

Ukraine President Gives Prime Minister Second Chance After Tape Leak

By [Reuters](#)

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Ukrainian Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk. **TASS**

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Friday allowed Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk to keep his job after the leak of an embarrassing audio recording prompted Honcharuk to submit his resignation.

In a carefully choreographed video of the two men sitting at a desk that was released on Friday evening, in which Honcharuk was mostly silent, Zelenskiy said he would give Honcharuk and his government a chance.

Honcharuk had offered to quit after an audio recording suggested he had criticized the president, though in earlier comments to Reuters he also indicated that he might end up keeping his job.

A recording of a man discussing Zelenskiy's purported lack of knowledge of economics was

circulated on messaging channels this week, apparently at a meeting of Honcharuk, the finance minister and the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU) in December.

Zelenskiy is a former comic actor who had no political experience when he swept to power in an election last year on the back of public anger over high-level corruption.

"I decided to give you a chance ... and a chance to your government," Zelenskiy said, but added the government had to fulfil certain tasks such as sacking ministers who do not perform.

Zelenskiy and the public had loaned Honcharuk their trust, he said to Honcharuk, adding: "you have not yet repaid this loan to our society."

Honcharuk said earlier the recording had been doctored and was made up of different fragments of what had been said at government meetings.

"Its contents artificially create the impression that my team and I do not respect the president, who is our political leader," Honcharuk said on social media. He did not say whether it was his voice heard in the recording.

Central bank officials and the finance minister have declined to comment on the recording.

Zelenskiy asked law enforcement agencies to determine who was involved in making the recording and how to prevent such incidents from occurring in future.

Contacted by Reuters shortly after his announcement and asked whether he indeed intended to step down, Honcharuk said: "Do not jump to conclusions."

Related article: [Ukrainian PM Offers to Quit After Tape Suggests He Criticized President](#)

Under Ukraine's previous president, Honcharuk's predecessor as prime minister, Volodymyr Groysman, also made threats to resign but ultimately stayed the course until last July's parliamentary election which Zelenskiy's party won.

Honcharuk, appointed by lawmakers last August, declined to say whether he had used the resignation letter as a way of testing the president's confidence in him.

"It doesn't show the prime minister's desire to resign, but rather it's a way for him to fight to stay in his position," said Volodymyr Fesenko, a Kiev-based political analyst.

Honcharuk announced his resignation in a message on Facebook where he also praised Zelenskiy as "a model of openness and decency".

Honcharuk appeared in parliament and reaffirmed his respect for the president, adding that Ukraine must remain united in the face of what he called information attacks and manipulations.

He was given a standing ovation by a number of lawmakers, though some shouted "shame on you".

Since taking office, Honcharuk has set out an ambitious reform agenda and secured provisional agreement from the IMF for a three-year-loan programme seen as key to maintaining investor confidence and economic stability.

Ukraine's dollar bonds recovered their modest earlier losses on Friday.

Honcharuk's government managed to secure a \$5.5 billion IMF loan programme in December but this is still subject to Ukraine's performance on reforms and tackling vested interests.

"(The resignation offer) will not affect them," Honcharuk said in his comments to Reuters on Friday, replying to a question about his government's reforms and the IMF programme

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