

# Kiev's Plan to Ban the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Shows How Insecure It Is About National Identity

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Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

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*Kiev hates that a significant share of the population refuses to conform with the “negative nationalism” that they’ve aggressively enforced upon them since 2014 by continuing to worship at the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches’ sites instead of the government-backed Orthodox Church of Ukraine’s.*

The Rada [passed a law](#) earlier this week for banning the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) by the middle of next year if it doesn’t sever all ties with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).

Kiev has accused the UOC of being under the ROC’s sway even though the UOC declared full autonomy from the ROC in early 2022. The authorities envisage replacing the UOC with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) that was controversially recognized as autocephalous by the Ecumenical Patriarchy in 2019.

Readers can learn more about this complicated subject in RT’s detailed article from last August about [“The Last Crusade: How the conflict between Russia and the West has fueled a major split in the Orthodox Christian Church”](#). All that’s sufficient for average folks to know though is that the OCU is part of post-2014 Ukraine’s Western-backed efforts to craft an anti-Russian national identity, which includes restricting Russian-language rights and arbitrarily persecuting those who still speak it in public.

Putin’s magnum opus from summer 2021 [“On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”](#) is worth reading for those who’d like to understand how Ukraine’s separate, though originally not radically anti-Russian, identity came to be. In brief, it was largely the result of the erstwhile Kievan Rus’ collapse, after which its heartland that’s nowadays known as Ukraine fell under Lithuanian and then Polish influence. This was then followed by some Austrian, Imperial German, Nazi, and now American influences too.

Throughout the centuries, linguistic differences developed between the indigenous inhabitants from this part of that former civilization-state and its northeastern reaches from where the future Russian Empire emerged, and these paired with different historical experiences to form a separate Ukrainian identity. Instead of celebrating its closeness with Russia’s due to their shared roots, ultra-nationalists became hellbent on exaggerating and even manufacturing differences in order to form a [“negative nationalism”](#).

What’s meant by this is that Ukrainian identity, both on its own due to some local demagogues but also especially as a result of the aforementioned foreign influences, came to be defined by how different it supposedly is from Russia’s. That trend turned Ukraine and

those of its people who adhered to this particular form of identity into foreign powers' geopolitical proxies against Russia, with the associated process unprecedentedly accelerating with American support in the aftermath of "EuroMaidan".

To be clear, Putin isn't against a separate Ukrainian identity per se as proven by what he wrote in his magnum opus about this:

"Things change: countries and communities are no exception. Of course, some part of a people in the process of its development, influenced by a number of reasons and historical circumstances, can become aware of itself as a separate nation at a certain moment. How should we treat that? There is only one answer: with respect!"

He immediately added though that this newly formed identity mustn't be weaponized against Russia, though that's regrettably what happened with Ukraine's. The latest example of this is the law that was described at the beginning of this analysis about banning the UOC by the middle of next year on the false pretext that it's operating as the ROC's proxy inside the country. The real reason, which the reader can now better understand after the preceding paragraphs' worth of background, is Ukraine's insecurity.

Its leaders hate that a significant share of the population refuses to conform with the "negative nationalism" that they've aggressively enforced upon them since 2014 with American support by continuing to worship at the UOC's churches instead of the OCU's. They accordingly suspect that their ideological mission hasn't been anywhere near as successful as they've publicly presented it as being and fear that everything that they did over the past decade could be reversed if they lost power.

Basically, a large portion of Ukrainians don't believe in obsessing over their identity differences with Russia, which doesn't necessarily mean that they're "pro-Russian" in a political sense but they're also not ethnic Russophobes like the Azov Battalion is either. They might disapprove of the special operation while also disliking their post-2014 regime. These so-called "moderates" don't want to fight for Ukraine against Russia, but they also don't want to engage in sabotage against their government either.

Some might secretly hope that Russia overthrows Zelensky, but they've also reconciled themselves with living under him and his successors if that doesn't happen. Their government considers them a threat precisely because they don't hate Russia, which the authorities suspect is due to the UOC allegedly being under the ROC's influence and therefore indoctrinating them with "Kremlin propaganda". The reality though is that these people independently arrived at their views.

Nevertheless, Kiev is hellbent on destroying the UOC in order to then force those of its citizens who worship at its churches to do so at the OCU's, from where they'd then be exposed to anti-Russian propaganda in the expectation that they'd eventually come to hate Russia. If this plan doesn't succeed, then Kiev will remain paranoid that these "moderates" might one day be radicalized by their regime's forcible conscription policy, deteriorating economic conditions, and "Kremlin propaganda" into rebelling.

What Zelensky and his clique can never accept is that these "moderates" embrace the original Ukrainian identity, which considers itself separate from Russia but still friendly with it, while their regime espouses the weaponized version that was artificially manufactured under demagogic and foreign influences. The very fact that the UOC remains the country's

largest in spite of everything that Kiev has done over the past decade proves how genuinely popular the “moderate” version is compared to the radical one.

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*This article was originally published on the author’s Substack, [Andrew Korybko’s Newsletter](#).*

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