



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on November 9, 2023

Poland Holds Up Ukraine's EU Membership Based on Ukrainian WWII Atrocities

Kyiv has no chance of joining the EU until it addresses the matter of exhuming the bodies of Poles who were murdered during the Second World War by Ukrainian Nazi collaborators in formerly Polish territories that are presently part of western Ukraine, a senior Polish Foreign Ministry official [maintained](#) in an interview with Warsaw's Radio ZET on November 7.

Between 40,000 and 100,000 Poles are estimated to have been massacred in an ethnic cleansing campaign conducted by Ukrainian nationalists in the Volhynia and Galicia regions in 1943 and 1944. The paramilitary wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), also known as the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), staged the massacre and helped the Nazis annihilate Jews in German-occupied territory on various occasions.

"In my opinion, without a solution to this issue — and many Ukrainians are already aware of this — Ukraine cannot dream of joining the European Union," Polish Under Secretary of State Paweł Jabłoński proclaimed.

"Therefore, we will absolutely emphasize that without a solution to this issue, there will be no long-term reconciliation with Ukraine."

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki declared late last month that a mass grave filled with Volyn massacre victims had been found in western Ukraine's Ternopil Region. Warsaw has asked for Ukrainian government approval for the bodies to be exhumed, examined, and given a dignified burial.

The Polish Foreign Ministry has also called for an apology for the mass murders from Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky — a request that Kyiv regards as "unacceptable and unfortunate."

Furthermore, Kyiv's continued tributes to OUN leaders, including Stepan Bandera, who was elevated to the status of a national hero in 2010, have tested Ukraine's bilateral relations with Poland. Several streets and squares throughout Ukraine have been renamed after Bandera since the U.S.-supported overthrow of that country's elected government in 2014. Bandera has also been honored with statues and monuments, including a seven-foot likeness in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv.

Jabłoński added that while he was hesitant to stipulate specific conditions for Warsaw to support Ukraine's EU accession, collaboration with Kyiv would not be easy unless the massacre problem was tackled.



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Poland and Ukraine have continued to clash over their shared history despite Poland's unwavering backing of Ukraine in its conflict with Russia. However, at the moment, Warsaw will still aid Ukraine in its self-defense, keeping the disagreements "separate from the war," according to Polish Ambassador to Kyiv Bartosz Cichocki in September.

Cichocki also told the BBC in September that Ukrainian authorities were "wrong" to erect monuments to war criminals, with Kyiv's persistent veneration of Nazi collaborators such as Stepan Bandera being a source of "real pain" in Poland.

"You say that war is no time to deal with the dead," Cichocki said. "But I can answer you: war is also not the time to erect monuments to criminals and name streets after them."

By "the dead," Cichocki was alluding to the aforementioned murders of between 40,000 and 100,000 Poles in Volhynia and Galicia.

"It is wrong in our Christian culture when loved ones cannot pray at the graves of their brutally murdered ancestors, when they cannot find them and bury them, and at the same time when monuments are erected to their murderers," Cichocki declared.

Should the Kyiv regime grant permission for Poland to exhume the mass grave near Ternopil, Cichocki said, such a move would help in "building trust between us."

The ambassador also rebuffed speculations that Poland was "fanning" the dispute between Warsaw and Kyiv.

"I very often hear when a monument to Stepan Bandera is opened somewhere and the Poles are indignant about it, they say, the Poles are fanning this topic," he said. "And why does no one ask those who open this monument why they do it?"

Polish Foreign Ministry spokesman Łukasz Jasina broached the thorny matter of the Volyn massacre earlier this summer, calling on Zelensky to "take more responsibility" and apologize for the murders.

Jasina's requests irked Ukrainian officials, with Kyiv's ambassador to Warsaw, Vasyl Zvarych, responding that "any attempt to impose on the Ukrainian president or Ukraine [and tell us] what we must [do] about our common past is unacceptable and unfortunate."

In 1941, the Nazis began an ambitious campaign to conquer Russia (already the Soviet Union by then), with the Germans occupying Volhynia within literally one or two weeks.

Notably, Volhynia was also one of the key centers of activity for the OUN. While it attempted to play an independent role, the OUN operated under the patronage of the Nazis at first, with the group itself separated into factions.

Reflecting its aversion to Volhynia's non-Ukrainian populations, the OUN's policy paper "Instructions for the First Days of the Organization of State Life" explicitly stated: "National minorities are divided into those friendly and hostile to us," with the latter including "Muscovites, Poles and Jews."

Based on this document, "hostile" national minorities were subject to "destruction in the struggle," and the paper noted that "our government should be terrible to its opponents. Terror for alien-enemies and their traitors."

The subsequent text in the report described in vivid detail an ethnic cleansing program, compiled before the start of the Soviet-German war in May of 1941.



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With the outbreak of the 1941 war, the nationalists followed the Wehrmacht, the unified armed forces of Nazi Germany from 1935 to 1945, to eradicate “Moscow, Poland, Magyars and Jews,” and demanded that the population obey the OUN and its leader Bandera.

The incident that ignited what would later be termed the Volyn massacre was a raid on the village of Paroslya on February 9, 1943. During this bloody carnage, militants hacked Poles to pieces with axes. Other villages were not spared from such brutalities, either. Polish women were raped, and many Poles were cruelly tortured before being killed, with murders primarily staged with farming equipment or other improvised means. Among the survivors in one village was a baby whose grandfather had been stabbed with a bayonet. This baby would eventually become Poland’s first cosmonaut, Miroslaw Hermaszewski.

“The entire Polish population, including infants, was destroyed (cut and chopped up). I personally shot 5 Poles there who were fleeing into the forest,” a captured militant later admitted to Soviet investigators during a probe about his involvement in an attack on another village.

For present-day Ukraine, the Volyn massacre remains the elephant in the room with regards to bilateral ties with Poland. Ukrainian nationalists of the Second World War are revered as national heroes, but the reality is that these nationalists have the blood of countless victims on their hands, including Poles. What is ironic is that contemporary Poland is regarded as an ally of Ukraine. Ukraine’s entire public agenda is heavily dominated by politicians who hail the OUN, so these murderers of the past century will probably remain scot-free for the time being.



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