

STATE BUREAU OF SECURITY REFORM AS A PRIORITY FOR 2026



The State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) is one of Ukraine's most powerful law enforcement agencies. Its jurisdiction extends to members of parliament, politicians, high-ranking public officials, NABU detectives, and SAPO prosecutors.

The events of recent years have highlighted that an institution with such extensive powers over high-ranking authorities requires strong guarantees of independence and robust safeguards against political influence.

As a result of politically motivated cases opened against activists and anti-corruption officials, pressure exerted on journalists, media outlets, and the defense sector, as well as alleged ties between the SBI's current leadership and criminal organizations, **SBI reform is being strongly demanded – not only by Ukrainian civil society, but also by international partners.**

This concerns the following requirements and international documents.

- **Cluster 1. Fundamentals (2026):** On 12 June 2026 the EU [adopted](#) its Common Position on the opening of Cluster 1, Fundamentals. The [document](#) sets out a list of reforms and concrete benchmarks that Ukraine must achieve in the areas of justice, anti-corruption, law enforcement, the prosecution service, and other rule of law institutions, including the reform of the SBI, following the model of the ESBP with the meaningful involvement of independent experts nominated by international partners.
- **Kos-Kachka Joint Statement (2025):** Identified SBI reform as one of ten key commitments aimed at restoring confidence in Ukraine's reform agenda following the July 2025 crisis around NABU and SAPO, including a review of the Bureau's integrity mechanisms and the adoption of the necessary reforms.
- **European Commission Reports (2024–2025):** Repeatedly called for the depoliticization of the SBI, including merit-based selection procedures with the meaningful involvement of international experts in appointing its leadership.

Why the Reform of the SBI is Crucial as soon as possible

1. Freedom of speech interference.

Court injunction banning the publication of a journalistic investigation into 143 real estate properties belonging to the brother of the SBI Director.

The Pechersk Court [banned](#) the Anti-Corruption Action Center and Slidstvo.Info from publishing an investigation into 143 real estate properties belonging to the brother of the SBI Director, Oleksiy Sukhachov. This precedent constitutes a significant assault on freedom of speech and contradicts Ukraine's European integration commitments. It occurred after journalists, adhering to professional standards and ethical guidelines, reached out to the individuals featured in the investigation for comment. After that, there was an appeal to court for issuing such a prohibition. Following this, an appeal was filed with the court requesting the issuance of such a prohibition.

The court ruling is unlawful and violates the fundamental rights of journalists and the public to collect and disseminate socially significant and publicly available information concerning senior government officials.

Threats of criminal liability and interference with the activities of journalists/civic activists

Daria Kaleniuk, Executive Director of the Anti-Corruption Action Center, [published](#) an article on "Ukrainska Pravda" titled "Prosecutor General Kravchenko and SBI Director Sukhachov Must Leave Their Posts Amid Zelensky's Reshuffles."

Following this, the SBI sent a letter to Daria Kaleniuk demanding that she provide responses and additional clarifications regarding the facts presented in the article. Furthermore, she was warned that disclosing the letter's content was allegedly prohibited, under threat of criminal liability. This letter appeared to constitute an attempt to collect evidence for the purpose of opening a future criminal proceeding, in violation of criminal procedural legislation, as well as an act of pressure on civic activists.

2. Pressure on business, in particular the defence sector.

In July 2026, the owner of the defense company Vyry Industries [reported](#) urgent SBI searches conducted simultaneously at dozens of production sites, the company's office, and the residences of its management and partners, **without a court warrant**. The criminal proceeding concerns allegations of artificially inflated drone pricing. In response, the company presented open market data refuting these accusations. Furthermore, military personnel, experts, and representatives of charitable foundations have repeatedly pointed out that Vyry's drones are among the cheapest on the market.

In its official communication, the SBI [claimed](#), that drone prices were inflated and that the company used an extensive network of private entrepreneurs to artificially inflate expenses and potentially withdraw funds. At the same time, it's important to note that tax evasion matters fall under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Economic Security, not the SBI. Moreover, conducting dozens of searches without issuing a formal notice of suspicion to any individual suggests that these actions were not based on objective evidence and lacked the exceptional urgency required to bypass a court warrant.

