

Ukraine's Parliament adopts the Law on the National Pantheon

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On 1 July, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the Law on the National Pantheon, which had been submitted by the President of Ukraine two days earlier. Parliament fast-tracked the bill, which passed with 287 votes in favour, with no votes against and no abstentions. The vote was accompanied by an emotional debate, reflecting patriotic sentiment and broad cross-party consensus.

The National Pantheon will be established in Kyiv as a national site of remembrance for the Ukrainian nation and a way of honouring its most distinguished figures. Those commemorated will include the rulers of Kyivan Rus, Cossack hetmans, presidents of Ukraine, leaders of various forms of Ukrainian statehood (such as the Ukrainian People's Republic and Carpathian Ukraine), scientists, athletes and artists. It will also honour individuals who served as Commanders-in-Chief or held equivalent positions in the Ukrainian armed forces, including the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA).

No list of individuals to be commemorated has yet been published. It will be compiled by a special commission comprising representatives of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UINM), historians and representatives of civil society. In a Facebook post, UINM Director Oleksandr Alfiorov mentioned Hetmans Ivan Mazepa and Pylyp Orlyk, as well as Princess Olga of Kyiv, who lived in the 10th century, as examples of individuals who could be commemorated.

Commemoration may take various forms, including honorary reburials and the establishment of symbolic tombs, gravestones and memorial plaques. Visits to the National Pantheon will be incorporated into Ukraine's official state protocol and ceremonial practice. The country's highest state honours will also be presented there.

The debate surrounding the law reflected the effectiveness of the sovereignty- and dignity-focused rhetoric adopted by the Ukrainian authorities in recent weeks. Although it is not yet known who will be honoured in the National Pantheon, it appears almost certain that the leaders of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) will be among those commemorated.

Commentary

- **The dispute with Poland has reinforced the Ukrainian government's belief that an assertive historical policy and sovereignty-focused rhetoric can deliver domestic political benefits.** The law was passed unanimously and was supported by all parliamentary factions. During the debate, MPs stressed that no one had the right to tell

Ukrainians who had fought for their freedom or whom they should honour. The proceedings in the Verkhovna Rada were also marked by cross-party calls for unity and expressions of gratitude towards Volodymyr Zelensky, reflecting broader public sentiment. Kyiv is therefore likely to continue emphasising historical issues, even at the cost of straining relations with its neighbours.

- **The shift towards a more nationalist narrative may also stem from the belief among Ukraine's leaders that recent military successes have brought a swift end to the war within reach.** If so, it could also form part of preparations for elections which, in the government's view, could take place as early as this autumn.
- **Disputes over historical memory are also likely to be used to divert public attention from Ukraine's domestic problems.** Against the backdrop of corruption at the highest levels of government, the slow pace of reforms and disappointment with progress towards EU integration, which is often seen in Kyiv as a political rather than a criteria-based process, it is politically convenient to portray Poland as a country whose own 'colonial' politics of remembrance is blocking Ukraine's path to EU membership.
- **Ukraine is likely to seek to honour in the National Pantheon UPA commanders directly responsible for crimes against Poles.** At the same time, the Ukrainian authorities are likely to present this as a response to grassroots public demand. The law's ambiguous wording on positions 'equivalent' to that of Commander-in-Chief suggests that Dmytro Klyachivsky, known by the nom de guerre Klym Savur and accused of directing the Volhynia massacres, may be among those commemorated. Any resulting escalation of the dispute with Poland could then be used to further consolidate support for the president among both the public and the political elite.