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Ukraine Premier, in White House Visit, Hails Economic Progress

Український прем'єр під час візиту в Білий дім оголосив про економічний прогрес

Прем'єр-міністр України Арсеній Яценюк запевнив президента Обаму, що його уряд, хоча і знаходиться у важкому становищі, але все ж таки добивається важливих успіхів у модернізації обтяженої проблемами економіки країни і виконує умови нестійкої перемир'я з Росією. За словами Яценюка, він сказав Обамі, що його уряд бореться з корупцією в ключовій енергетичній галузі економіки України і працює над збільшенням зарплат. Крім того, за його прогнозами, парламент на цьому тижні проголосує за конституційні зміни, щоб передати більше повноважень органам місцевої влади на Східній Україні. Яценюк прибув до Вашингтона вдруге за місяць, щоб відвідати ділову конференцію, організовану спільно Міністерством торгівлі та Торговою палатою США. Ця конференція надає йому можливість переконати більш ніж 150 американських бізнесменів у тому, що новий український уряд в змозі впоратися з такими проблемами, як війна на сході країни і неконтрольована корупція.

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/14/world/europe/ukraine-premier-in-white-house-visit-hails-economic-progress.html?_r=1

The prime minister of Ukraine reassured President Obama on Monday that his embattled government was making important progress in overhauling the country's troubled economy and meeting the terms of a shaky cease-fire with Russia.

Arseniy P. Yatsenyuk, the prime minister, said he told Mr. Obama that he was tackling corruption in Ukraine's crucial energy industry and working to increase wages. He also predicted that Parliament would vote this week for constitutional changes to devolve more power to local governments in eastern Ukraine, where pro-Russian separatists have waged a violent uprising.

In an interview, Mr. Yatsenyuk said Mr. Obama had pressed him on whether he would hold together his coalition with President Petro O. Poroshenko. "I said, 'Mr. President, once Benjamin Franklin said: Hang together or hang separate,'" Mr. Yatsenyuk said. "That's what we are doing with the Ukrainian president. We will stay united." He pledged that Ukraine would not allow the coalition to fracture the way a previous pro-Western coalition did.

The meeting between Mr. Yatsenyuk and Mr. Obama was not on the president's public schedule and was disclosed only afterward. In a statement issued on Monday evening, the White House said Mr. Obama had dropped by a White House meeting between Mr. Yatsenyuk and Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. and had offered his "unwavering support" for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression.

"The president and vice president commended the government of Ukraine for the steps it has taken to implement its obligations under the Minsk agreements, including the submission to Ukraine's Parliament of draft constitutional amendments on decentralization," the White House statement said. "The president and vice president also welcomed the government of Ukraine's ambitious economic reform agenda."

The constitutional changes may not satisfy Russia, which agreed to pull back military forces as part of the cease-fire negotiated in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, while pushing for more power to be held by regional governors. But Mr. Yatsenyuk said that passing the plan would put the onus on Moscow to fulfill the Minsk accord, which has so far failed to settle the

conflict and is widely expected to collapse within months. “They won’t get any chance to blame Ukraine,” he said.

Mr. Yatsenyuk said that he did not care whether Russia accepted the decentralization plan, and that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia would not have a veto over Ukraine’s Constitution. “It’s up to Putin to decide whether he wants to escalate the situation or de-escalate the situation,” he said.

Mr. Yatsenyuk came to Washington for the second time in about a month in order to attend a business conference co-sponsored by the Commerce Department and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Ukraine’s economy has been battered in part by the war in the country’s east, but also by years of unbridled corruption, and one major question has been whether the new government would be able or willing to fix it. The conference was a chance to convince more than 150 American businesses that it is up to the task.

“It’s a classic case of commercial diplomacy,” Penny Pritzker, the commerce secretary, who addressed the gathering along with Mr. Biden, said in a telephone interview. Ms. Pritzker praised the Ukrainian government and Mr. Yatsenyuk in particular for what she said were substantial steps toward a more open, less corrupt economy.

“They’ve passed anticorruption reform, they’ve arrested some folks, they’ve begun the deregulation of the natural gas market and dismantling monopolies,” she said. “They seem to be holding themselves to deadlines.”

But previous Ukrainian governments have tried and failed, and Ms. Pritzker acknowledged that the task was enormous.

“It’s a complicated place,” she said. “We recognize that they have a lot of work to do. But here’s a government that’s committed to taking its economy back.”

Correction: July 14, 2015

An earlier version of this article misstated the surname of Ukraine’s president. He is Petro O. Poroshenko, not Petrosenko.