

Beat: Politics

Obama meets Ukraine's president-elect in show of support

-, 30.11.-0001, 00:00 Time

USPA News - U.S. President Barack Obama met with Ukrainian president-elect Petro Poroshenko in the Polish capital on Wednesday, discussing the situation in Ukraine and how to come up with a peaceful solution for the ongoing crisis in the southeast, as well as discussing economic plans and energy. The meeting, on the second day of Obama's four-day European tour, came just over a week after the candy tycoon secured a solid victory in Ukraine's presidential election.

Poroshenko faces enormous challenges when he takes office on Saturday to replace Acting President Oleksandr Turchynov, who gained power in February after ousting the democratically-elected president. Obama, after concluding his bilateral meeting with Poroshenko, said the world had seen "an incredible outpouring of democracy" in Ukraine in the face of Russia's actions and armed militias in the country's east. Poroshenko, who is often nicknamed the "Chocolate King" due to his chocolate stores across Ukraine, represents a different future whereby the Ukrainian people choose their own representatives, Obama said. "The United States is absolutely committed to standing behind the Ukrainian people and their aspirations, not just in the coming days and weeks but in the coming years," Obama said, speaking from a hotel in the Polish capital Warsaw. Obama also announced that his administration will continue its support towards Ukraine by increasing non-lethal aid, including night vision goggles, but also \$1 billion in additional loan guarantees to supplement assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Professionalizing Ukraine's law enforcement and military, as well as steps to help with the transition and reform process, is also part of the discussion in regards to U.S. support for Ukraine, said the U.S. leader. Obama stressed the importance of the international community standing behind the efforts of Poroshenko to come to a peaceful solution for his country, whereby Russia is no longer supporting, financing or arming separatists in the state's sovereign territory, according to the White House. "We're confident that Ukraine can, in fact, be a thriving, vital democracy that has strong relationships with Europe and has strong relationships with Russia," Obama added. Poroshenko, for his part, stated that he believes in dialogue with the country's east to help bring an end to the increasingly violent crisis. "From the very beginning, from the first day of the inauguration, we are ready to present a plan for the peaceful resolution of the situation in the east," he was quoted as saying by the Interfax-Ukraine news agency. The upcoming meeting of G7 leaders in Brussels will also be important for Ukraine considering the summit's focus on the country's crisis, the president-elect said. During Wednesday's meeting, Obama and Poroshenko further discussed economic and energy plans with the aim of creating models for economic growth, as well as transparency and the importance of combating corruption. Energy was discussed by expressing how Ukraine needs to become a more energy efficient economy and depending less on Russia, Obama stated. Poroshenko also held a meeting with Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski, during which he expressed his plans for resolving the issues in the southeastern part of the country by conducting a dialogue with the region's representatives. In order to do this, Poroshenko believes it is a must to hold elections to the Verkhovna Rada and local councils. This is a way for legitimate representatives to be elected from all parts of the country and for issues to be resolved peacefully, he said. Poroshenko - often nicknamed the "Chocolate King" due to his chocolate stores across Ukraine - won the May 25 presidential election with nearly 55 percent of the vote, beating former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. Ukraine lost control of the Crimean Peninsula to Russia in March and has since suffered deadly clashes in the country's east, where separatists have proclaimed independence in the hopes of joining Russia.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-2282/obama-meets-ukraines-president-elect-in-show-of-support.html>

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