

## Ukrainian politics

### Zelenskyy moves against Ukraine's independent anti-corruption bodies

President signed legislation to tighten executive control after moves targeting anti-graft campaigners



The legislation is the latest in a series of manoeuvres against pro-reform activists and anti-corruption campaigners that have prompted warnings of creeping authoritarianism in Ukraine © IMAGO/Andreas Stroh via Reuters Connect

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President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has signed into law a contentious measure that grants his office greater control over the country's independent anti-corruption bodies, in a move that critics warn would hand his circle enormous influence over investigations.

Lawmakers hastily voted on Tuesday in favour of legislation that eliminated the independence of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (Nabu) and its partner organisation the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (Sapo). The bodies will be placed under the wartime authority of the prosecutor-general, who is appointed by the president.

Parliament also voted in favour of rushing the law to the president for his signature. MPs who were against the changes shouted "shame!" during the vote.

More than 2,000 people protested against the move in Kyiv on Tuesday evening, in the first anti-government protest since before Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

Demonstrators gathering outside the presidential office chanted for Zelenskyy to “veto the bill!” while waving signs that read “corruption = death”. Smaller rallies also took place in Dnipro, Lviv, Odesa and Sumy.

But the public opposition, alongside calls to Zelenskyy by several European leaders, could not dissuade the Ukrainian president from signing the measure into law.

The president claimed the move to weaken the independent investigative bodies was intended to purge Russian interference. “The anti-corruption infrastructure will operate. But only without Russian influences — everything must be cleansed of that,” he said late on Tuesday.

He also suggested that Nabu and Sapo were not doing their jobs efficiently. “There must be more justice,” he added. “It is important that the prosecutor-general is committed to ensuring real inevitability of punishment for those who break the law. Cases that have been stagnant must be investigated.”

The move to bring Nabu under tighter control is the latest in a series of manoeuvres against pro-reform activists and anti-corruption campaigners that have prompted [warnings of creeping authoritarianism](#) in the president's wartime administration, raising concerns among Ukraine's western allies.

Anastasia Radina, an MP with [Zelenskyy](#)'s ruling party in parliament who opposed the move, said that with the passage of the legislation, Ukraine's anti-corruption infrastructure would be “effectively dismantled”, transforming the two bodies “into purely decorative institutions . . . completely dependent on the will of the prosecutor-general”.

Framed as a wartime measure to regulate investigations into missing people, the legislation includes provisions that would place Nabu and Sapo under tighter executive control.

The bill — which people familiar with the matter said had been approved by the

parliamentary law enforcement committee earlier on Tuesday — grants broad powers to the prosecutor-general, who is appointed directly by the president.

These powers include authority over Sapo, access to case files and the ability to reassign or redirect Nabu investigations, Nabu said on Tuesday.



Former PM Yulia Tymoshenko backed the legislation and accused Ukraine's western partners of trying to control Kyiv through Nabu and Sapo © AFP via Getty Images

Several MPs from opposition parties, including the former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, spoke in favour of the legislation, according to lawmakers. Tymoshenko accused Ukraine's western partners of trying to control Kyiv through Nabu and Sapo.

An MP close to the president said eliminating agencies supported by [Ukraine's](#) western backers could throw Kyiv into jeopardy at an especially fraught moment, given that “we need money”.

But an MP said Zelenskyy's ruling faction had been urged by its leadership to approve the legislation quickly so that the president could sign it into law as soon as possible. It passed with 263 votes, with a second vote approved by 246 MPs to send the legislation to the president's desk immediately for his signature.

Ukraine's security service (SBU) carried out raids on Monday targeting current and

former anti-corruption officials, which have been condemned by civil society and international partners.

Nabu said the searches involved 15 employees and were carried out without court warrants. It said the actions were based on dubious grounds, including alleged involvement in traffic incidents and vague accusations of links to Russia.

Separately, it said the SBU had launched an unannounced inspection of how state secrets are handled, raising fears that the agency could gain insight into confidential operations and undermine current investigations, some of which reportedly involve figures close to the presidency.

The SBU confirmed it was looking into potential mishandling of classified material but said it had not accessed sensitive operational details. It rejected claims it might compromise Nabu's work as "unfounded and manipulative".

Civil society groups including Transparency International warned that the latest actions might be part of a broader effort to weaken institutions established after the 2014 revolution that toppled pro-Russia president Viktor Yanukovich.

Anti-corruption NGO AntAC said the actions were about silencing Nabu and Sapo "as they close in on Zelenskyy's inner circle".





Former deputy PM Oleksiy Chernyshov, a close ally of the president, has been charged with abuse of power and illegal enrichment © Andrew Kravchenko/Bloomberg

The raids came after Nabu opened a criminal case against former deputy prime minister Oleksiy Chernyshov, a close ally of the president, who was once thought to be a potential candidate for prime minister.

Chernyshov was charged with abuse of power and illegal enrichment, making him the most senior official in Ukraine's history to face such charges while in office. He has denied the charges but was dismissed in last week's government reshuffle.

Zelenskyy's office did not respond to requests for comment. Last week, the president ordered the biggest reshuffle of his wartime cabinet since the start of Russia's all-out invasion. The reorganisation was widely seen in Kyiv as a further consolidation of power within Zelenskyy's inner circle.

Western partners said in a [joint statement from G7 ambassadors](#) in Kyiv on Monday that they were "closely following" the situation and had raised concerns with Ukrainian government officials.

A European Commission spokesperson warned that the move could hold back Ukraine's bid to join the EU and pointed out that Brussels' funding to Kyiv was "conditional on progress on transparency, judicial reform and democratic government".

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