



Ukraine Reform Monitor No. 6

November 28, 2023 **Ilan I. Berman, Matthew Cesare**

Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; Warfare; NATO; Corruption; Border Security; Europe; Russia; Ukraine

ZELENSKY TAKES AIM AT CYBER DEFENSE OFFICIALS

On November 20th, prosecutors in Kyiv announced that they had launched an investigation into allegations of embezzlement and graft within the State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection (SSSCIP), the Ukrainian government agency responsible for defending the country from cyber-attacks and maintaining secure government communications. As part of the probe, the head of the SSSCIP, Yuri Shchyhol, and his deputy, Viktor Zhora, have already been forced out of their jobs. No specific reason for the firings was given by Taras Melnychuk, the senior cabinet official who broke the news on Telegram. However, known details of the investigation include accusations against Shchyhol and Zhora for plotting with four others to embezzle 62 million hryvnias (\$1.72 million) from the SSSCIP between 2020 and 2022. The two are alleged to have bought software from companies purportedly under their control at prices far above market value and in a sale closed off to other bidders, the national anti-corruption regulator, NABU, said in a statement. (Reuters, November 20, 2023)

COMBATTING CORRUPTION IS THE KEY TO UKRAINE'S EU QUEST

Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, Ukraine's government – operating on the principle of safety in numbers – has made accession to the European Union a major national priority. Officials in Brussels have largely reciprocated, hoping to lock in Kyiv's pro-Atlantic trajectory. But lingering worries over endemic and widespread corruption in Ukraine could still throw a wrench in the process. On November 8th, the EU formally recommended the commencement of membership talks with Ukraine – citing that Ukraine's government had done most of the work and reform necessary to begin the process. According to European Commission president Ursula Von Der Leyen, "over 90%" of the political reform needed in order for Ukraine to become an EU member has already been completed.

However, Kyiv could still face turbulence ahead. That's because the accession of new members to the European Union requires unanimous consent from the bloc's existing members (currently numbering 27). Therefore, analysts say, the most effective course of action for Kyiv to take is to continue its current, aggressive anti-corruption push – and to publicize it as much as possible. "To ensure the impact and sustainability of anticorruption efforts, Ukraine should continue building a credible track record of investigations, prosecutions, and final court decisions in high-level corruption cases including the seizure and confiscation of criminal assets," the European Commission has advised. (*Wall Street Journal*, November 8, 2023)

KYIV EYES MILITARY MEDICAL REFORM

Earlier this month, as part of his ongoing overhaul of processes to optimize the fight against Russia, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appointed Anatolii Kazmirchuk as the new commander of the Medical Forces of the Ukrainian military. Kazmirchuk was previously the head of the National Military Medical Clinical Center in Kyiv. He replaces Tetiana Ostashchenko, who has been the subject of complaints from paramedics and medical workers in the Ukrainian Armed Forces in recent times. Defense Minister Rustem Umerov remarked that the decision to switch out Ostashchenko was "obvious" to those in the Armed Forces. Zelenskyy is hopeful the hire of Kazmirchuk will usher in a "fundamentally new level of medicine." (*Meduza*, November 20, 2023)

SECURING THE "DAY AFTER"

Ukraine's government is still preoccupied with its fight against Russia, and marshaling tremendous political and economic resources to persevere. However, officials in Kyiv are already thinking about the need for post-conflict reconstruction – and moving to ensure that opportunistic elements don't take advantage of the "day after" the current war. In late November, Ukrainian authorities publicized a probe into two lawmakers suspected of being involved in bribing top reconstruction officials. One of the lawmakers, a member of the Ukrainian Rada's anti-corruption committee, was apprehended by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) offering a bribe in digital currency, while the other has been suspected of illicit cash transfers. Both of the payoffs are said to have been intended to divert funds intended for reconstruction projects by Ukraine's State Agency for Restoration and Reconstruction Development. (*U.S. News & World Report*, November 21, 2023)

PROTECTING THE MILITARY FROM GRAFT

Ukraine's armed forces are on the front lines of the fight for the country's independence against Russian aggression, making instances in which corruption has prevented their resupply all the more egregious. Ukraine's government is now cracking down on widespread instances of the diversion of humanitarian aid (things like foodstuffs, clothing, and other sundries) to military units. Ukraine's State Customs Service has estimated that roughly a third of the humanitarian aid intended for the Ukrainian military did not reach its destination after clearing customs so far in 2023. The agency's investigation found that – of the 9,000 instances of humanitarian goods movements checked – delivery could not be verified in more than 3,000 cases. The service has also documented nearly 400 reports of the use of humanitarian aid for profit, which constitutes a crime under the country's Criminal Code. (*Kyiv Post*, October 20, 2023)