

Diplomatic Scandal between Ukraine and Czech Republic – expert opinion poll

Only a clear inciting agent can rapture diplomatic ties with Czech Republic – experts

In response to the expulsion of Czech diplomats from Ukraine, the Czech Republic blamed Ukraine for non-diplomatic behaviour and informed of an intention to act reciprocally.

The Gorshenin Institute has conducted an opinion poll asking experts about the effect of the diplomatic scandal on relations between Ukraine and Europe and on the prospects of Ukraine's European integration as well as the risks of diplomatic ties between the two countries being broken.

Member of parliament and first deputy head of the parliamentary committee for foreign affairs, **Taras Chornovil**, has said that the situation should be viewed only from the political angle. "The things that the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) has presented raise huge doubts that this was an entirely political action rather than a spy scandal. This is not the first diplomat expelled from Ukraine, and usually they do it quietly. However, in this case they deliberately stirred up a scandal. It seems to me that this SBU's wired game was organized by Russia. I have already said many times about the 'Kremlin quartette' that Khoroshkovskyy [SBU chief] is a member of", Chornovil said. He also said that the Czech statements regarding Ukraine's non-diplomatic behavior and the reciprocal expulsion of diplomats are quite substantiated. "If there was a fact of a diplomatic scandal there, the Czech Republic would avoid making any statements. But statements were made from the Czech side, moreover, the statements were very nervous and it demonstrates that the Czech side feels offended. The expulsion of a Ukrainian representative in return is a classic situation, a mirror principle of symmetry in international politics. Also add here the fact that Ukraine is now blocking the appointment of the new Czech ambassador to Ukraine, so the nervous reaction of the Czech side is related not only to the expulsion of the diplomats but also to the fact that starting of June the work of the Czech diplomatic office in Ukraine will be blocked due to Ukraine's fault. This scandal goes far beyond Ukraine and SBU plays not in favour of its country. All these events lead to breaking the diplomatic relations with the Czech Republic. And this is not the right thing to play games like this with a member of the European Union. It is only a clear inciting agent working for a third party who can break diplomatic relations with the Czech Republic", Chornovil said.

Member of Parliament and deputy head of the parliamentary committee for European integration, **Stepan Kurpil**, agrees with his colleague that the diplomatic level of events would require no publicity. "In practical terms, if there are any suspicions of espionage, an exposure of foreign diplomats over espionage charges, when there are good relations between countries or there are intentions to keep good relations, expulsions like this do not take place publicly. However, if a country wants to show its protest against some actions by the other party, expulsions take a public form of a social campaign. I do not rule out that there is some reason in the statements made by Czech side. Nevertheless, it is important to see the original documents about the actions of the Czech diplomats to be able to say something for definite and say clearly who backs this scandal. But it is absolutely clear that the Ukrainian government does not like the fact that political asylum was given to former Economics Minister Bohdan Danylyshyn. Based on this fact, an absolutely substantiated conclusion can be drawn regarding political repressions and persecutions in Ukraine, if Ukrainian politicians are given political asylum in other countries," Kupril suggested.

The head of the all-Ukrainian Ukraine-EU expert council, **Oleh Rybachuk**, has said that diplomatic espionage is a widespread practice, but making the recent case with the Czech diplomats public harms Ukraine's European reputation. "The case we are talking about is quite a regular diplomatic practice, when spies in different countries work under cover of diplomatic passports. Ukrainian intelligence service officers work in the same manner as well. However, this case would never become a big story if our ministries, and the SBU in particular, did not put it on the front pages of newspapers. Ukraine acted non-diplomatically and in a non-friendly manner in the way that this situation became a political story in the media and was broadly commented to the national audience. So it only confirms the fact that the problem was not in Czech intelligence service officers looking for our secrets but this was small and unconvincing revenge for giving Danylyshyn political asylum, Rybachuk said. He also said that the main purpose of the scandal was "the playing of a domestic Ukrainian political card". "This was made very unprofessionally and unconvincingly, and Ukrainians do not understand why there is so much noise about this story. But Ukrainian experts understand that the Czech Republic is a member of the European Union, our ally, a friendly country, that the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Štefan Füle, is Czech and that this is not the right way to deal with partners. And here I agree with the Czech side that friends should not behave like this", Rybachuk concluded.

