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# Ukraine's Pro-Kremlin MP Blasts Treason Probe

By AFP

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Viktor Medvedchuk is a hugely controversial figure in Ukraine for his ties to Russia. **Alexei Druzhinin / TASS**

Ukrainian lawmaker Viktor Medvedchuk, seen as Russian President Vladimir Putin's top ally in Kiev, has slammed a treason investigation against him, calling it a "political reprisal."

The 66-year-old business tycoon, who counts the Kremlin chief among his personal friends, is a hugely controversial figure in Ukraine for his ties to Russia, which has backed separatists in a years-long conflict with Kiev.

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On Tuesday, Ukraine's security service searched Medvedchuk's two houses in Kiev as well as the offices of his political party as part of an ongoing investigation into treason.

Medvedchuk said that he is currently in Kiev and added that he was not planning to "hide from justice."

"Everything that is happening to me is a political reprisal for my principled political position," he said in a statement released Tuesday evening by his pro-Russian party, Opposition Platform – For Life.

He said the searches were carried out in violation of Ukraine's constitution.

"As expected, nothing illegal has been found," Medvedchuk said, claiming that authorities were seeking to trump up charges against him.

The Kremlin on Wednesday said it was not planning to interfere but would like to make sure that the case against Medvedchuk was not politically motivated.

"This is Ukraine's domestic affair," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"We are following this very closely and would like to make sure that politically-motivated persecution is not behind this."

Peskov added that the Ukrainian lawmaker did not request asylum in Russia.

On Tuesday, Prosecutor General Iryna Venedyktova said that Medvedchuk and another pro-Moscow lawmaker, Taras Kozak, were "suspected of high treason and attempts to plunder national resources in the Ukrainian Crimea," annexed by Moscow in 2014.

Speaking to reporters alongside Ivan Bakanov, head of the SBU security service, she rejected claims that the case was politically motivated.

The prosecutor general said that Medvedchuk had in 2015 planned to begin extracting natural resources off the Black Sea coast belonging to Ukraine and monopolized by Russia after the annexation of Crimea.

He is also suspected of handing over information about a secret Ukrainian military unit to Russia in 2020, Bakanov said.

Ukraine has been fighting Russian-backed separatists in the eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions since 2014.

The fighting has claimed more than 13,000 lives, according to the United Nations.

Kiev and the West accuse Moscow of sending troops and arms across the border. The Kremlin has denied the charges.

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