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Ukraine's Reaction to Donald Trump's Election as U.S. President

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Donald Trump's election as U.S. president has caused anxiety among Ukraine's authorities, who expected victory for Hillary Clinton and are concerned about her opponent's declarations regarding possible rapprochement between Washington, D.C. and Moscow. Still, President Petro Poroshenko and his associates will seek to establish close personal contacts and cooperation with the new U.S. administration. Ukrainian opposition parties, on the other hand, will aim to take advantage of Trump's success to increase its own popularity and discredit Poroshenko.

Cautious Response from Ukraine. The reaction of Ukraine's authorities to the results of the U.S. election was restrained, since it had been widely expected that Clinton would win. Poroshenko was among the last major heads of states to congratulate Trump. He conveyed congratulations to the president-elect during a meeting with Marie Yovanovitch, the U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, who assured him that the U.S. would remain an important partner for Ukraine. Members of the Ukrainian government spoke in a similar vein. Prime minister Volodymyr Hroysman, while congratulating Americans on making their choice, did not even mention Trump's name. Pavlo Klimkin, foreign affairs minister, expressed willingness for future cooperation with the new U.S. administration and added that steps had already been taken to arrange a meeting between Poroshenko and Trump. Less than a week later, in a telephone conversation, Poroshenko invited the U.S. president-elect to Ukraine. However, the first meeting between the leaders may be held as early as February 2017, when Poroshenko may visit the United States. It is also worth mentioning that Poroshenko was the first leader after Russia's President Vladimir Putin to speak to Trump.

The anxiety of the Ukrainian authorities arises from their election miscalculations. Ukraine had engaged in the U.S. election campaign in an unprecedented manner, supporting Clinton. Serhiy Leshchenko, a member of parliament from Poroshenko's faction, in cooperation with the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, revealed secret documents on Trump's chief of staff Paul Manafort's ties to Ukraine's ex-President Viktor Yanukovich. Manafort, dismissed during the election campaign because of the allegations, had reportedly received \$12.7 billion and had illegally transferred money to lobbying institutions in Washington, D.C. Ukraine's politicians wrongly expected that the Manafort case would diminish Trump's chances of winning the election.

During that time, the Ukrainian politicians criticised the Republican candidate for his declarations on a possible deepening of relations with Russia. In response to Trump's statement that he may consider recognising Crimea as Russian territory, Ukraine's internal affairs minister Arsen Avakov called him a dangerous and marginal politician (the Facebook post was deleted after Trump's election).

In the pre-election period Poroshenko also met Clinton on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly to discuss countering Russian aggression in Ukraine. Both underlined the effectiveness of sanctions against Russia. In addition, a delegation of members of the Ukrainian parliament took part in a Democratic Party convention. However, despite the efforts made by Ukraine, there was no meeting between Poroshenko and Trump, officially owing to both of their busy schedules.

Ukraine in the Trump Campaign. During his election campaign, the Republican candidate did not present any coherent vision of future U.S. policy towards Ukraine. On the one hand, Trump criticised the current U.S. administration for its insufficient support for Ukraine in fighting Russian aggression. He also assured that, in contrast

to current President Barack Obama, he would not have allowed Putin to get away with attacking Ukraine. On the other hand, he signalled the possibility of recognising the Russian annexation of Crimea and took an ambivalent position on Ukraine's possible membership of NATO by saying that the issue does not matter for him.

According to Trump, the U.S. bears too high a cost in stabilising the situation in Ukraine compared to European countries. Therefore, it is unlikely that cooperation with Ukraine will be among his priorities. Nevertheless, Trump's election may pave the way for the government in Kyiv to obtain lethal weapons and military equipment from the United States. Such a declaration was made by Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the House of Representatives and a close associate of Trump during the election campaign, during a visit to Ukraine in September 2016. Although Gingrich will not serve in the new U.S. administration, he may have a significant influence on Trump's policies. Selling lethal weapons to Ukraine is supported by both Republicans and Democrats. However, it has hitherto been rejected by Obama for fear of Russia's reaction.

Opposition Seizes the Opportunity. The result of the U.S. election was welcomed enthusiastically by some Ukrainian opposition forces. On the morning after the election, Mikheil Saakashvili, ex-governor of Odessa Oblast and now a fierce critic of Poroshenko and the Ukrainian authorities, boasted of his long-term acquaintance with Trump. At a press conference during which a new political party (provisionally called the Movement of New Forces) was announced, Saakashvili presented a short movie of Trump's visit to Batumi, in which the billionaire praised successes of the then-president of Georgia. Trump promised to invest in this country, but ultimately did not.

Trump's election has also met with a positive reaction from Ukraine's former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko (although Manafort helped Yanukovich to bring about her conviction). According to Tymoshenko, the U.S. has always pursued a friendly policy towards Ukraine, and after Trump's victory relations between the countries will become stronger.

The activities of Ukraine's opposition show that it will try to take advantage of Trump's victory to increase its popularity among Ukrainian society and further discredit Poroshenko as a leader who bet on the wrong candidate. Soon after the U.S. election result was announced, Serhiy Kiral, a Self-Reliance Party member of the Ukrainian parliament, called on Poroshenko to demand from Trump an explanation of his stance on Ukraine's sovereignty. Nadiya Savchenko, the former Ukrainian air force pilot kidnapped by Russia on trumped-up charges and later released as part of a prisoner exchange and now a member of the Ukrainian parliament in Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna party, wrote an open letter to President-elect Trump, in which she appealed for tougher sanctions against Russia and additional diplomatic and military assistance to Ukraine.

Prospects for U.S.-Ukraine Relations. There is no consensus among Ukrainian experts as to what Trump's victory will mean for relations between Washington, D.C. and Kyiv. On the one hand, Trump's election is perceived as a threat to Ukraine due to possible détente between the U.S. and the Russian Federation, elements of which would be a recognition of the annexation of Crimea as well as informal consent for Russian domination in the post-Soviet area. Future U.S. support for Ukraine's reforms is being called into question, too. The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, which put effective pressure on Ukraine's authorities, has so far played a key role in the implementation of these reforms.

On the other hand, it is suggested that expectations of Clinton were too high, and the positive aspects of Trump's election are underlined. This is because the potential need for Ukraine to implement reforms on its own would allow it to become less dependent on the assistance of external partners. However, it is unlikely that the Ukrainian authorities will demonstrate enough political will to introduce wide-ranging changes in the country without external pressure, including from the United States. Besides, U.S. support will be crucial for Ukraine's further macroeconomic stabilisation.

Nevertheless, it is currently difficult to define how future U.S. policy towards Ukraine will shape up. This may depend on the Stability and Democracy for Ukraine Act, a bill being in the legislative process that would provide for further U.S. support for Ukraine, disallow the recognition of the annexation of Crimea, and in fact prevent the president-elect from lifting sanctions imposed on Russia. Progress in the Senate may be impeded because the current term of Congress is coming to an end, but if passed the bill will limit the new president's freedom to make decisions in this respect. If the bill fails, Trump will have room for manoeuvre regarding both Crimea and the sanctions.

It can be expected that the U.S. will continue its military assistance to the Ukrainian armed forces through, for example, the Joint International Training Group-Ukraine. However, the future of these activities may depend on the development of relations between the two countries.

The significant financial assistance of American NGO's, including the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the International Republican Institute (IRI), for Ukrainian non-governmental organisations and media, are also likely to be maintained.