

Ukraine president denies being pushed by Trump to investigate Biden



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[Ovsyannikova Yulia /Barcroft Media/Getty/Kyodo]

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election, Joe Biden, saying he lacks such authority under the Constitution.

"I was never pressured and there were no conditions being imposed" to realize a summit with Trump or agree to arms sales in return, Zelenskyy said Saturday in an interview with Kyodo News at his office in Kiev, the first time he has spoken to foreign media about the allegations that have sparked an impeachment crisis in Washington.

Ukrainian prosecutors will deal with any requests from their U.S. counterparts to cooperate in investigations "in accordance with our laws," if they are made based on "international law," Zelenskyy said.

The allegations, which first came to light in a whistleblower report, say that Trump, a Republican, abused his office by asking Zelenskyy in a July 25 phone call to investigate Biden, a former vice president and one of the Democrats' most prominent presidential candidates, and his son Hunter's business dealings in Ukraine.

A memo of the conversation released by the White House in September quotes Zelenskyy as affirming that Ukraine's prosecutor general will "look into the situation."

But Zelenskyy said in the interview that he was merely stating that if U.S. prosecutors want help on the matter and take necessary steps, Ukraine can oblige by setting up a joint investigative committee.

He added that under Ukraine's Constitution the president does not have the power to tell the prosecutor general or investigative authorities to look into a particular case.

Zelenskyy, a former actor and comedian who was inaugurated in May, also said that "Ukraine must not be embroiled in scandals connected with the presidential election," noting that each camp or institution is releasing information for its self-interest.

The memo, which the White House said is a summary and not a word-for-word transcript, shows Trump asking Zelenskyy to "do us a favor" by investigating the Democrats' purported role in Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

While Trump has denied any wrongdoing, Democrats in the House of Representatives have initiated a formal impeachment inquiry.

The Ukrainian leader denied reports by U.S. media that Trump's requests were conditions for him to be invited to the Oval Office or for agreeing to sell Javelin anti-tank missiles to Ukraine.

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annexed by Russia in 2014, and looks forward to economic cooperation between the countries.

Zelenskyy plans to visit Japan to attend the enthronement ceremony of Japanese Emperor Naruhito on Oct. 22.

The following is the gist of remarks made by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in an interview with Kyodo News in Kiev on Saturday.

Zelenskyy said:

- Ukraine's relationship with the United States, its strategic partner, and President Donald Trump are important.
- As a new president, he wanted to dispel the negative impression that Ukraine is riddled with corruption when he had talks with Trump in September.
- He believes each camp or institution is releasing information for its self-interest ahead of next year's U.S. presidential election.
- Ukraine must not be embroiled in scandals associated with the election, and it does not want to be involved in them.
- He had no discussions on an investigation into former U.S. Vice President and current 2020 presidential candidate Joe Biden with the U.S. special envoy for Ukraine, Kurt Volker, as a condition for his visit to the United States.
- He would also never accept such a condition.
- The United States set no conditions, and its sale of anti-tank missiles to Ukraine was not in return for an investigation into Biden.
- The United States cannot pressure him, president of an independent country.
- Constitutionally, he cannot order Ukraine's prosecution and investigative authorities to launch an investigation.
- He knows that Biden is said to have pushed for the firing of former Ukrainian chief prosecutor Viktor Shokin only through media reports.

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-- If necessary, Ukraine's judicial authorities will investigate the issue.

-- He explained to Trump during their phone conversation in July that any investigation could be possible if needed because Ukraine would have a new and just chief prosecutor.

-- He also told Trump that if U.S. prosecutors request cooperation for an investigation based on international law, in accordance with domestic laws Ukraine can launch a probe by setting up a joint investigative committee.

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