



## The end of a prosecutor – Why the Trump case is actually a Biden case

**The recently failed impeachment trial against Trump was based on a phone call between the US president and Ukrainian president Zelenskyy. The background to the telephone conversation is the political entanglements of Obama's Vice President Joe Biden and his son in Ukraine. It is about the dismissal of a prosecutor, a lobby network of a gas company – as well as about geopolitics.**

STEFAN KORINTH, 19. Februar 2020, 0 Kommentare

In July 2019, US President Donald Trump had a momentous telephone conversation with the new Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The call, the content of which became known soon afterwards, led to impeachment proceedings against Trump a few months later. As expected, however, it was rejected by the Republican majority in the US Senate in early February 2020.

The Democratic Party's impeachment argument was that Trump had abused his office by demanding his Ukrainian colleague to initiate legal investigations against Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden. To this end, he had withheld financial aid of around 400 million dollars for the Ukrainian military as long as the investigations had not been initiated. Trump had blackmailed Zelenskyy in order to damage his potential democratic rival Joe Biden in the upcoming US presidential election with the results of the investigation.

This was a justified accusation, but it only became political theatre with a foreseeable outcome.

**„There's a lot of talk about Biden's son ...“**

The actual wording of the telephone conversation is not known. However, the White House published a transcript of the conversation shortly afterwards. The passage of interest for the impeachment is found on page four above. According to this, Trump said to Selenskyj:

*„There’s a lot of talk about Biden’s son, that Biden stopped the prosecution and a lot of people want to find out about that so whatever you can do with the attorney general would be great. Biden went around bragging that he stopped the prosecution, so if you can look into it ... it sounds horrible to me.“*

It’s by far not the only interesting part of the transcript, but let’s stick with it for this article. Trump talks about Hunter Biden’s work for the Ukrainian gas company Burisma Holdings, which was investigated by the Ukrainian Prosecutor General’s Office. According to Trump Father Joe Biden later boasted publicly that he had forced then Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko to dismiss the Prosecutor General, thus ending the investigation against Burisma and Hunter Biden. In October 2019, new investigations against the Burisma owner, but not against Hunter Biden, were indeed resumed. By the way, there is no mention of a threat of Trump or the withholding of military aid anywhere in the transcript.

It is obvious that Trump was pursuing his own political goals with his demand for investigations against Biden. But that doesn’t mean there’s nothing to the Biden case. On the contrary. At first glance, the case of the former vice president consists of two aspects: Joe Biden’s interference in the sovereignty of Ukraine and the self-enrichment of his son, whom he protected by doing so. But that is not all. The deeper one digs in the case, the more dirt comes to light.

## **Joe Biden and the sovereignty of Ukraine: a joke**

Vice President Joe Biden was the Obama administration’s Ukrainian point man. The magazine Foreign Policy writes that no one in the US government has had more influence in Ukraine than him. Biden interpreted this role in a rather aggressive way. Obviously he regarded the Ukrainian leadership as mere recipients of orders.

For Biden – as US vice president – it seemed completely unproblematic to dictate to the head of state of another country the personnel policy in its law enforcement agencies and to put him under pressure with the possible refusal of loan guarantees amounting to one billion US dollars. As if that were not enough, Biden spoke openly about this action. Thus he reported in January 2018 at a public event of the Council on Foreign Relations:

*„I went over, I guess, the 12th, 13th time to Kiev. And I was supposed to announce that there was another billion-dollar loan guarantee. And I had gotten a commitment from Poroshenko and from Yatsenyuk that they would take action against the state prosecutor. And they didn’t. So they said they had – they were walking out to a press conference. I said, nah, I’m not going to – or, we’re not going to give you the billion dollars. They said, you have no authority. You’re not the president. The president said – I said, call him. I said, I’m telling you, you’re not getting the billion dollars. I said, you’re not getting the billion. I’m going to be leaving here in, I think it was about six hours. I looked at them and said: I’m leaving in six hours. If the prosecutor is not fired, you’re not getting the money. Well, son of a bitch. He got fired. And they put in place someone who was solid at the time.“*

## **Biden’s blackmailing scheme à la Trump**

In retrospect, Joe Biden certainly wished several times that he had kept quiet about this case back then on the podium. He doesn't mention his son here, but that's secondary for now. Either way, his ultimatum to the Ukrainian president was a neo-colonial arrogance. The Neue Zürcher Zeitung speaks of an „extortion manoeuvre“. Here Biden did exactly what the US Democrats accused Trump of doing in Impeachment: withholding financial aid to Ukraine if the Ukrainian president did not do what the US government wanted.

