



VERKHOVNA RADA OF UKRAINE
Committee on Foreign Affairs

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Kyiv, 20 March 2018

From: Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

To: Congressional Ukrainian Caucus

Re: Russian influence on American institutions

Dear members of the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus!

On behalf of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, let us renew the assurances of our highest consideration to the U.S. Congress and thank you for the continuing steadfast and meaningful bi-partisan support of Ukraine.

We would like to emphasize our appreciation of the virtually unanimous passing in the Senate and House of Representatives of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, tightening sanctions on Russia, and enhancing Ukraine's energy security.

We are grateful for the important bipartisan decision to enhance the U.S. security assistance to Ukraine in the National Defense Authorization Act, 2018, which has authorized USD 350 mln. for the aforesaid purposes, including for provision of lethal weapons of a defensive nature to the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

We also welcome the most recent vote in the House when almost every Member supported the passing of the Ukraine Cybersecurity Cooperation Act.

While looking forward to continuing our joint efforts to counter Russian hybrid warfare against Ukraine and the Free World, we would like to express our concern about potentially compromising links between a number of U.S. think tanks and

foundations and the Kremlin associates that threaten to turn American institutions into unwitting tools of Russia's propaganda and political interference.

Activities of such organizations as the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute, Sustained Dialogue Institute, the Kettering Foundation, American-Russian Cultural Cooperation Foundation and Carmel Institute of Russian Culture and History at the American University, raise the question about possible overt or covert financial support they might be receiving from sources with direct or indirect link to the Russian Federation.

The Wilson Center's Kennan Institute has a long history of honoring the pro-Kremlin oil tycoons and oligarchs. The Wilson Center has awarded Russian oligarchs a number of times for strengthening the U.S.-Russia dialogue since 2005, when it first honored Lukoil president Vagit Alekperov, followed by awards to Viktor F. Vekselberg in 2007 and Petr Aven in 2015. All three sponsored the Wilson Center's gala dinners and the proceeds were channeled to support of Kennan Institute's activities.

In 2017, the U.S. Treasury Department included all three oligarchs in the so-called «Kremlin» sanctions list. The fact that in 2015 Viktor Vekselberg was featured on the Wilson Center's special video¹ in honor of Petr Aven testifies to the continuous partnership between one of Russia's richest oligarchs and the U.S. government sponsored think tank, which jeopardizes its reputation as America's top-level and non-partisan institution.

Today, at a time when the U.S. government tightens its grip on Putin's associates, the Kennan Institute offers them a warm welcome. Matthew Rojansky, director of the Kennan Institute, actively promoted the idea of a U.S.-Russia dialogue at the Dartmouth Conference. Long dead after the end of the Cold War, the "conference" was suddenly revived by Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, only months after Russia launched the war in Donbas.

The Dartmouth Conference is administered by the Sustained Dialogue Institute, where Mr.Rojansky also serves as an Advisory Board member. Mr Rojansky is also the U.S. Executive Secretary for the Dartmouth Conference. On the Russian side the conference is run not by a think-tank or an academic institution, but by Yuri Shafranik, Russia's former energy minister and chairman of the Russia's Union of Oil and Gas Producers, and Gissa Guchetl, the Union's executive director. Both are known to lobby the idea of lifting American sanctions on Russia and it is surprising they are given this reputable opportunity. In particular, Mr.Shafranik was given a floor to speak at Kennan Institute on February 7, 2017.

¹ Wilson Center, Peter Aven, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYUiYMlhrx5Q>

The Dartmouth Conference seems quite nontransparent. It does not have an official web-site and it is hard to get to know about its American and Russian participants. With no transparency in its policy agenda, the “Conference” appears to be a façade to legitimize a form of lobbying in Washington DC by reputable American organizations on behalf of the Kremlin’s oil tycoons, who are interested in lifting the U.S. sanctions. It is also used as a mechanism to influence US public opinion and legitimize the Kremlin’s illegal annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas.

In our view, the Kennan Institute clearly manifested its pro-Russian position when it supported the November 14, 2017 “For Unity!” concert, featuring Mariinsky Theatre conductor Valeriy Gergiev and pianist Denis Matsuev. Both musicians endorsed Putin’s illegal annexation of Crimea and signed a letter in support of this blatant violations of international law and order. Statements of concern were issued on the part of Ukraine and the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States that American nonprofit organizations provided a platform for Russian propaganda and manipulation of U.S. public opinion aimed at covering Russia’s outrageous violation of international law. The Kennan Institute’s “conspicuous flirtation” with Kremlin was condemned also by a large group of the Ukrainian Kennan alumni network.

The tensions between the Ukrainian Kennan alumni and the Kennan Institute grew after Mr. Rojansky’s appointment as Kennan Institute director. In May 2015 the Kennan Institute invited Russian sociologist Olga Kryshtanovskaya - Vladimir Putin's trusted associate in the 2012 presidential elections - to the Kennan alumni conference in Kyiv, where she claimed that Russian annexation of Crimea was legal. The Kennan Institute’s leadership did nothing to object to these outrageous and disrespectful statements.

In his numerous public interviews and speeches at expert round-tables, Mr. Rojansky continues to encourage the U.S. officials to engage in a closer dialogue with Russia and lift sanctions imposed by the Obama administration. In M. Rojansky’s words: «The policy of isolating Russia ...makes US appear weak and inconsistent... The key questions is *to ask what the Russians want, how the Russians are thinking about challenges like Ukraine, Syria and counterterrorism...*».²


On February 27, 2017, a group of 34 Ukrainian scholars and public intellectuals - Kennan Institute alumni in Ukraine – addressed to Jane Harman, Wilson Center Director, President and CEO with an open letter requesting separation of the Ukraine Program from the Kennan Institute due to «disagreement with the management style and strategy of its current leadership», and because of their deep concerns by the «Kennan Institute’s growing pro-Kremlin policies, lack of democratic procedures and unprofessional communication with Kennan Institute alumni in Ukraine».

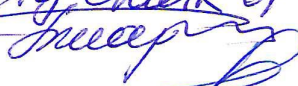

² Wilson Center, «What does the World Expect of President-Elect Trump», November 8, 2016, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/what-does-the-world-expect-president-elect-trump-russia>

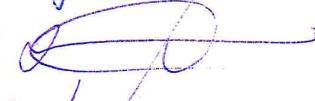
Based on the above, we respectfully ask you to pay attention to this matter in view of the importance to further marginalize the Kremlin's disruptive outreach and propaganda.

Respectfully,

Hanna Hopko


Committee on Foreign Affairs, Chairwoman
The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

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