

Former Ukraine President Poroshenko under Police Investigation: Fails to Appear for Polygraph Test

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Former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko failed to appear at the Kiev Research Institute of Forensic Expertise for a polygraph test on October 1st. The test was scheduled to be conducted by Ukraine's National Bureau of Investigations, having been authorized by a Kiev court on August 13th. The polygraph test was scheduled to be conducted in connection with a tax-evasion investigation being carried out by NBI. Poroshenko is currently the focus of over a dozen criminal investigations which have been opened by multiple Ukrainian law-enforcement bodies since he lost the presidential election to Volodymyr Zelensky on a landslide in April. These investigations are in connection with indictments for tax-evasion, embezzlement, illegal abuse of authority, interference in judicial proceedings, forgery of documents and of lawmakers' signatures, money-laundering, and other corruption-schemes.

The criminal exploits of the Yanukovich family seem quite modest by comparison.

On August 1st, the Vesti Ukraine newspaper reported that Poroshenko had made appeals to American lobbyists for protection from prosecution, including to the BGR Group, where former US Special Representative for Ukraine Kurt Volker acts as a senior advisor. This is a shrewd move on Poroshenko's part. Over the past 70 years, between the United States government and its myriad puppets, there has been an unspoken agreement.

If you do our dirty work for us, impunity is guaranteed.

And indeed Poroshenko did a lot of dirty work. As president, he was an extremely loyal servant of US foreign policy. Even if President Trump has consistently indicated that he has little interest in Ukraine, there will doubtlessly be voices in the State Department advising him that it sets an extremely unhelpful precedent for the future if the US fails to protect Poroshenko now.

This latest controversy involving Poroshenko is just one instance of a pattern which has emerged steadily in Ukraine, in particular over the past 5 years – the country has developed a love-affair with the polygraph. In January, Ukraine's most senior military prosecutor, Anatoly Matios, announced that he planned to develop a "polygraph program" in order to identify Russian collaborators and "separatists."

Used in this way, the technology's express purpose will be to identify thought-criminals.

As it currently stands, polygraph tests have already been made standard components within job-interviews for many positions in banking, the tax-service, anti-corruption agencies and the military. In addition, polygraph-results are admissible as evidence in Ukrainian courts,

despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists and criminologists worldwide who are familiar with the methodology and theory behind polygraphy regard it as a pseudo-science. There is very little evidence that polygraph-results are reliable, and lots of empirical evidence to the contrary.

The legal codes of the Sumerian king Ur-Nammu and the Babylonian Hammurabi stipulated the practice of “trial by ordeal,” a practice which survived well into the medieval period in Europe. Polygraphy, which involves monitoring physiological reactions during a line of questioning, is obviously a less physically dangerous method of establishing a person’s innocence or guilt than trial by ordeal, but no less superstitious. Honestly, you may as well be attempting to determine a person’s truthfulness or deception by entrails-divination.

The Ukrainian psychotherapist Irina Muzychuk, a vocal critic of polygraphy, has argued that the proliferation of this pseudo-scientific fad has partially ideological and emotional roots. She argues that in what she calls “highly unstable societies” such as Ukraine, the polygraph offers “hope that the truth will be found.” In a society which has been mired in oligarchism and corruption since it untethered itself from the Soviet Union in 1991, with the result that trust has completely broken down not only on the societal level but also on the interpersonal level, the polygraph operates as a fetishistic, pseudo-scientific substitute for trust.

However, if we were to analyze the phenomenon genealogically, we might also admit that it had deeper roots. Every society, every distinct ideological order, has its own ideologically driven, privileged pseudo-sciences. For example, in the United States, the most privileged pseudo-sciences are psychology and macro-economics. In the post-Soviet space, many privileged or legally mandated pseudo-sciences are hangovers from the “scientism” (in Russian “naukoobrazye”) which inhered in “scientific communism.”

For example, the disciplines which we call “political science” (in Russian “politologia”) and “geo-politics” are pseudo-sciences, insofar as they do not have methodologies which essentially distinguish them from the study of history. Their methodologies essentially centre on making historically-grounded comparisons. Nothing essentially wrong with that in itself – this would make “politologia” essentially a sub-discipline within the venerable study of history. The problem is that most political scientists don’t think as deeply or as long-term as historians. They compensate for this by maintaining scientific pretensions.

In the post-Soviet world, most high-profile purveyors of “politologia” are people who managed to crawl from the epistemological wreckage of “scientific communism” 30 years ago.

I would contend that the widespread use of the polygraph in Ukraine’s juridical process is another clear example of a particular type of “scientism,” this naïve trust in methodologies which purport to be “scientific.” As previously stated, almost every ideological order has its own privileged pseudo-sciences. “Scientism” is certainly not unique to the post-communist world. In the case of Ukraine’s contemporary polygraphy-craze, rather than “scientific communism,” it would count as an example of “pseudo-scientific post-communism.” For those under criminal investigation in Ukraine today, this is a somewhat brutal irony, when we consider the spate of “anti-communization” statutes which have been signed into law in Ukraine since the 2014 coup d’etat. Ukrainian society is just the flip-side of everything it thinks it’s reacting against.

You see, just like religions, secular ideologies cannot simply be erased or surgically

removed. They can only morph or mutate. In spite of “secularization,” religion never really culturally disappears – it simply morphs into some post-religious form.

Precisely the same point holds for ostensibly secular ideologies such as communism or liberalism.

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