Admittedly, it was not the first time for Joe Biden to trample on Ukrainian sovereignty – something that the USA usually accuses Russia of. In December 2013, Biden had already had the then President Viktor Yanukovich dragged out of bed at night to tell him by phone that he would be „punished“ if he had the Maidan evicted. This is what former Prime Minister of Ukraine Nikolai Azarov reports in his book. (1) Biden thus dictated to the Ukrainian President when he would have to deploy the Ukrainian police in Ukraine. In February 2014, Biden repeated his threats against Yanukovich, as Der Spiegel also reported.

As seen, Biden continued this behaviour towards the US-friendly post-Maidan government. The New York Times (NYT) called his intervention in the case of the dismissed prosecutor general „one of his most memorable performances“ in the fight against Ukrainian corruption. Against corruption? Yes, that's how the case is explained by Biden and media supporting him – more on that in a moment. Apart from criticism from left-wing US alternative media, the action initially had no negative consequences for Biden – neither legally nor politically. The 77-year-old is currently in the race for the presidency in the Democratic Party's primary elections.

## Hunter Biden and Burisma



His son Hunter served on the board of the oil and gas company from May 2014 – shortly after the Maidan, in which his father played an important role – until April 2019. It was not the first time that he had come to lucrative posts in the wake of his father's offices. Even the NYT, in the article quoted above, cannot help but concede that the lawyer is completely unsuitable for a board position at Burisma. Neither had he had any experience with Ukraine to date, nor did he have any experience in the gas and oil business. Moreover, Hunter Biden had been thrown off the Navy reserve just a few months earlier because he had tested positive for cocaine. Massive drug and alcohol problems have accompanied him throughout his life.

A competent candidate? Well, having Hunter Biden on the board means access to the US vice president, meaning to the Obama administration's Ukrainian point man. It was the direct line to the US government and to the powerful circles in Washington. The filling of the position had a flavor from the beginning. In this interview by ABC News, Hunter is asked whether he would also be on the board of Burisma if his last name were not Biden. „I don't know. Probably not,“ he replied.

In addition to Hunter Biden, his business partner Devon Archer, a family friend of US Secretary of State John Kerry, also joined the company's board after the Maidan. The Ukrainian oligarch Oleksandr Onyshchenko writes in his book (2): The Burisma owner Mykola Zlochevsky had „made fairly clever provisions“ by appointing well-connected people from the West to the board. In this way he protected the company from expropriation by other Ukrainian oligarchs:

*„This was a shield that was more effective than a seat in the Verkhovna Rada“ [the Ukrainian parliament].*

Zlochevsky was under the toppled President Yanukovich among other things Minister for Environmental Protection and Natural Resources. He is accused of having granted his Burisma company, registered in Cyprus, numerous exploitation licences for Ukrainian oil and gas fields. After the Maidan he fled abroad and had to enter into expensive haggling with Poroshenko and Co. But because of the prominent board, his Ukrainian competitors could not simply take Burisma away from him.

## The „seedy side“ of the Western consulting industry

So Hunter Biden worked for an oligarch from the former „regime“. An oligarch who was active in a „pro-Russian“ party, which was immediately interpreted in the US media, for example in the case of James Manafort, as being close to the Kremlin or even as an activity directly for Putin. In Biden's case, however, this detail has received virtually no criticism in the media mainstream.

After all, according to the New York Times, Hunter Biden's income made him one of the „seedy side“ of the lucrative Western „consulting industry“ in Ukraine. Biden is said to have earned 50,000 US dollars a month at Burisma. Other media speak of 83,000 dollars. According to John Solomon of the US magazine „The Hill“, three million US dollars are said to have flowed from Burisma to Hunter Biden's and Devon Archer's joint investment company Rosemont Seneca between April 2014 and October 2015 alone. These account statements, which the journalist obtained in a New York federal court, are supposed to prove this. It's possible to extrapolate the sums. Hunter Biden worked for Burisma until May 2019.

So father and son Biden were politically and economically quite active in the Ukraine. One interfered in the country's internal affairs like an imperial viceroy, the other collected millions of dollars from a corrupt oligarch for his last name alone. All this is very unappetizing – but not necessarily criminal. (3)

But did Joe Biden's demand to dismiss the Ukrainian Prosecutor General also have something to do with his son? Had he really wanted to stop investigations against Hunter Biden in this way, as Donald Trump suspected on the phone? To get closer to the answer, it is worth looking at the details.

