



Bild. – 18.06.2019

*Paul Ronzheimer and Julian Röpcke*

## Interview with Ukrainian president Zelensky I will tell Putin: Crimea is Ukraine

*Інтерв'ю з Президентом України Зеленським. Я скажу Путіну:  
Крим - це Україна*

**BILD:** *Пане Президенте, ви зустрічаєтеся з канцлером Німеччини Ангелою Меркель у Берліні. Як їй пояснити, що Зеленський «телевізійний президент» може стати справжнім Президентом України?*

*Володимир Зеленський: "В Україні є величезна потреба в змінах. Старі політичні еліти, які були при владі з 1991 року незалежності, не змогли забезпечити українцям рівень життя, якого вони заслуговують. 45 мільйонів сильних людей, які успадкували великий економічний та інтелектуальний потенціал, але соромилися бути однією з найбільш розвинених держав континенту, і люди прийшли до висновку, що корінь проблеми в керівництві державою.*

*Коли «телевізійний президент» показав людям надію, яку вони прийняли і повірили, справжній Зеленський зрозумів, що більше не може стояти осторонь і повинен намагатися зробити все можливе, щоб стати справжнім Президентом. Зараз, тут я намагаюся перетворити цю надію на реальність».*

<https://www.bild.de/politik/international/bild-international/interview-with-ukraine-president-zelensky-i-will-tell-putin-crimea-is-ukraine-62694806.bild.html>



*Volodymyr Selenski (41)*

*As Ukraine's new president Volodymyr Zelensky greets the reporters from BILD, he recalls a private trip to Berlin two years ago: „The Tiergarten was great“, he says in English. On Tuesday, he will meet Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin, for the first time in his function as president.*

**BILD: Mr. President, you are meeting German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin. How do you explain to her that Zelensky the "television president" could become the real president of Ukraine?**

**Volodymyr Zelensky:** "There is a huge demand for change in Ukraine. The old political elites who have been in power since Independence in 1991 failed to provide Ukrainians with the standard of living that they deserve. We have the biggest land mass in Europe and are nearly 45 million strong, we have inherited great economic and intellectual potential, but we are ashamed to be one of the poorest nations on the continent and the people came to the conclusion that the root of the problem is with the management of the State.

When the 'Television President' showed people hope which they embraced and believed, the real Zelenskyy realized that he could not stand aside anymore and had to try his best to become the real President. Now, here I am struggling to turn this hope into reality."

**In your opinion what is the difference between the "fictional president" Holoborodko and the real president Zelensky?**

**Zelensky:** "We are different in how we have lived our lives but are similar in our values. I want for Ukrainians everything that I have promised as a Servant of the People – to stop corruption, to bring honesty and transparency in the Ukrainian politics, to unify the country, to deliver peace, and to improve lives of ordinary people. With these objectives, I am as sincere as Vasyl Holoborodko.

But I don't ride a bicycle to work, especially now, when I am in a position where it can be dangerous. I am proud to have had a successful business in the sphere of creative economy that I love. And also, what is important to underline, as a real politician I will collaborate with the international partners of Ukraine. Our urgent goal now is to develop the good relations of the new government with the IMF, as well as with the European Union, and NATO. Our economic priorities are the establishment of the rule of law, currency liberalization and privatization, land reform, tax administration and coping management, reducing the administrative burden on business and creating incentives for small and medium businesses."

**As an actor, have you taken benefit from the global election trend in which people no longer want "classic politicians"?**

**Zelensky:** "Every good actor, like every good politician, must listen to people and sense their mood and aspirations. But still I am the one to choose the path of changes and to take the responsibility."

**Your predecessor has demanded from Germany in the past that arms deliveries and sanctions should be tightened against Russia. What do you want from the Chancellor?**

**Zelensky:** "Chancellor Merkel has a strong personality, undisputed credibility, and tremendous experience. Ukrainians hope that Angela Merkel, as a powerful European and global influencer, will help my country stand against the challenges we face. We are sure that sanctions policies must stay until the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine is restored. We will also need assistance in the deep structural reforms we are launching. We also see threats in the energy sector because of North Stream 2, that will damage Ukraine's and Europe's energy security."

