

Polish-Ukraine Relations Risk to Plunge in Crisis Over Polish Genocide Committed by “Ukraine Insurgent Army” during World War II

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Radosław Sikorski, the Polish foreign minister has suggested [placing Crimea under a UN mandate](#). Large parts of the Ukrainian establishment itself have at times been reconsidering the whole idea of “[reconquering Crimea](#)”, but this development nonetheless prompted Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry to state that such proposals were “unacceptable.”

This is not the only ongoing source of tension for these two Eastern European countries. Sikorski has also called on Ukraine to allow the exhumation of victims of the so-called Volhynia massacres (during WWII, Ukrainian nationalists killed about 100,000 ethnic Poles). According to him, Kyiv should do it “[out of gratitude for what Poland is doing for Ukraine today](#).”

He insisted on these victims having a “Christian burial”. This remains a hot topic in Poland. The problem is that their [neo-nazi] tormentors are now officially honored as national heroes in Ukraine.

Since 2022, Ukrainian-Polish relations at times have resembled a roller-coaster of ups and downs. The two nations have taken some steps towards a [confederation](#) with developments such as the [Polish Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine](#).

Their bilateral [military agreement](#) announced in early July has been described as [unprecedented](#), and it also includes intelligence-training, as well as forming and training a new Ukrainian Legion on Polish territory.

Besides being a logistic hub for its neighbor (making it easier for Western weapons to arrive), Warsaw has thus far provided Kyiv with no less than 44 military aid packages worth about €4 billion – and there is more to come. No wonder it is considered one of Ukraine’s closest allies. And yet not everything is rose-colored.

Back in September 2023 I wrote about how Polish-Ukraine relations seemed to be deteriorating to the point of Warsaw having at the time [stopped sending weaponry](#). Polish President Andrzej Duda then described his Ukrainian ally as “a drowning person clinging to anything available”, adding, quite dramatically, that “a drowning person is extremely dangerous, capable of pulling you down to the depths ... simply drowning the rescuer.” The context of it was a Polish-Ukrainian trade battle over agricultural bans. In Poland, support for Ukrainian refugees has also been consistently falling – the issue also fuels xenophobic feelings. Despite Warsaw and Kyiv’s great plans for “coming together”, there is a domestic political climate in both countries that does not help.

Time and time again the issue of WWII and Ukraine comes to the forefront of a public discussion in Poland. This intensified during the years of the Polish nationalist party Law and Justice (PiS), which was in power from 2015 to 2023.

Kyiv and Warsaw politicize the history of the 20th century quite differently. I've written about the issue [elsewhere](#). In short, post-Maidan Ukraine officially celebrates organizations and figures such as the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and Stepan Bandera as national heroes in the struggle against communism.



The only problem is that they were Nazi collaborators who also committed war crimes against Poles [e.g. Lviv Galizien region] - there are often considered genocide even by prominent Ukrainian historians such as Yaroslav Hrytsak, for instance.



The importance of the politics of memory should never be underestimated.

In a different but somewhat similar context, the issue of history was indeed one of the factors behind the tensions that culminated in the [Donbass War](#) in 2014. A large part of the trouble with Maidan was all about that. During my research in Southern Russia and the Russo-Ukrainian border conflict zone (in 2019) that was the topic I came across with - over and over again. One of my interlocutors, for instance, would go on to say: "Maidan brought this new ideology to Ukraine.

And our people were against this ideology, completely - we do not accept it. That is why a major referendum was held - both the Lugansk and Donetsk oblast took part and [over 90%](#) of the population said no to the new ideology because we respect our fathers and forefathers who fought in the Great Patriotic War against Nazism and we honor our ancestors - and would never betray them." Similar utterances were common.

The hard fact is that post-Maidan Ukraine is increasingly becoming a kind of ethnocratic state, that is, a "far-right regime" as the West's intelligentsia would normally describe it - and has often [done so](#) at least until 2022. And, yes, [neo-Nazi elements](#) play a role in it as well. This is an undeniable fact although one can try to minimize or [whitewash](#) it for the sake of political propaganda or for sentimental reasons.

Nicolai N. Petro, a professor of political science at the University of Rhode Island, [writing for Foreign Policy](#), describes today's Ukraine as having a "[civil rights problem](#)", and as a country with policies that "effectively relegate Russian speakers to permanent second-class status", to the point that many Ukrainians "across the political spectrum", including "former officials" and "intellectuals" worry that such policies, after peace is achieved, will "alienate, criminalize, or deport a significant portion of the country's population."

Meanwhile, neighboring Poland in turn is also experiencing its own kind of [nationalist revival](#). This is thus fertile soil for historical grievances and Polish-Ukrainian interethnic friction to take hold - and eventually it could get ugly.

To sum it up, Poland in all likelihood will remain Ukraine's strategic partner for quite a long time - but there is always a factor of unpredictability looming in the horizon (pertaining to nationalistic ideology and the politics of memory) to the point that such a relationship

should never be taken for granted.

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