



By: TA | AP Insight

Is the new anti-corruption law slowing down Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU?



The anti-corruption protests in Ukraine continue, while President Zelenskyy assures them that an even stronger fight against corruption will follow.

The first large-scale anti-government protests since the beginning of the war are also a reason for European criticism of official Kyiv.

Activists on Wednesday **called** for more protests of a new law that they say weakens Ukraine's anti-corruption watchdogs, following the first major anti-government demonstration in over three years of **war**.

The legislation also has drawn rebukes from European Union officials and international rights groups, as well as putting increased pressure on President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and endangering his public support at a critical phase of the war.

Later Wednesday, delegations from Russia and Ukraine were set to meet in Istanbul for a third round of direct talks in two months, although hopes for a breakthrough were low.

In the morning, Zelenskyy convened the heads of Ukraine's key anti-corruption and security agencies in response to the outcry against his decision to approve the law that was passed by parliament.

"We all hear what society says," Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram after the meeting. But he insisted the new legal framework was needed to crack down harder on corruption.

"Criminal cases should not drag on for years without verdicts, and those working against Ukraine must not feel comfortable or immune from punishment," he said.

Zelenskyy said all government agencies agreed to work constructively and respond to public expectations for fairness and effectiveness. A detailed joint action plan is expected within two weeks, aimed at addressing institutional weaknesses, removing legal hurdles, and ensuring justice across the board, he said.

Thousands of people gathered in the capital

and other cities Tuesday to urge Zelenskyy to veto the controversial bill. After he approved it, activists went on social media to call for another demonstration Wednesday night in central Kyiv.

Zelenskyy has been the international face of Ukraine's **determination** to defeat Russia's all-out invasion, and his domestic troubles are an unwelcome diversion from the war effort.

The legislation tightens government oversight of two key anti-corruption agencies. Critics say the step could significantly weaken the independence of those agencies and give Zelenskyy's circle greater influence over investigations.

EU officials warn of possible setback to joining bloc

Fighting entrenched **corruption** is crucial for Ukraine's aspirations to join the EU and maintain access to billions of dollars in Western aid in the war.

"Limiting the independence of Ukraine's anti-corruption agency hampers Ukraine's way towards the EU," German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul warned in a post on X.

EU Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius, also on X, noted: "In war, trust between the fighting nation and its leadership is more important than modern weapons — difficult to build and to keep, but easy to lose with one significant mistake by the leadership."

The Ukrainian branch of Transparency International criticized the parliament's decision, saying it undermines one of the most significant reforms since 2014, when Ukrainians **ousted** a pro-Moscow president in what they called the Revolution of Dignity, and damages trust with international partners.

It accused authorities of "dismantling" the country's anti-corruption architecture.

Zelenskyy said the new law clears out "Russian

influence” from fighting corruption and ensures punishment for those found guilty of it. He cited years of delays in criminal proceedings involving huge amounts of money.

“The cases that have been lying dormant must be investigated,” he said in a Telegram post early Wednesday. “For years, officials who have fled Ukraine have been casually living abroad for some reason -- in very nice countries and without legal consequences -- and this is not normal,” he said.

He didn’t give examples of what he said was Russian interference.

The legal changes in Ukraine would grant the prosecutor general new authority over investigations and cases handled by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office (SAPO).

Prosecutor General Ruslan Kravchenko, appointed by Zelenskyy just over a month ago, said the anti-corruption watchdogs and other law enforcement agencies would keep working as before.

“The prosecutor general has only been granted broader powers and an increased scope of authority,” Kravchenko told a news conference as officials moved to ease public concern.



Limiting the independence of Ukraine's anti-corruption agency hampers Ukraine's way towards the EU - Johann Wadehul

The anger and frustration among war-weary Ukrainians prevailed in the crowd Tuesday.

Some protesters accused Ukraine’s leadership of prioritizing loyalty and personal connections over fighting corruption.

“Those who swore to protect the laws and the constitution have instead chosen to shield their inner circle, even at the expense of Ukrainian democracy,” said veteran Oleh Symoroz, who lost both legs after he was wounded in 2022.

Russian officials relished Zelenskyy’s difficulties, although Moscow faces its own series of corruption **cases** against government and military officials.

A third round of direct talks on the war

The third direct meeting between Russian and Ukrainian delegations in Turkey in as many months wasn’t expected to make progress on ending the war and would likely focus on further **exchanges** of prisoners of war.

Zelenskyy said the Ukrainian delegation in Istanbul “will again insist on the need for an immediate and complete ceasefire, including ... strikes on civilian infrastructure.”

Russian drone strikes knocked out power to more than 220,000 customers in Ukraine’s northeastern Sumy region, Zelenskyy said on Telegram, adding that repairs restored most of the supply in hours.

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Earlier this month, U.S. President Donald Trump **threatened** Russia with severe

economic sanctions and said more American weapons, paid for by European countries, would go to Ukraine.

Trump hardened his stance toward Moscow after months of frustration with Russian President Vladimir Putin about unsuccessful talks for a ceasefire.

Trump gave Russia until early September to agree to a ceasefire.