Chair of Ukraine's Supreme Court arrested in bribery scandal

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Vsevolod Knyazev, the chief of Ukraine's Supreme Court, was arrested and removed from his post on Tuesday amid accusations of accepting $2.7 million in bribes.

Earlier on Monday, the country's National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) released a photo of large amounts of American dollars lined up on a couch and stated it had "uncovered large-scale corruption in the Supreme Court, namely a scheme that allowed the leadership and judges to receive illicit profit."

On Tuesday, at a joint news conference of both NABU and another anti-corruption agency called the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), prosecutor Oleksandr Omelchenko announced that the head of the Supreme Court had been detained and suggested other high-ranking officials were under investigation for "criminal activity" but did not mention Knyazev specifically.

Unnamed sources from NABU also told ZN.ua that investigators conducted searches at the properties of 18 other Supreme Court judges, suggesting a much larger purge of the top of the judicial system.

Later on Tuesday, the Supreme Court held a special session where judges voted to strip Knyazev of his role as chief justice and released a joint statement calling the arrest "a dark day in the history of the court."

According to Ukrainian parliamentary member Oleksiy Goncharenko, Knyazev is the highest ranking official in the history of post-Soviet Ukraine to be arrested for bribery.

The arrest of the highest judicial official in the country signals an intensifying struggle within the Ukrainian ruling class and a deepening crisis of the Zelensky regime. It comes just a few months after far-reaching purges over another "corruptions scandal" in Zelensky's cabinet, among regional governors and the country's military leadership. The procurement scam even nearly took down Ukraine's Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov, weeks after the top leadership of the country's Interior Ministry died in a helicopter crash.

It also comes as the Ukrainian military is on the verge of launching a "counter-offensive" against Russia with its imperialist backers warning that no great success can be expected from it.

Semen Kryvonos, the recently appointed head of NABU, claimed the bribe was paid by oligarch Konstiantyn Zhevago, who led the now bankrupt Finance and Credit Bank. According to Kryvonos, the chief of Ukraine's Supreme Court received the bribe in exchange for deciding a case over control of the shares of a mining company in Zhevago's favor.

Zhevago currently lives in France, where he fled in 2019 after he was accused of embezzling $113 million from the bank.

From 1998 to 2019 Zhevago served in the Ukrainian parliament where he was allied with former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, herself a potential Zelensky rival.

On Wednesday, Ukraine's State Bureau of Investigation announced it was working with Swiss authorities to retrieve the embezzled funds from Zhevago's Swiss bank account. Earlier in December, Zhevago was arrested in France and then later released on $1 million bail after Ukrainian authorities had sought his extradition.

Significantly, the arrest of Knyazev has nothing to do with the reported widespread plundering of cash, weapons and resources by the Ukrainian ruling-class that have flooded the country since Russia's 2022 invasion nor have any of Zelensky's associates been implicated. Journalist Seymour Hersh has revealed that

Zelensky and his regime had embezzled $400 million in US funds intended to purchase diesel gasoline.

No doubt that there is massive social and political discontent in Ukraine's working population about the open theft and plunder in the country's ruling elite, all the while hundreds of thousands are dying in the NATO proxy war against Russia, and tens of millions have been thrown into complete destitution.

However, workers must lend no credence to the phony "anti-corruption" campaign of the NATO-backed Zelensky regime. The truth is that Ukraine's ruling oligarchy, which emerged out of the Stalinist bureaucracy's destruction of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism, is steeped in criminality. Whatever "corruption scandals" are surfacing only show a glimpse of the systematic theft of social resources that forms the basis for the very existence of this layer, and they are used above all to settle scores within rival factions of the ruling class.

The imperialist powers and especially the US too are using the smokescreen of "corruption scandals" for their direct intervention in Ukraine's oligarchic politics.

Kryvonos was appointed in March as the head of NABU, with much fanfare that Zelensky and the Ukrainian government were finally getting tough on "corruption," as demanded by the EU and US. Kryvonos reportedly possesses close ties to Zelensky's Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak, one of the most influential figures in contemporary Ukrainian politics.

NABU was set up in the wake of the 2014 coup in Kiev, in which a pro-Russian government was toppled with the assistance of far-right nationalist organizations, such as Svoboda and the Azov Battalion. The coup was organized and funded primarily by the US and EU and triggered an eight-year-long civil war in East Ukraine, leading up to Russia's invasion in February 2022.

Founded in 2015 by the right-wing nationalist government of Petro Poroshenko, NABU is almost entirely created and directed by the US, and its staff was trained directly by the FBI and EU.

In 2020, the former Prosecutor General of Ukraine, Viktor Shokin, complained that NABU was created by order of then US Vice President Joe Biden in order to undermine Ukraine's own State Bureau of Investigation and "put there emissaries who listen to the United States."

NABU has played a key role in the ongoing conflicts within the Ukrainian oligarchy and state apparatus.

Earlier this month, Ukraine's High Anti-Corruption Court ordered the arrest of Odessa Mayor Gennady Trukhanov for reportedly misusing city funds dating back to 2017. Again, the case is years old and conveniently does not concern corruption within Zelensky's circles, and Trukhanov himself is tied to pro-Russian political forces that were banned in June of last year.

In 2022, the US gave Ukraine $48 billion in military, financial and humanitarian aid combined, while the EU gave $72 billion since the start of the war.

By arresting high-profile officials in years-old cases, Zelensky's regime hopes to keep the money and weapons flowing while at the same time eliminating political enemies .

As Volodymyr Dubovyk, professor of international relations at Mechnikov National University in Odesa, Ukraine, told *Al Jazeera* in February amid the widely reported corruption scandals, "There is definitely a connection between the anti-corruption moves and Zelenskyy's desire to keep Western military aid flowing.

"Ukraine's worst fear is that the US and West will abandon them and that the flow of weapons will stop," Dubovyk added.

In reality, the United States—where the majority of Congress members are millionaires—has no issues with corruption as long as it does not impede Ukraine's ability to continue its disastrous war with Russia that has already killed hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers, destroyed the lives of millions and continues to threaten the outbreak of World War III.

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