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Poroshenko Pressures TV Channel to Keep Putin Handshake Off-Air

By Anna Dolgov

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Russia's President Vladimir Putin (2nd L) shakes hands with his Ukrainian counterpart Petro Poroshenko, with France's President Francois Hollande (L) and Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel standing nearby, as they take part in peace talks on resolving the Ukrainian crisis in Minsk, Feb. 11, 2015.

A Ukrainian television channel has published a statement by its former producer, claiming officials from President Petro Poroshenko's administration banned the channel from broadcasting footage of a handshake the Ukrainian leader exchanged with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin at a recent meeting.

The handshake took place at the start of a meeting in Paris on Oct. 2, but when television channel 112 Ukraina was preparing a report about the gathering, it received a "barrage of calls" from the presidential administration and security services "about the unacceptability of showing the handshake on the air," former producer Viktor Zubritsky said on his Facebook page Sunday.

“So, Poroshenko shook Putin's hand, but did not want Ukrainians to known about it,” Zubritsky said. “And somehow strangely, all of Ukraine's television channels did not notice that event.”

The television channel reprinted the post in full on its website, without adding any comment. It also included a photo, credited to France's Foreign Ministry, of Putin and Poroshenko shaking hands.

Zubritsky also accused the Ukrainian president of putting pressure on 112 Ukraina, and linked a recent court warrant to search the channel's offices to the channel's refusal to shelve the footage of the handshake.

“Poroshenko, with the help of his cohorts ... has been using the usual arsenal of a tyrant — threats of opening or closing criminal cases, threats of revoking the digital [broadcasting] license,” Zubritsky said.

The channel is under investigation on suspicion of money laundering, Zubritsky said, describing the case as punishment for 112 Ukraina's critical coverage of the president.

“This final refusal to 'not show his handshake' has led to a Ukrainian court approving on Friday, Oct. 16, a warrant to search within a month the offices of 112 Ukraina television and to seize all computers, digital data-storage devices and so on,” Zubritsky said. “In other words — to carry out technical moves toward terminating the television channel's work.”

The 112 Ukraina channel has received several government warnings this year for supposedly violating the terms of its broadcasting license, Russia's RBC business news agency reported.

Putin and Poroshenko, along with French President Francois Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, met in Paris on Oct. 2 in an attempt to bring peace to eastern Ukraine, where Moscow-backed separatists are fighting Kiev government forces.

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