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Ukraine: Celebrations of Victory Day under red flags

For the first time during the 9 May celebrations of the anniversary of the end of World War II in Ukraine, the use of red flags (the so-called 'standards of victory' – copies of the flag raised over the Reichstag building) was ordered by law. During the parades in Kyiv, the red flag was carried before the Ukrainian state flag. In Lviv, whose authorities had previously banned the hanging of red flags, there were serious public disturbances, as a result of which the provincial governor (*voyevoda*) resigned.

In Kyiv the celebrations passed off without trouble. In accordance with the law red flags were hung, although leading politicians appeared with ribbons modelled on the Russian Order of St George, but in the Ukrainian national colours. In Lviv, despite the legal prohibition of gatherings on that day, there were serious public disturbances. The militia blocked access to monuments and cemeteries for soldiers of the Soviet Army, but did not combat other violations of public order, including clashes between members of the Ukrainian nationalist Svoboda party and the Russian nationalist party Russkoye Yedinstvo. During one such incident, one member of Svoboda was shot with a rubber bullet. Representatives of the Communists were also injured. As a consequence of these events, and under pressure from city councillors from Svoboda, the head of Lviv's regional state organisation (*voyevoda*), Mykhailo Tsymbaluk, resigned the next morning.

The order to display the so-called 'standard of victory' is Kyiv's gesture towards both pro-Russian elements in Ukraine, and towards Moscow itself, for which the 'Great Patriotic War' is the subject of worship. The glorification of the 'red flag' was seen by some of Ukraine's ruling class as a sign that the policy of Ukrainian identity is being disregarded. Certainly the events in Lviv will fuel the conflict between radical Ukrainian nationalists and the increasingly powerful nationalist Russian organisations in Ukraine. <Tao>