## Joe Biden's Ultimatum

First of all, the dismissal of the Ukrainian Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin was not as abrupt as Biden had told at the Council on Foreign Relations. The chronology is important for analysis. Biden's personal demand for release („in six hours“) to Poroshenko was made during his fifth trip to Kiev from 6 to 8 December 2015. So Shokin should have been released on 8 December at the latest. In fact, however, he continued to act as Prosecutor General and had property of the Burisma owner Zlochevsky confiscated at the beginning of February 2016.

It was only on February 16 that President Poroshenko publicly called for Shokin's resignation after US Vice President Joe Biden called four times during February. On the same day, the prosecutor filed a letter of resignation. The case seemed to be suspended from that date. An [explosive report](#) by a Latvian authority (18 February) on international money laundering by Burisma had already been ignored in Kiev.

At the end of March, the Ukrainian parliament dismissed Shokin. He was only officially released on 3 April. Exactly on that day, the USA and Ukraine signed a loan guarantee agreement for one billion US dollars. Shokin's successor Yuriy Lutsenko took office in May and, according to unanimous reports, dropped all investigations into Burisma.

## Viktor Shokin's testimony



The dismissed Prosecutor General Shokin describes the events a little differently than Biden. In a [testimony](#) under oath for an Austrian court, he discusses his expulsion, among other things. In the document he confirms (from page 4, point 6) that Biden's financial pressure was decisive. President Poroshenko had told him this. The reason for his dismissal was not corruption or lack of public trust, as it was officially called, but Shokin's extensive investigation of Burisma.

Poroshenko urged him to withdraw these investigations, testifies Shokin. But he refused, whereupon Biden took action against him. He goes on to say that it was the US authorities, in particular Vice President Biden, who told the Ukrainian investigators who should be investigated and who should not. Another encroachment on Ukraine's sovereignty. Viktor Shokin:

*"I did not comply, so I had to leave."*

## Intense pressure from the USA

In an interview with the Ukrainian magazine Strana, Shokin [explains](#) the course of events in more detail: At the beginning of his roughly one-year term in office, his relationship with US officials such as Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt and Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland was good. However, he quickly realized that they had an influence on personnel policy. For example, Shokin had to appoint a Georgian from Mikhail Saakashvili's team as Deputy Prosecutor General.

In the case of Burisma, US Ambassador Pyatt at first gently urged that the investigation be dropped. When Shokin refused, the US government had built up „intense pressure“ from summer 2015 onwards and sent anti-corruption activists, financed by the US government, out onto the streets to demonstrate against Shokin. It is

unclear whether a failed assassination attempt on Shokin by a sniper in November 2015 is also related to the case. (4)

He goes on to say in the interview that he also wanted to interview Hunter Biden and Devon Archer in the Burisma case. Joe Biden had wanted to prevent this and get „corruption dirt“ against Shokin, but he did not succeed. In February 2016, Biden repeatedly called the presidential office after Shokin had filed motions to confiscate Burisma property. Poroshenko finally gave in. Biden had thus „humiliated“ not only the president, but the whole of Ukraine. So far Shokin.

## **The counter-narrative: Shokin was corrupt**

What do the Bidens say to the accusations? Hunter Biden stresses that he was never investigated in Ukraine. This was also confirmed by the Prosecutor Generals who succeeded Shokin. Joe Biden denies that his intervention against the Prosecutor General had anything to do with his son. He stresses that Shokin had to leave because he was corrupt.

Many Western media outlets follow Biden's reasoning. But the evidence is problematic and poorly proven. Most reports simply repeat the sweeping accusations of Western critics against Shokin. In some cases they do not even criticize him personally – but the corruption in the Ukrainian judiciary as a whole. There are only a few concrete cases that can be verified. When it gets more precise, it is usually not about the fact that Shokin illegally accepted money, but that he dismissed the wrong people in his department.

The most concrete criticism of Shokin concerns the case of Burisma, of all places. In a short BBC television report it is said that Shokin did not push the investigation against Burisma, but even blocked it. The BBC does not present any evidence for this, but has the Ukrainian activist Daria Kaleniuk of the Anti-Corruption Action Centre (AntAC) appear as a key witness. But Kaleniuk is not an impartial expert. Her organisation is paid directly by the US government, which can be read on the AntAC website itself, but is not mentioned by the BBC.

