

V. Zelensky

## Ukrainian President praises relationship with Trudeau but mum on support for Security Council seat

### *Президент України високо оцінює відносини з Трюдо, але ухилився від підтримки місця в Раді Безпеки*

*Виступаючи в ексклюзивному інтерв'ю The Globe and Mail, Президент України Володимир Зеленський заявив, що міжнародне співтовариство повинне чинити тиск на Москву, щоб вона повернула землю, яку вона відібрала в Україні в 2014 році, і подякував прем'єр-міністру Джастіну Трюдо за те, що він відкинув прагнення президента США Дональда Трампа знову прийняти Росію в "велику сімку". Але хоча Україна є одним з найближчих союзників Канади, пан В. Зеленський не сказав, чи підтримав би невдалу заявку Оттави на місце в Раді Безпеки ООН. Пан В. Зеленський сказав, що, хоча він був прихильником пошуку миру з Росією Володимира Путіна – для зусиль, які він назвав «найскладнішими і важко вирішуваними», - Україні потрібні її міжнародні союзники, щоб твердо триматися в ході цих переговорів. Хоча переговори практично припинилися на тлі пандемії COVID-19, він побачив деякі скромні ранні успіхи, в тому числі кілька обмінів ув'язненими. «У мене немає часу вибирати, довіряти чи не довіряти В. Путіну», - сказав пан В. Зеленський. «Може бути, [обмін полоненими] не така вже й велика перемога, але такі маленькі перемоги уможливають велику перемогу - а для нас велика перемога - це повернення всіх наших вкрадених земель. Це те, у що я твердо вірю, і на це у мене є час». Росія була вигнана з Великої сімки (раніше Великої вісімки) за анексію Криму в 2014 році, а також за підтримку Москвою бойовиків-сепаратистів в районі Донбасу на сході України. Через шість років після початку війни на Донбасі лінії фронту тепер статичні, хоча перестрілки відбуваються майже щодня. Більше 13 000 чоловік були вбиті.*

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-ukrainian-president-praises-relationship-with-trudeau-but-mum-on/>



*Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Skype with Mark MacKinnon in his office in Kyiv, Saturday, June 20, 2020. Photos provided by Ukrainian President's office.*

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky says the international community must maintain pressure on Moscow to return the land it seized from Ukraine in 2014 – and he thanked Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for rejecting U.S. President Donald Trump's push to readmit Russia into the G7.

But even though Ukraine is one of Canada's closest allies, Mr. Zelensky wouldn't say whether he had supported Ottawa's failed bid for a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with The Globe and Mail, Mr. Zelensky said that while he was committed to seeking peace with Vladimir Putin's Russia – an effort he called

“most tricky and difficult” – Ukraine needed its international allies to hold firm during those negotiations. While talks have slowed to a near-stop amid the COVID-19 pandemic, they saw some modest early gains, including several exchanges of prisoners.

“I have not the time to choose to trust or not to trust Vladimir Putin,” Mr. Zelensky said. “Maybe [the prisoner swap] is not that big a victory, but such small victories make a big victory possible – and for us the big victory is the return of all our stolen lands. That’s what I believe in strongly, and that’s what I have time for.”

Russia was expelled from the G7 (formerly the G8) over its 2014 annexation of Crimea, as well as Moscow’s support for separatist fighters in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Six years after the Donbas war began, the front lines are now static, though exchanges of fire still occur on a near-daily basis. More than 13,000 people have been killed.

Mr. Trump, the host of the next G7 meeting in September, called the club of industrialized nations “a very outdated group of countries” and said last month that he will invite Russia, as well as India, South Korea and Australia, to a gathering focused on the question of how to deal with China. It would be the first time Mr. Putin has been invited to attend since the Crimea takeover.

While welcoming other countries to attend the September meeting is Mr. Trump’s prerogative as host, Mr. Trudeau and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson have both said Russia won’t be allowed to rejoin the G7 before Ukraine gets its land back.

“Justin Trudeau said on June 1 that there is no chance for Russia to return to the G7 until the full restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine and we are grateful for that support – and I should say that there will be no resolution if the world doesn’t keep the pressure on Russia in that regard,” Mr. Zelensky said in the interview – which was conducted via Skype, with Mr. Zelensky speaking from his office in Kyiv on Saturday.

But while he repeatedly praised Canada and Mr. Trudeau for backing Ukraine, Mr. Zelensky twice refused to answer whether Ukraine had supported Canada’s high-profile drive – an effort central to the Prime Minister’s foreign-policy vision – for a seat on the UN Security Council. The bid ended in defeat last week when Canada finished behind Norway and Ireland on a secret ballot, which saw the top two countries chosen from a three-country list.

“Ukraine has always and will continue to support Canada. Regarding the voting and the election process at the United Nations, I cannot say because that is confidential information,” Mr. Zelensky said. “I know that Canada wanted very much to be elected and to be on the Security Council of the United Nations. Well, it did not happen this time, but what is important for Canada is also important for Ukraine because the success of Canada is the success of Ukraine.”

When The Globe asked about a rumour that Ukraine had already promised its votes to Norway and Ireland before Canada even began its campaign in 2016 for the Security Council seat, Mr. Zelensky again avoided answering. “I know this information, but I cannot disclose it because it is confidential information.”