The most serious consequence of the SBI's actions against the company is interference in a business that is critical to Ukraine's defense. Investigating corruption during wartime matters, but it shouldn't be used to pressure companies, carry out corrupt orders on behalf of competitors, or otherwise benefit from businesses that are critical to the country.

Thus, the reform of the SBI is not only about the effectiveness of law enforcement activities, but also about the stability of the defense sector, which is crucial for a country at war.

3. Pressure and discreditation of journalists, anti-corruption activists and officials.

Case of Vitaliy Shabunin, Chair of the Board of the Anti-Corruption Action Center.

In 2023 the SBI opened a criminal proceeding against an anti-corruption activist for allegedly evading military service with the assistance of a military unit commander. In August 2025, the SBI issued an additional [suspicion notice](#) against him regarding his use of a vehicle acquired for him as a serviceman. The SBI conducted searches at his place of military service, and seized his personal property, including the phone.

Subsequently, the SBI and the Office of the Prosecutor General leaked intimate photos from the phone of Vitaliy Shabunin, which had been confiscated during the search, to anonymous Telegram channels.

Case of NABU detective, Ruslan Magamedrasulov.

On July 21, large-scale searches were conducted targeting NABU employees without court warrants (at least 70 searches involving no fewer than 15 employees). This was one of the preconditions for the registration and adoption of draft law No. 12414, which revoked NABU's guarantees of independence and made it fully subordinate to the Prosecutor General.

As a result, NABU detective Ruslan Mahamedrasulov and his father were [arrested](#) у сфабрикованій справі без жодних доказів. Провадження вели СБУ, Офіс генерального прокурора та ДБР. Детектива та його батька тримали у жаклих умовах у СІЗО. Такі умови особисто затвердило керівництво Міністерства юстиції (ексміністр юстиції Герман Галущенко наразі є підозрюваним НАБУ у справі про відмивання коштів). Упродовж майже п'яти місяців їм відмовляли у праві на оскарження. У грудні 2025 року суд звільнив їх із СІЗО.

Searches at High Qualification Commission of Judges of Ukraine (HQCJ)

In March 2025, the SBI conducted [searches](#) at the HQCJ, allegedly in connection with HQCJ members' interference in an information system, as [reported](#) by journalists from "Dzerkalo Tyzhnia".

Journalists suggested that the searches may have been an attempt to obstruct further vetting of the 7 judges from the liquidated District Administrative Court of Kyiv (OACK) — which was liquidated in December 2022 due to numerous corruption scandals, systematic issuance of unlawful rulings, and loss of public trust. Authorization for the searches was granted by the Pechersk Court, whose chief judge was himself supposed to undergo vetting alongside the OACK judges.

4. The ties of the SBI with criminal organisation in the energetic sphere ("Mindychgate").

In November 2025, NABU uncovered the largest corruption scheme in the energy sector, led by Timur Mindich, an associate of the President. NABU recordings highlighted the SBI's involvement, including cooperation with the criminal organization.

Suspect Myroniuk [stated](#) that he has close ties with the SBI leadership, from whom he received information about the progress and prospects of pre-trial investigations in certain criminal proceedings, as noted by the SAPO prosecutor in court during the selection of a pretrial restraint measure. Furthermore, according to NABU's recorded materials, the suspects refer to "Lyosha" (Lyosha is a diminutive form of the name Oleksiy; the current SBI Director is Oleksiy Sukhachov) in their conversations and mention close personal communication with him.