Shokin had talked about US-funded anti-corruption activists who were sent on the streets against him. Kaleniuk is one of them. But Shokin admits to them: „I don't know if they understood what they were doing or what they were being used for.“ After all, Kaleniuk also says that Shokin's predecessors and successors were also corrupt, and had been ordered from above to let the case of Burisma rest.

## **Refused cooperation with London?**

The Intercept, known as a rather critical, liberal magazine, also participated in the defense of Joe Biden with corruption allegations against Shokin in the Burisma case. Author Robert Mackey (former New York Times) dismissed the Biden-Ukraine scandal as a „republican conspiracy theory“. He also quotes Daria Kaleniuk as the main witness in his thesis, presenting her as „an American-educated lawyer“ without mentioning her US financial connections.

The author discusses another aspect of the case: In April 2014, a British authority, the Serious Fraud Office (SFO), had initiated money laundering investigations against Burisma owner Zlochevsky and blocked his London accounts with a balance of more than 23 million dollars. The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office had subsequently failed to send the necessary documents to the British SFO investigators despite requests,

Mackey claims, so that the blocked money had to be released in January 2015 and was immediately withdrawn to Cyprus („offshore“). The case was in Shokin's hands.

But even here the evidence is full of holes. When the British requests for cooperation arrived in Ukraine in the spring of 2014, Shokin was not even working in the General Prosecutor's Office. He was only reactivated from retirement at the end of June 2014. Even then, however, he did not become chief but only deputy chief. When Shokin took over the chief post of Prosecutor General in February 2015, however, the Burisma money had long since been released in London. His two predecessors as Prosecutor General Oleh Machnizkyj (Swoboda) and Vitali Jarema (Fatherland Party) therefore bear far more responsibility in this case than Shokin.

However, if one goes deeper into the British Burisma investigation, for example with the help of [this extensive research](#) by the Guardian, it can be seen that the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office did indeed cooperate with the British colleagues from the SFO and, according to them, even provided „more than enough“ incriminating documents. Responsible for this was the Ukrainian prosecutor Vitaly Kasko, who obtained approval for the investigations from his superior. Whether the superior was Viktor Shokin is not clear from the research, as no name is mentioned. Shokin's name does not appear in the whole article at all.

However, the British judge was not satisfied with the evidence at the time, he criticized the poor work of the SFO and released the Burisma money. In retrospect, the British prosecutors simply blamed the Ukrainian colleagues for their defeat in court, and Western media took the blame unchecked.

So this case cannot prove any misconduct of the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office.

## **Joe Biden – the fighter against corruption**

James Risen, another well-known ex-NYT author, has [written](#) about the Biden Burisma case in The Intercept. In the article Risen explains that the opposite of Trump's assumptions is correct:

*„When Joe Biden went to Ukraine, he was not trying to protect his son – quite the reverse.“*

In Risen's view Joe Biden is an honest anti-corruption fighter and Hunter „the black sheep of the family“. Hunter has never reached the status of his older brother, he is the „millstone around Joe Biden's neck“ (!), writes Risen. Joe Biden therefore fought strictly for his principles in Ukraine – even against the interests of his own son.

But this does not fit at all with Biden's other behavior. If the Intercept author's thesis is correct, then Biden would also have publicly criticized his son long ago for taking money – sums in the millions – from a corrupt oligarch. James Risen himself wrote in the NYT in 2015 that Biden's behavior was „hypocritical“; in major editorials in the New York Times and Washington Post at the time, Hunter Biden's activity for Burisma was also openly and clearly rejected. That is remarkable. Yet Biden claims he never even talked to his son about the issue.

Ukrainian anti-corruption activist Kaleniuk [said](#), „I think Hunter Biden did a very bad thing and he was very wrong.“ But Joe Biden has not yet been able to say a single critical word – on the contrary. As recently as February 2020, he [said](#) that his son had done nothing wrong. He was given the post at Burisma because Hunter was „a very bright guy“.

## **This was not about corruption**

No matter how one twists and turns it, Biden and his media supporters cannot present concrete accusations of corruption against Shokin. Like a polyphonic choir, they simply keep claiming it all the time. Shokin, on the other hand, in a recent interview with Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani, showed official confirmation that he has never been charged, let alone convicted in court – neither for corruption nor for anything else.

