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### **Manafort case: Ukrainian ties between Russia and the United States**

The former Donald Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort has been indicted last month in Washington on charges ranging from money laundering to acting as an unregistered agent of former pro-Kremlin President Viktor Yanukovich's Party of Regions. The charges mention neither Trump nor his campaign. Indeed, Manafort joined the Trump's presidential campaign in March 2016 and later became campaign manager, but he was forced to resign in August as questions emerged about his previous work for Yanukovich's party [Jeremy Herb, Evan Perez, Marshall Cohen, Pamela Brown, Shimon Prokupez, Ex-Trump campaign adviser pleads guilty to making false statement, CNN, 31 October 2017]. Serhii Horbatiuk, head of Ukraine special investigations at the general prosecutor's, yet in 2014 and 2015 investigated two cases related to Manafort. The first relates to the suspected illegal use of Ukrainian state funds by justice ministry officials to pay a U.S. law firm for a report used to justify the imprisonment of the former prime minister and political rival Yulia Tymoshenko during Yanukovich's rule. The second one to a so-called 'Black Ledger' discovered after Yanukovich's 2014 ouster by street protests, a book supposedly listing payments from a slush fund by Yanukovich's Party of Regions to their associates, including Manafort. Yanukovich denies corruption accusations, Manafort denies all wrongdoing. [Matthias Williams, Pavel Polityuk, Ukraine prosecutor says puzzled by lack of U.S. help on Manafort case, Reuters, 14 November 2017].

In the U.S. has been imposed a gag order for the case of Paul Manafort. U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson said she wanted to make sure the trial was fair and those potential jurors were not influenced by pre-trial publicity. Manafort and his business associate Rick Gates are charged with conspiring to defraud the United States in more than a decade of dealings with political forces in Ukraine. The charges came out of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's probe into alleged Russian efforts to interfere in the 2016 presidential election. Manafort and Gates have both pleaded not guilty. [U.S. Judge Imposes Gag Order In Case Against Former Trump Aide Manafort, RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty, 9 November 2017].

Very swirling situation, which is accompanied by the complex Prevezon affair. The Prevezon case officially dates back to 2013 when U.S. authorities sought to seize about \$14 million in assets from the real-estate firm Prevezon, which was registered in Cyprus and largely owned by the Russian businessman Denis Katsyv. U.S. officials alleged that the assets, mainly Manhattan real estate, came from a \$230 million tax scheme, uncovered seven years earlier, to defraud the Russian government. With thousands of pages of evidence, affidavits, and bank records detailing strange transfers of money, the Prevezon case had been scheduled to go to trial on May 15th. On May 12th, however, the two sides announced a settlement, with Prevezon admitting no wrongdoing and agreeing to pay \$6 million. Prevezon's main Russian lawyer was Natalya Veselnitskaya, who travelled to the United States in June

2016 as part of the ongoing pre-trial manoeuvring for Prevezon. It later emerged that during that visit, she met with Trump's son Donald Jr., along with a Russian-American lobbyist, and Trump's then-campaign manager, Paul Manafort [Mike Eckel, U.S. Seeks Court Order To Enforce \$6 Million Prevezon Settlement, RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty, 16 November 2017].

Notwithstanding allegations against the businessman will have to be proved, this situation demonstrates the importance of Ukraine in the political and economic ties between the Russian and US establishment. The Ukrainian conflict seems to have been manipulated and exacerbated by opposing elites, taking away much from the rhetoric of the ideological confrontation between the West and Russia. Indeed, the charges have shown two opposing factions in the upper class of Russia and USA, one more tied with the Putin's strategy, of whom Manafort and Yanukovich are the most relevant actors and one tight with the West and represented by Soros, Tymoshenko, Juščenko and Porošenko. In this game of alliances and power, the role of Trump has yet to be clarified. Only one thing is for sure, this challenge between the top Russian and American leaders is one of the many reasons that caused a war in Ukraine that seems to have no end.

**Mattia Giulioli** - *Master's degree in International Relations graduated at Roma Tre University. Master in Economic Security, Geopolitical and Intelligence obtained at the SIOI (Italian Society for International Organization). Expert in Russian and Eastern Europe affairs.*