5. Officials who do not meet standards of integrity.

Journalists have repeatedly exposed questionable facts regarding the biographies and financial growth of the SBI leadership:

- The aforementioned **143 apartments are owned by the brother of the SBI Director**, an — [investigation](#) into which is currently banned from publication. The property purchases were made at value, significantly below market prices. For a certain period, the SBI investigated a case involving a company allegedly linked to the brother of its Head, but in the end no one was served with notice of suspicion.
- MEZHA [uncovered](#) assets exceeding \$400,000 held by close relatives of **Dmytro Mirkovets, head of the SBI's Main Investigative Directorate**, including an expensive cottage and three apartments. Dmytro Mirkovets is the official overseeing politically motivated cases against Vitaliy Shabunin, Oleksandr Kudrytskyi (former head of Ukrenergo), and others.
- Journalists from Bihus.Info [discovered](#) a **hidden Deputy Director of the SBI**. They note that the name of Pekar, Deputy Director, appears neither on the SBI's official website, nor in the asset declaration registry, nor in any of the Bureau's various reports. According to Bihus.Info's sources, Pekar became Deputy Director of the SBI in 2025. Although appointment to such a position requires an open competition, no information about any such competition taking place exists. As his career advanced, his associates' businesses began expanding and their assets began growing.

At the same time, the SBI Director [expressed](#) concern that staff were experiencing panic due to "lobbyists working to shape a negative narrative about the SBI's ineffectiveness, causing people to stop focusing on their work." In our view, this simply reflects staff members' fear of losing their positions due to failure to meet integrity standards, if a decision is made to conduct a recertification of personnel.

Risk of Preserving the Status Quo for Another 5 Years

Current competitive procedure does not correspond to best practices of transparency and independence.

The dominant role of government-appointed members led to a non-transparent and politically influenced selection [process](#) in 2021, which culminated in the [appointment](#) of Oleksii Sukhachov. Notably, four members of the selection commission were affiliated with Oleg Tatarov, Deputy Head of the Presidential Office, and Oleksiy Sukhachov. Not surprisingly, they voted for Sukhachov's appointment as the Director. His appointment marked the final transformation of the SBI into a politically dependent law enforcement agency increasingly used to persecute opponents.

Moreover, journalists complained about the closed decision-making process and the fact that the commission held its meeting in the Presidential Office building.

2026 is the last viable window because the current appointment procedure would preserve political influence over the SBI until 2031-2032.

- **The five-year mandate of the current Director expires this year.** Under Article 10 of the Law on the SBI, the Director is appointed for a five-year term. President Zelenskyy appointed the current Director, Oleksii Sukhachov, on 31 December 2021, meaning that his term expires on 31 December 2026.
- **A new competitive commission must be established in October 2026.** Under Article 11 of the Law on the SBI, the selection commission must be formed no later than two months before the Director's term expires — till 31 October 2026 at the latest. Legislation introducing a new appointment framework should therefore be adopted well before October 2026. Waiting until December 2026, as currently envisaged by the Government, **would mean that the process of selecting the next Director would already be underway under the existing rules.**

- **Once a new SBI Director is appointed, that person will receive a five-year mandate protected by law.** Тож навіть якщо оновлене законодавство ухвалить пізніше, наступна можливість обрати директора за деполітизованою процедурою може з'явитися лише у 2031–2032 роках. Хоча міжнародні експерти й не мають вирішального голосу за чинною процедурою, вони все ж беруть участь у відборі. Після завершення конкурсу та призначення директора перегляд його результатів викличе серйозні застереження щодо правової визначеності, інституційної незалежності та політичного втручання у результати відбору.

SBI Leadership's Manipulative Rhetoric on Reform and EU Integration Commitments

The SBI Director [stated](#), that international partners do not require reform, but merely a comprehensive review of the SBI's institutional framework, as stipulated in the relevant Government resolution. Moreover, the Director considers that such a reform would lead to the destruction of the SBI.

In reality, what's actually needed is genuine reform of the SBI, following the model of the Economic Security Bureau of Ukraine, including competitive selection of the Director with meaningful involvement from independent experts nominated by international partners. It is not just about a review of institutional framework. This requirement is already [part](#) of the recently opened first "Fundamentals" cluster, which is crucial to fulfill on the path toward EU integration.

Conclusion

With the opening of the first EU accession negotiation cluster, the depoliticization of the SBI can no longer be postponed. To ensure that the next SBI Director is selected under a framework aligned with European standards, the necessary legislation should be adopted no later than the end of the third quarter of 2026, before the process of forming the selection commission begins under the existing rules.