This document also proves nothing for the time being. Nevertheless, Shokin may have been corrupt. But if corruption had been the reason for Biden's intervention, the US Vice President would have had to fly to Ukraine every week to force ministers and senior officials out of their posts. Self-enrichment has been a virulent problem throughout Ukraine's political upper class during Poroshenko's term in office, as it was before. Exchanging a single head does not change the problem – Joe Biden knew that too.

## **Why is a prosecutor worth a billion dollars?**

Biden's defenders accuse Shokin of not having acted against the corrupt structures of the Yanukovich era. But neither were his predecessors. Biden did not press for their dismissal, nor did he press for the dismissal of his successor Yuriy Lutsenko (who had even dropped all investigations against Burisma). Shouldn't he have been fired all the more? No, Biden only pushed for Shokin – and that with the help of a huge sum of money.

Both the lack of evidence and the above mentioned circumstantial evidence speak against corruption as an actual reason for the dismissal. Whether bribed or not, Shokin's person is too unimportant to use a billion dollars for his departure. The Prosecutor General was, in the final analysis, merely an agent of President Poroshenko. He was bound by his instructions to him and only carried out what the Ukrainian president wanted. (The role of the Prosecutor General in Germany is constructed in a very similar way). The investigation against Burisma was not ordered by Shokin, but by the president. It is therefore obvious that Biden's blackmailing manoeuvre should have hit Petro Poroshenko.

## **Was it about licenses or a million-dollar payoff?**

Why Petro Poroshenko began to press ahead with the investigation of Burisma in 2015 is not clear. Either he wanted to extort a million-dollar bribe from the Burisma owner, as the informant Andrii Telizhenko claims, or Poroshenko wanted to get his hands on the company's valuable mining licenses. Either way, he let Shokin off the leash. It's standard procedure in the Ukraine. After changes of power, the new state leadership instrumentalizes the judicial system for its individual interests. They want to get the privileges and benefices of the previously powerful oligarchs. Burisma was an opportunity for Poroshenko.

The gas business is the most lucrative source of money in Ukraine – nowhere else can oligarchs make such profits. The business opportunities are correspondingly competitive, which is why it is not at all easy for foreign companies, such as US corporations, to permanently enter the sector. As already explained, Poroshenko could not simply incorporate the oil and gas company Burisma into his own corporate empire because of the prominent board there. However, he was able to launch a public prosecutor's investigation to obtain Burisma's gas exploitation licenses.





According to Viktor Shokin, Burisma's owner Zlochevsky granted at least seven such mining licenses to his own company during his time as minister under the previous president. This was virtually a licence to print money. Burisma was allowed to exploit all three major gas fields in Ukraine and in this way became the country's largest private gas company – albeit still far from the top dog, the state-owned Naftogaz. The exploitation licenses were (and still are) the basis for profit.

Regardless of whether it was about the licenses or bribery demands from Poroshenko, Burisma owner Zlochevsky was alarmed by the reopening of the investigation. Poroshenko needed to be patted on the fingers.

Zlochevsky launched a massive lobby campaign, including media and political pressure, to end the investigations against himself and his company. Joe Biden was part of this campaign, but not as the recipient of orders from his son or the oligarch Zlochevsky, but as part of the US political business, which is closely intertwined with large corporations, and as a representative of the worldwide US hegemony of raw materials. A complex web of political corruption in Washington and US geopolitical interests worked together in this case. Many parts of it have already been uncovered.

## **The geopolitical factor: natural gas**

As in the case of other interventions of the USA, a strategically important resource is also in play in the case of Ukraine – natural gas. It did not play the only role in the Ukrainian conflict, and possibly not the leading role either. But at least: Ukraine, with its large pipeline network, is the most important gas transit country in Europe – at least until the North Stream pipes through the Baltic Sea are completed, which the US wants to prevent with all its might. The „gas war“ with Russia was massively exploited against Moscow in the West in the years before.

Besides the important transport pipelines, Ukraine also has the third-largest natural gas reserves in Europe. Although a large part of it is bound deep in the ground as shale gas, the problem can be „solved“ with modern fracking technology. And the USA is the world leader in this field.

