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Soros-Funded Groups Undercutting Ukraine, Helping Russia



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A pair of George Soros-funded NGOs are engaged in a campaign that could destabilize Ukraine and force the country to rely on its enemy, Russia, for its energy needs.

Transparency International and the Anti-Corruption Action Centre are behind political propaganda and social media attacks aimed at Burisma, a private Kiev-based natural gas company that has invested billions of dollars to dramatically increase natural gas production and helped wean Ukraine off of Russian energy imports.

Both organizations received hundreds of thousands of dollars from Soros-funded foundations in recent years. Burisma's owner, Nikolay Zlochevskyi, was under suspicion for corruption and tax evasion, but separate investigations in the United Kingdom and Ukraine dropped all charges against Burisma and Zlochevskyi.

Despite Burisma's resounding victory in both the British and Ukrainian legal systems over the course of the past three years, the Anti-Corruption Action Centre engaged in a series of press releases, statements and social media posts implying Zlochevskyi and the company received favorable treatment in court due to political connections.

Earlier this year, Transparency International plastered Kiev with posters and ads claiming Ukraine's General Prosecutor's Office was guilty of abuse of power, and alleged Zlochevskyi's case should not have been dropped.

Former U.S. Deputy Assistant Attorney General John Buretta, however, believes the outcome of the investigation was reasonable and correct. "The actions of the [British Office of the General Prosecutor] and those of the Ukrainian court are clear evidence of Ukraine's commitment to the rule of law and due process — twin pillars of democracy," Buretta stated.

Transparency International and the Anti-Corruption Action Centre also claim Burisma failed to pay appropriate taxes, even though the company pays almost \$100 million in taxes a year. Burisma's taxes fund almost 5 percent of Ukraine's annual government spending.

Supporters of Burisma fear the unsubstantiated attacks by the Soros-funded NGOs may harm the company, undercutting Ukrainian energy independence and opening the door for Russian control in the process — a particular concern in the years since the military conflict between the two nations related to the annexation of Crimea.

“Burisma is leading a private sector that drastically boosted the domestic production in recent years — an increase of more than 30 percent in 2014 alone,” said Roman Opimakh, the executive director of the Association of Gas Producers of Ukraine. “This is the perfect example of promising energy independent behavior by Ukraine that should be supported by NGOs, not criticized.”

Opimakh points out that Ukraine’s increased natural gas production, combined with increased energy imports from European Union allies, has allowed the country to stop buying natural gas from Russia.

Soros has been a leading critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin, saying threats from ISIS “do not compare with the threat emanating from Russia.” The Russian government responded by banning Soros’ charities, the Open Society Foundations and the Open Society Institute from the country.

The billionaire hedge fund mogul later declared “Putin’s bombing of Aleppo will be viewed as among the modern world’s most egregious war crimes.”

Soros’ donations to Transparency International and the Anti-Corruption Action Centre, however, may be aiding Russia.

“You have to wonder why George Soros, a supporter of an independent Ukraine and one of Putin’s biggest adversaries would funnel his money to groups seeking to undermine that independence by taking aim at Burisma,” said Jeff Stier, a senior fellow at the National Center for Public Policy Research and the head of the think tank’s Risk Analysis Division. “Ukraine’s energy industry is central to allowing the country to stand on its own, as a democracy, rather than deteriorating into a de facto Russian satellite state.”

“Soros is no novice when it comes to deploying his charitable dollars to achieve political objectives. It’s clear that his support for these groups is serving Russian interests at the expense of democracy. Now that he’s on notice of it, it’ll be telling to see if his foundations cut off all funding for these efforts — before he winds up further weakening Burisma, and by direct extension, Ukrainian independence.” Stier stated.

From 2013 to 2015, Soros’ philanthropies gave more than \$1 million to Transparency International, according to the organization’s financial statements. The Anti-Corruption Action Centre received \$210,000 from Soros’ International Renaissance Foundation between 2013 and 2016. Soros’ Open Society Foundation also donated to the center, according to the NGO’s own annual reports, but specific funding amounts were not disclosed.

Some Ukrainians doubt Soros knows what the Anti-Corruption Action Centre and Transparency International are doing with the money he provides. “To the best of my knowledge Soros institutions never tell [recipient organizations] what to do and never dictate their content,” said Dmytro Boyarchuk, the executive director of CASE Ukraine, a Soros-funded think tank that provides economic analysis for business and government organizations.

“Ignorance is no excuse,” said David Williams, the president of the Washington, D.C.-based Taxpayers Protection Alliance. “Soros is a sworn enemy of Putin and condemns what Russia’s government stands for. He should take every possible step to guarantee that his money isn’t being used to help Russia and harm Ukraine.”

Much of Soros’ international philanthropic efforts have focused on helping former communist countries to accept democracy. Soros spent his formative years in Nazi-occupied Hungary, then experienced the country’s transition to Soviet control before immigrating to England.

“Soros has seen, firsthand, the horrors associated with nationalist dictators and has spent his life fighting against

them," Williams said. "It's heartbreaking that he would help to benefit one, whether deliberately or inadvertently.

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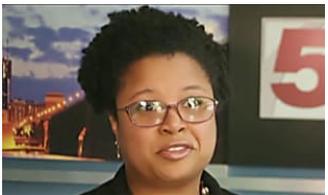
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