**Do you believe that Ukraine will join the EU and will you refer to this topic with Merkel?**

**Zelensky:** "Ukraine is already a part of the European family. Ukraine seeks for European integration as the major demand of our people. But we understand that we need to deliver compelling results to be able to join the common economic, legal, customs, and digital space of the EU. I would like to see Ukraine at such a level of development that the EU countries will see us as an equal member of the Union. And we will do everything to reach this."

**Do you consider Ukraine's accession to NATO realistic?**

**Zelensky:** "NATO enlargement proved to be a powerful tool to ensure security in the region. Almost all our neighbors are members of the Alliance, as well as France and Germany. Ukraine has officially declared its aspiration to join NATO too. First, what I want to do is to implement NATO standards in the Ukrainian armed forces and our security sector. Ukraine is already a reliable partner of NATO and in the future, we can become a reliable member of the Alliance."

**The Saxon Prime Minister Kretschmer met Putin and spoke in favor of easing the sanctions. How will you deal with that?**

**Zelensky:** "This is not the first time when discussions of lifting sanctions have been launched amidst the continuing war. Most probably, these envoys should be reminded why these sanctions were introduced in the first place. My position is clear and simple. Sanctions are the only leverage to free the occupied territory, restore our territorial integrity and sovereignty, and to return our people."

**Soldiers are still dying in Ukraine. Do you think the sanctions should be tightened from your point of view?**

**Zelensky:** "Sanctions are a diplomatic tool to achieve results, I mean a cease-fire and the restoration of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. If this tool does not work, then the mechanism needs to be expanded."

**Will the war never stop in the East?**

**Zelensky:** "All wars come to end. We will do everything to implement a ceasefire and stop the killing and suffering of our people in the nearest future. We have to give diplomats the chance to talk again while the guns stay silent. This is what I count on. And hope this will be heard in Moscow."



*BILD reporters Paul Ronzheimer (l.) and Julian Röpcke talking to Zelensky*

**When you meet Putin for the first time, what will you tell him?**

**Zelensky:** "Let us start from the point that the Donbas and Crimea are Ukraine."

**But isn't Crimea already lost for Ukraine?**

**Zelensky:** "Crimea is Ukraine. And we hope that soon it will be returned. I love Crimea very much. I have been there many-many times. This is a unique place in Ukraine with its nature and history. For me, Crimea has always been and still stays a part of Ukraine."

**You recently said that you want to protect the game from the old elite. However, several people associated with oligarchy like Kolomoisky are part of your presidential team now. Why?**

**Zelensky:** "My presidential team consists of professionals with no corruption background and ties to the old elites. They are people whom I trust because I worked with them in business and during the political campaign, people who had proved that they can be trusted. They are not influenced by oligarchs or any part of the old elites. They are committed to the future of Ukraine that we aim to build together. They know my position. And if anyone of my team falls under the suspicion of being involved in murky deals or compromises me, our paths will immediately split."

**When it comes to Eastern Ukraine, some Ukrainian activists accuse you of "surrendering Donbas" to the occupiers while western leaders are afraid, you will choose to be a part beyond the "Minsk" process. How do you plan to solve the conflict during your presidency?**

**Zelensky:** "My goal is to bring peace to Ukraine using diplomatic means, not populism. Let me underline again that neither the sovereignty, neither territory, nor the Ukrainian people's destiny will become a negotiating token in any peace deal. I'll do my best and I'll seek the support of my fellow citizens and international partners in this difficult endeavor. We trust in the Minsk process, so far. We hope it is a solution. We are relaunching it to negotiate a ceasefire and the release of prisoners. But we can't wait for another 5 years, because the Ukrainians die every day. If we have to, we will explore any other way for negotiations, either in 'Normandy' or another format."

**There is a debate that is ongoing in Germany, weather we should lift Crimea and Donbas related sanctions in Russia because they do not have any effect on the Kremlin's behavior.**

**What is your take on this?**

**Zelensky:** "This question is very closely connected with the one I have already answered earlier. The only thing I can add that the sanctions can also be reinforced if their effect is not satisfactory."