The US government under Barack Obama has repeatedly made it clear how important this issue is to the USA. In their crisis support package for Ukraine, Obama and Biden listed Ukrainian „energy security“ as one of the top issues shortly after the Maidan. In a White House publication of April 21, 2014, it says:

*„U.S. technical experts will join with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and others in May to help Ukraine develop a public-private investment initiative to increase conventional gas production from existing fields to boost domestic energy supply. A technical team will also engage the government on*

*measures that will help the Ukrainian government ensure swift and environmentally sustainable implementation of contracts signed in 2013 for shale gas development.“*

European and US taxpayers' money should therefore be used to efficiently exploit Ukrainian gas fields by modernizing and purchasing fracking technology. This will benefit Ukraine's energy independence from Russia and at the same time serve the profit and expansion interests of the large US energy companies, which are the main beneficiaries of US foreign policy alongside the military-industrial complex. The ultimate goal is to privatize the entire Ukrainian gas market, open it up to Western corporations and prevent gas imports from Russia.

## **Joe Biden's speech in Parliament**

No one other than Joe Biden himself made this clear during his visit to Kiev on 8 December 2015. It was the day when the US Vice President issued the ultimatum to dismiss the Prosecutor General. He gave a much-noticed speech in the Ukrainian parliament. In it, he agitated mainly against Russia, before stating exactly the two demands at issue here:

*„The Office of the General Prosecutor desperately needs reform. The judiciary should be overhauled. The energy sector needs to be competitive, ruled by market principles.“*

## **Burisma's interests**

The interests of Burisma owner Zlochevsky are congruent with those of Biden. The „reform“ of the judicial system relieves Burisma of criminal prosecution. The privatization of the gas sector threatens competitors, but can hardly endanger Burisma. Breaking up the state-owned Naftogaz could even increase Zlochevsky's share of the pie.

The measures previously announced by the White House are also very valuable for Zlochevsky. The displacement of Russia from the Ukrainian gas market allows Burisma an excellent negotiating position with Ukrainian state customers. The million-dollar US investment in the gas sector is again a worthwhile target for embezzlement. Since Ukraine's independence in 1991, Western aid funds and support loans have regularly wandered into the pockets of oligarchs. After all, some of these funds could be used to engage lobbyists in the West to solicit further aid funds – for „protection against Russia“, of course.

## **Burisma is buying into Washington**

Zlochevsky had long since bought into Washington. Flashback: In January 2014 – meaning even before the change of power by the Maidan – the allegedly „pro-Russian“ oligarch had already started his precautionary business management. He had brought former Polish President Alexander Kwasniewski onto the board of Burisma. Kwasniewski is a convinced transatlantic and Nato friend. He was and is closely connected to the political leadership of Ukraine and played a leading role during the „Orange Revolution“ in 2004 and during the Maidan in Kiev. Kwasniewski sits, among other things, on the international advisory board of the Nato-affiliated Atlantic Council and apparently opened the oligarch's doors in Washington.

Only a few months later the widely known personal details followed. First Devon Archer, the former campaign manager of US Secretary of State John Kerry. Archer (who was later convicted of securities fraud in the US) met with Vice President Joe Biden at the White House on April 16, 2014, shortly after he joined Burisma. A few days later, Hunter Biden was appointed to the Burisma board of directors. While Biden and Obama again decided just a few days later to put taxpayers' money into the private Ukrainian energy sector.

## **„He starts paying anyone he can to whitewash his corruption“**

Burisma owner Zlochevsky continued to invest heavily in political relations and improving his reputation in Washington when he was a minister under Viktor Yanukovich. Journalist Max Blumenthal says of Zlochevsky: „He basically starts paying anyone [in Washington] he can to whitewash his corruption.“

At the end of May 2014, Zlochevsky hired David Leiter, a former employee of John Kerry, to lobby for Burisma. Leiter's company ML Strategies is educating US officials about Burisma and the company's role in „creating a stable and secure energy future for Ukraine“, an employee of another US communications firm working for Burisma told Time Magazine. As the article further reports, the lobbying led to four Democratic US senators writing a letter to Barack Obama in June 2014 calling for further investment in the Ukrainian energy infrastructure, which Burisma publicly welcomed.

During this period, at the insistence of Hunter Biden, Burisma also engaged the large US law firm Boies Schiller and the consulting firm Nardello and Co.

In January 2017, Burisma donated a six-figure sum to the Atlantic Council and signed a cooperation agreement. No one in Washington had a problem with this. The following month, Burisma accepted Joseph Cofer Black, the former director of the CIA's Counterterrorism Center, into its board of directors. Black is a close associate of former Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

The major US media ignored all these facts about Burisma. Max Blumenthal said this was just another example of „the legal bipartisan corruption in Washington“.

