

Alumni: ‘We are deeply concerned by the Kennan Institute’s growing pro-Kremlin policies’

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Matthew Rojansky is director of the Kennan Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C.

Editor's Note: The following is an open letter of the [Ukrainian Association of the Kennan Institute Alumni published on Feb. 27.](#)

Feb. 27, 2018

The Honorable Jane Harman, Director and CEO

CC: Kennan Institute Advisory Council

Dear Ms. Harman!

Dear Members of the Kennan Institute Advisory Council!

The Ukrainian Association of Kennan Institute alumni would like to renew to the Wilson Center the assurances of its highest consideration and express its deep concern with the worrisome trends in the overall management and strategy of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute. After careful consideration, we would like to request that Wilson Center leadership disintegrate the Ukraine program from the Kennan Institute and transfer it under the auspices of the Wilson Center's Global Europe Program.

This decision will be a logical outcome of Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution of Dignity and its unequivocal desire to break away from the politico-economic influence of Russia. In light of the growing EU-Ukraine partnership, the transfer of our academic program to the Global Europe Program would guarantee the proper academic framework for the analysis of Ukraine's internal politics, economy and security as part of the European agenda.

Our strong interest in disassociating Ukraine from the Kennan Institute is also based on our disagreement with the management style and strategy of its current leadership. We are deeply concerned by the Kennan Institute's growing pro-Kremlin policies, lack of democratic procedures and unprofessional communication with Kennan Institute alumni in Ukraine.

Smagliy's firing 'unjustified'

On Feb. 16, 2018 we learned that the Kennan Institute dismissed Dr. Kateryna Smagliy, Director of the Kennan Institute Kyiv Office, and simultaneously appointed Dr. Mikhail Minakov as Principle Investigator on Ukraine. The Institute promised to continue its operations in Ukraine, but made no mention of the scope, direction and the form of its involvement. In the follow-up message the Kennan Institute accused Dr. Kateryna Smagliy of "driving a disinformation and incitement campaign" – the statement that we categorically deny as our debate was genuine and grounded on our own observations and professional analysis.

We find Dr. Smagliy's dismissal unjustified, illogical and disrespectful. Appointed in December 2015 in an open competition, Dr. Smagliy has proven herself an accomplished scholar, devoted professional and resourceful manager. She quickly diversified and magnified the work of the Kennan Institute Kyiv Office and built numerous partnerships with government and research institutions. In 2017 the President of Ukraine praised the Kennan Kyiv Office for promoting Ukraine's public diplomacy in his annual address to the Verkhovna Rada (parliament) of Ukraine. Under Dr. Smagliy's leadership, the Kennan alumni presented more than 100 public lectures, including 30 at the displaced universities of Donbas; organized three forums of cultural diplomacy with the Foreign Ministry of Ukraine, held five intensive leadership programs for internally displaced

students; and edited six volumes of *Agora*, featuring 122 articles on the wide range of subjects.

Parallel to this arbitrary dismissal, Mr. Matthew Rojansky prevented Dr. Smagliy from participating at the Kennan Advisory Council meeting held on Feb. 16, 2018, despite the fact she was in Washington, D.C., and requested the opportunity to present the Kyiv office accomplishments to the Advisory Council members. The fact that Dr. Smagliy was denied this opportunity testifies to Mr. Rojansky's increasing tendency to make non-transparent decisions, obstruct democratic dialogue and silence his ideological opponents. Such behavior does not align with the Western tradition of openness and democratic scholarly debate.

Kennan Institute 'unwitting tool of Russia's political interference'

The Kennan Institute's growing pro-Kremlin policies threaten to turn the Wilson Center into an unwitting tool of Russia's political interference. We noted numerous episodes of the Kennan Institute's involvement with Kremlin associates, as exemplified by its special awards to a Russian businessman Petr Aven, whose name is on the "Kremlin" sanctions list, and to Susan Carmel Lehrman, previously personally awarded by President Putin with an "Order of Friendship". We were appalled by the fact that the founder of *Russia Today* TV channel Mikhail Lesin – the mastermind behind Russia's major vehicle of disinformation campaign during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections – was on the Kennan Institute's guest list for the Aven-Lehrman gala.