Canadians could be forgiven for expecting Ukraine to be outspoken in its support for Ottawa’s bid. Conservative and Liberal governments have given \$785-million in aid to Ukraine since 2014 – in addition to imposing sanctions on Russian businesses, as well as members of Mr. Putin’s inner circle.

Canada also has some 200 troops stationed in western Ukraine on a training mission. “Canada supports Ukraine. Ukraine needs to support Canada,” was the headline of an op-ed opinion piece, written by Alexandra Chyczij of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, which appeared last week in the Kyiv Post newspaper, ahead of the Security Council vote.

The 42-year-old Mr. Zelensky said he had a close relationship with Mr. Trudeau, one he believes is based partly on the fact the two men are younger than many other world leaders. (Another thing the two men have in common is both their spouses have been infected with the novel coronavirus. Mr. Zelensky said his wife, Olena Zelenska, was recovering after being hospitalized last week.)

Mr. Zelensky said he hoped the Canada-Ukraine relationship would continue to evolve to include more foreign direct investment and, eventually, visa-free travel between the two countries. (Pre-pandemic, Canadians could travel freely to Ukraine, though Ukrainians had to apply for a visa before going to Canada.)

Mr. Zelensky, who spoke by phone with Mr. Trudeau last week just before the UN vote, said the two men were also united in putting pressure on Iran to deliver the flight recorders from Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752, which was shot down in January by an Iranian anti-aircraft system minutes after it took off from Tehran's airport. Of the 176 people who were killed in the attack, 138 were connecting to Canada via Ukraine; of these, 55 were Canadian citizens and 30 were permanent residents.

"I hope that we will be able, eventually, to be able to count on a result-oriented policy from the Iranian government," Mr. Zelensky said. "Because it is not only that they don't give us back the black boxes. It is also about their [other] promises. They have to give an official apology. They have to pay adequate compensations. .... They have to do what they have promised. Otherwise, we will have no other choice – and they know our position – but to resort to the international courts."

Mr. Zelensky said the Iranian side had blamed the pandemic for the delay in delivering the flight recorders to Kyiv, but "this problem cannot wait indefinitely because we have been waiting for quite a long time now."

Mr. Zelensky's remarks about Mr. Trump's G7 proposal were as close as he got to making a comment on U.S. politics during the interview. He said he had not yet read a new book by Mr. Trump's former national security adviser John Bolton that recounts details of the now infamous call between Mr. Trump and Mr. Zelensky. That call saw Mr. Trump attempt to put pressure on Mr. Zelensky by connecting the delivery of U.S. military aid to Ukraine to Kyiv opening an investigation that could damage Mr. Trump's rival, the Democratic presumptive presidential nominee, Joe Biden.

Mr. Bolton's memoir suggests the call was part of a pattern of behaviour that saw the U.S. President repeatedly tie his country's foreign policy to his own electoral fortunes. Mr. Trump was impeached by the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives – but acquitted by the Republican-dominated Senate – over the call.

Mr. Bolton's book details how angry Mr. Trump was that Ukraine had not pursued an investigation into the activities of Mr. Biden's son, Hunter, with its previous government. Mr. Bolton describes Mr. Zelensky positively, portraying him as an earnest figure serious about pushing back against Mr. Putin's incursions into his country while also fighting corruption domestically with no fewer than 254 separate reform bills. Mr. Bolton also notes how unreliable an ally the U.S. under Mr. Trump had been to Kyiv.

"Zelensky was impressive throughout, very much in command of the issues," Mr. Bolton recounts of a meeting with the Ukrainian President in Kyiv in August of last year. "He started by thanking us for keeping our Crimea sanctions in place and our continued non-recognition of Russia's purported annexation. I thought: If only he knew how close we were to giving it all away!"

In his interview with *The Globe*, Mr. Zelensky said he was eager to steer clear of U.S. politics, and to erase the image of Ukraine as "a country of scandal."

It's an effort that has been complicated in recent weeks by the criminal prosecution of Mr. Zelensky's immediate predecessor, Petro Poroshenko, who is facing charges of abuse of power over the hiring and firing of the former deputy head of the country's intelligence service. Western embassies in Kyiv, including Canada's, issued a collective statement last week calling for "a justice system free of political interference."

The statement appeared to reference past incidences of Ukraine's justice system being used to settle political scores – the most famous of which saw then-president Viktor Yanukovich jail his rival, former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko. "History tells us that appearance of interference and revanchism only breeds more of the same," it reads.

Mr. Zelensky, who took office just 13 months ago, laughed when asked to look back on a year that has seen the one-time political neophyte – whose previous political experience had consisted of playing Ukraine's president on a satirical television show – bounced between the war in Donbas, the U.S. impeachment scandal, the downing of the Ukrainian airliner, and now the pandemic and a looming global economic recession.

"It's a very difficult job. I don't want to cry or say 'Oh, it's so difficult for me. I never see my children; I don't have any hobbies; I don't have time for sports,'" he said, switching to English that has rapidly improved since he came to office. "It's not everybody God gives a chance to have responsibility, and to do something which can help Ukrainians and make a difference and, exactly, stop the war. I have this chance and I want to use it.

With a report from Adrian Morrow in Washington



*Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Skype in his office in Kyiv, Saturday, June 20, 2020.*