No one should now be surprised that Joe Biden also has close ties to the Atlantic Council. Not only did Biden make several speeches there during his tenure. His personal foreign policy advisor, Michael Carpenter, also works as a Senior Fellow for the Atlantic Council – main topics of interest: Russia and Ukraine. Carpenter is, by the way, the gentleman who, on the podium at the Council on Foreign Relations, slid restlessly on the chair next to Biden and smiled in agony as his boss told how he forced Viktor Shokin's dismissal.

## **Burisma lobbyists address Kiev prosecutor**

But that is not all. Zlochevsky finally engaged the lobbying firm Blue Star Strategies, whose founders worked for the US government under Bill Clinton. Karen Tramontano was a consultant to John Podesta and her colleague Sally Painter is still on the board of directors of the Atlantic Council. Throughout 2016, the lobbyists worked to stop the investigation by maintaining constant contact with the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington and with the US State Department.

According to information from Andrii Telizhenko, a former employee of the Ukrainian embassy in Washington, US officials of the Department of Justice and the FBI tried in January 2016 to convince Ukrainian prosecutors

at a working meeting in Washington to hand over the Burisma case to the FBI.

Immediately after the release of Viktor Shokin in April 2016, the Burisma lobbyists from Blue Star Strategies sought an appointment with the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office in Kiev. After putting pressure on the Ukrainian embassy in Washington, they were able to talk to the interim prosecutor in Kiev. According to his memo, they praised the work of the Ukrainian prosecutors and invited him to the USA.

They were accompanied by US lawyer John Buretta, who also worked for Burisma. He offered the Ukrainian justice official meetings with top US prosecutors. Should this unprompted flattery immediately after Shokin's release prepare the ground for the suspension of the prosecution?

## **Investigations ended after payments in millions**

Finally, the Burisma files were actually closed in early 2017. In an advertisement in the Kyiv Post, Burisma lawyer Buretta reported on the end of the investigation. In it, Buretta sells a back tax payment of the equivalent of around seven million euros, which indicates the massive tax evasion of the company in Ukraine, as a kind of transparency initiative.

There are also different but similar explanations for the end of the investigations: The Ukrainian informant Andrii Telizhenko, who has already been mentioned, said in an interview with Rudy Giuliani that the owner of Burisma, Mr Zlochevsky, had ensured the closure of the investigation files by paying some million dollars in cash to Petro Poroshenko.

Oligarch Oleksandr Onyshchenko writes in his book that the investigations against Burisma were terminated because owner Zlochevsky gave the Ukrainian president a lucrative stake in another company (Kub Gas) as an offer of reconciliation. Onyshchenko acted as a negotiator between Poroshenko in Kiev and Zlochevsky, who was in Dubai.

## **The last speech**

Whatever kind of bribery was paid here, the fact is that the investigations against Burisma had been dropped. However, what should be clear evidence of the bribery of the new Prosecutor General Yuriy Lutsenko, according to statements by media Biden supporters in the New York Times and Co. was not worth a word to them or to Joe Biden. But Joe Biden still had the great opportunity to call Lutsenko to order, because he visited Kiev again on January 17, 2017 – exactly five days after the investigations were closed – on his very last state trip as US Vice President.

At the press conference in Kiev, Biden praised the Ukrainian leadership around Poroshenko effusively. Following the usual anti-Russia rhetoric, he urged Kiev not to slacken in the fight against corruption. He didn't utter a critical word on the subject of Burisma or the Prosecutor General. However, he did call on Ukraine to continue working on energy independence from Russia. He also mentioned that in the three post-Maidan years, the US had pumped \$750 million in economic aid to Ukraine in addition to loan guarantees (\$3 billion) and military aid (\$600 million).

Biden did not mention how much – or rather how little – of it actually arrived at its actual destination and did not flow into the oligarchs' pockets. And, of course, he did not even hint at the fact that a two-digit million euro

sum of it flowed into the pockets of Hunter Biden, his American business partners and countless political lobbyists in Washington via detours from tax havens like Cyprus or Belize. Incidentally, a Ukrainian congressman claims that of the 16.5 million dollars for the Burisma board members, 900,000 dollars also went directly to Joe Biden.

What is publicly sold as US government aid to the Ukrainian people is in fact nothing more than the politically forced redistribution of Western taxpayers' money into the pockets of the Ukrainian and US upper classes. In the Biden family both sides of this coin are manifest.

## **The end of a prosecutor: conclusions**

What does this case show?

