with pro-Russian oligarch and politician Viktor Medvedchuk. The latter is already facing treason charges and under house arrest. Poroshenko faces up to 15 years in prison.

The accusations against Poroshenko were first unveiled in December. In addition to facing legal prosecution, Poroshenko’s assets have been frozen in Ukraine. As former president, Poroshenko was undoubtedly aware of his impending arrest and left the country a week prior for what his political party claimed was a previously planned trip.

While outside of the country, Poroshenko traveled to Brussels, Berlin and other NATO member countries to meet with European Parliament members and drum up support among the imperialist powers and Eastern

European NATO member states.

In an interview with *Politico* while in Brussels, Poroshenko campaigned as the alternative to Zelensky, stating, “I’m the leader of the opposition. I’m the leader of public support. I’m the fifth president. I am the person who, fighting Putin, and with my team, saved Ukraine in the most difficult years of our history. I’m the person who created the army. And I am the person who (brought) Ukraine much closer to the European Union. I am the person who put in the Ukrainian constitution, European and Euro-Atlantix integration as the direction of our foreign policy.”

Upon his return from Warsaw, Ukrainian border guards seized his passport as he was greeted by thousands of supporters.

Since his arrival in Kiev, Poroshenko has vocally backed NATO’s escalation of tensions with Russia and attacked the Zelensky government for not being “decisive” enough. The Ukrainian journal *Fokus* quoted him as saying “We are for unity...We are for calming the population, but with decisive measures, not with some videos.” On Tuesday, he accused Zelensky of funding Moscow through purchases of coal and electricity from Belarus.

“He [Zelensky] has bought \$3.5 billion worth of electricity from Belarus since 2019, de facto financing Russia,” stated Poroshenko. “He shows soap operas [on television] ...[while] instead, we need to concentrate and mobilize.”

As a trusted friend of US imperialism, Poroshenko recently received support from American Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who urged the Ukrainian ruling class to call a timeout on the oligarchic infighting amid war preparations against Russia. “I think one of

Moscow's longstanding goals has been to try to sow divisions, between and within countries, and quite simply we cannot and will not let them do that," Blinken said while meeting with Zelensky in Kiev.

Poroshenko likewise got support from the British ambassador to Ukraine, Melinda Simmons, who tweeted that Poroshenko's case should be treated "independently, impartially, and professionally, ensuring fairness and respect for due process."

Unsurprisingly, the US and the UK expressed no such concerns over "divisions" within the oligarchy last year when the pro-Russian oligarch and opposition figure Medvedchuk was charged with treason and three popular Medvedchuk-owned television stations were undemocratically banned by the Zelensky administration.

The defense of Poroshenko by Ukraine's two most important military backers indicates that some circles in Washington and London may view Poroshenko as a potential replacement for Zelensky should a full-scale war break out between Russia and Ukraine.

Throughout his presidency, Poroshenko systematically worked to integrate far-right forces into Ukraine's National Guard, government and state apparatus. Neo-fascist "volunteer" battalions have played the principal role in the now almost eight-year long civil war between pro-Russian separatists and the Kiev regime in East Ukraine. At each step of his presidency Poroshenko was supported by the United States, most overtly by Joe Biden who coordinated US policy on Ukraine as Obama's vice president.

In contrast, Zelensky was forced to wait nine months into the Biden administration before being granted a meeting with the US president in September 2021, despite many previous requests.

While Washington initially expressed concern over Zelensky potentially making a deal with Moscow upon his election, such doubts have since been erased. Zelensky has gone even further than Poroshenko in antagonizing Moscow by openly pleading for his country's admission to NATO, adopting an official policy "to recover Crimea" and purchasing Turkish aerial drones for use against the separatists.

In doing so, Zelensky, with the backing of the imperialist powers, has brought the country to the brink of war. Notably, Zelensky is prosecuting Poroshenko not for any of the myriad financial crimes he

undoubtedly carried out as president, but rather on a right-wing, nationalist basis. Zelensky portrays his political opponents as national "traitors."

Today, Zelensky, who defeated Poroshenko by winning over 70 percent of the vote in 2019, is supported by just 17.4 percent of voters, according to recent polling data from the Kiev International Institute of Sociology.

Poroshenko's party, European Solidarity, is currently ahead in the polls against Zelensky's Servant of the People party. While promoting empty slogans like "democracy" and "European values," European Solidarity has drawn into its ranks many far-right Ukrainian nationalists. In October of 2021, deputies from his party participated in a social media challenge by singing a right-wing hymn to the Ukrainian nationalist hero, Nazi collaborator and war criminal Stepan Bandera.

Zelensky's constant concessions to the country's far right and his anti-Russia war drive notwithstanding, he has found himself under significant pressure from fascist forces that have been built up, armed and funded by Washington and sections of the state apparatus and oligarchy. In recent years, there have been several large-scale demonstrations against his government that were dominated by far-right forces and addressed by Poroshenko.

Last summer, amid NATO's escalating war drive in Eastern Europe, Zelensky, despite being the commander-in-chief, was banned from visiting the front of the civil war in East Ukraine for several days. The incident was never fully explained but indicated significant tensions within the Ukrainian state and military apparatus. In late July, Zelensky replaced the General Chief of Staff as part of a wider reshuffling of the security forces and army.



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