Today, at the time when the U.S. government tightens its grip on Putin's associates, the Kennan Institute offers them a rather warm welcome. Mr. Rojansky actively promotes the idea of the U.S.- Russia dialogue at the *Dartmouth Conference*. This platform, which was long dead after the end of

the Cold War, was suddenly revived by the Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, several months after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its war in Donbas. Mr. Rojansky serves as conference's executive secretary on the American side, but his Russian vis-à-vis – Yuri Shafranik and Gissa Guchetl – lead the Russian Union of Oil and Gas Producers.

We were particularly disappointed by the Kennan Institute's logo on the "For Unity!" concert on November 13, 2017, as it featured two Russian artists who supported Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea. In our October 31, 2017 letter to Mr. Rojansky, signed by 36 members of our network, we warned that such an inconsiderate move would strongly damage the Kennan Institute's reputation and make it no friends among Ukrainians.

We noted that the Kennan Institute's leadership started sidelining Dr. Smagliy and prohibiting the Kyiv Office from implementing research projects with international partners immediately after our protest against the "For Unity!" concert. The Kennan Institute denied Dr. Smagliy the opportunity to organize the international conference on the legacy of communism and Soviet occupation and attempted to prevent her from participating in the February 14, 2018 presentation of *Boris Nemtsov and Russian Politics* book in Washington DC. The fact she was dismissed the day after the event testifies that this decision may be politically motivated.

We feel deeply sorry to lose Dr. Smagliy as a leader of the Kennan Institute's programs in Ukraine, because she had always demonstrated professionalism, enthusiasm, and devotion to her work. The entire Kennan Kyiv office team decided to step down in protest of this unjust decision. At the same time, we are surprised by the appointment of Dr. Mikhail Minakov, who is known for his biased analysis of Ukraine's post-Euromaidan developments. In our view, he is not in a position to serve as an

independent and academically balanced editor of “Focus Ukraine” or Kennan Institute’s Principle Investigator on Ukraine.

We appreciate the long-term support provided by the Kennan Institute to Ukrainian scholars, which allowed us to deepen cooperation and understanding between Ukraine and the United States. However, our deep disappointment and disagreement with the recent policies and decisions taken by the current Kennan Institute leadership prompt us to request you disassociate our program from Mr. Rojansky’s supervision and transfer it under the auspices of the Global Europe Program.

Under the current circumstances, we consider this open letter to be a necessary step to save the reputation of the Kennan Institute and the Woodrow Wilson Center.

Respectfully,

Antonina Kolodii, Chair, Ukrainian Association of Kennan Institute alumni

Olexiy Haran, former member of the Kennan Institute Advisory Council

Natalia Moussienko, former member of the Kennan Institute Advisory Council

Viktor Stepanenko, former member of the Kennan Institute Advisory Council

Serhiy Kvit, Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine (2014-2016)

Pavlo Kirpenko

Oleksandr Potiekhin

Volodymyr Dubovyk

Viktor Susak

Grygoriy Shamborovsky

Mykola Riabchuk

Valentyna Kharkhun

Iryna Bekeshkina

Sergiy Fedynyak

Vitaliy Zhuhay

Oleksii Pozniak

Nazar Kholod

Mykhailo Kirsenko

Ella Lamakh

Yuri Matsievsky

Volodymyr Kulyk

Lyudmyla Pavlyuk

Oleh Lystopad

Roman Kalytchak

Oleh Yarosh

Serhii Rymarenko

Mikhail Alexeev

Iuliia Soroka

Viktor Zablotsky

Yuri Kalyukh

Oleksandr Demyanchuk