It demonstrates the hypocrisy of the Democratic Party. While Trump is accused – with help of an impeachment – of abuse of office and extortionate bartering, i.e. state financial aid in return for political favours – a so-called quid pro quo – the party ignores a clearly proven quid pro quo, which has even been publicly admitted by Joe Biden. The imperial attitude towards Ukraine interests no one in Washington anyway, not even the Republicans.

The case illustrates the extent to which relatives and other confidants in the wake of Washington's power elite are enriching themselves. Hunter Biden is not the only one. Numerous sons and daughters of US political celebrities sit on lucrative company boards, for which they are only qualified by exclusive access to their powerful parents. The example of Hunter Biden shows that some do not even shy away from working with extremely dubious people.

Furthermore, the case proves that the criticism of Joe Biden is justified. Trump's statement that Biden wanted to stop the investigation against his son is wrong – since there was no investigation directly against Hunter Biden. However, procedures and circumstantial evidence suggest that Joe Biden's blackmailing tactics were protecting his son's employer, which amounts to the same thing. The action was singular, arbitrary, and extremely costly. It is likely that the US vice president knew about the investigation into Burisma. The action was supposed to show the limits to Shokin's superior – President Poroshenko.

The case exposes the PR phrases of US foreign policy. Shokin's alleged corruption was a feigned argument, a euphonious justification for the public and for media who did not want to know more. The „fight against corruption“ is a phrase of legitimacy, like the „fight for human rights“ – a phrase that the US government uses when it cannot publicly state the tangible real reasons for its actions because they do not fit the official noble goals of US foreign policy. The „aid for the Ukrainian people“ turns out to be a predictable aid programme for the US export economy (armaments, gas exploitation), in which oligarchs and Washington's lobbyists are cashing in heavily.

The case also shows the complicity of the US mainstream media. While they meticulously investigated the allegations against Trump, they failed to investigate the Biden-Burisma case. They proved that they could do otherwise in 2014/2015, when Hunter Biden's Burisma job was a critical topic on several occasions – at that time it was impossible to imagine a president Donald Trump. After the Trump telephone call in 2019, however, the leading media only clouded the issue and attacked every other position with the usual vocabulary of „conspiracy theory“. The exception to this rule is Fox News on a case-by-case basis – because the station

defends Trump. Real journalistic investigation work, on the other hand, was done by the US alternative media – both conservative and progressive.

Finally, the case once again makes it clear: securing raw materials, geopolitics and corporate interests are the guidelines of US foreign policy. Clever oligarchs can take advantage of this. Their lobbyists are met with open arms in Washington's ministries. All of Biden's „reforms“ and financial promises did not play into the hands of the Ukrainian population, but of companies like Burisma.

>> *This article is also available [in German](#).*

**About the author:** *Stefan Korinth, born 1983, is a German journalist. He has a degree in social sciences and has been working as a freelance journalist since 2012, among others for German magazines Telepolis, Rubikon and Evangelischer Pressedienst. In the Ukrainian conflict, he has illuminated the political situation and the role of the media with numerous analyses since 2014. Together with Paul Schreyer and Ulrich Teusch he is co-founder of Multipolar.*

## Notes

- (1) Nikolai Asarow: Ukraine: Die Wahrheit über den Staatsstreich. Aufzeichnungen des Ministerpräsidenten. [Ukraine: The truth about the coup. Records of the Prime Minister] Berlin 2015, p. 38. Azarov writes that after the telephone conversation with Biden, Yanukovych instructed him to cancel the planned eviction.
- (2) Alexander Onischenko: Peter der Fünfte. Die wahre Geschichte des ukrainischen Diktators. [Peter the Fifth. The true story of the Ukrainian dictator.] Berlin 2018, pp. 104
- (3) Joe Biden's intervention could indeed have a legal repercussion in Ukraine. Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin, who was dismissed following his pressure, has filed a complaint against Biden there for interfering in the work of a law enforcement agency. This is still being shunted back and forth between the authorities. Hunter Biden's acceptance of Burisma money could also be criminal if it was „laundered money“ from tax evasion or even the theft of international aid funds in Ukraine.
- (4) According to Ukrainska Pravda, on November 2, 2015, unknown persons fired at the office of the Prosecutor General at about 10 p.m., where Shokin held a meeting. The SBU took over the investigation of the case and is still investigating today. Anatoliy Matios, then Chief Prosecutor of the military, said that the sniper allegedly fired with a thermal imaging camera and that only bulletproof glass saved Schokin's life.