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Ukraine: 100 million Russian books waiting to be banned

It is not new for governments to crack down on freedom of expression in times of war. But this attack is only the latest of many perpetrated against the Russian language in Ukraine since before this war.



Oleksandra Koval, director of the Ukrainian Book Institute (under the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine), said they will start working to remove more than 100 million of the so-called "propaganda" books from Ukraine's public libraries. These books, which include the works of world-renowned writers and poets such as Dostoevsky and Pushkin, could end up in paper recycling centers according to Culture Minister Oleksandr Tkachenko.



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In [an interview with the Interfax Ukraine agency](#), Koval expressed her desire to first confiscate books that she called "ideologically harmful literature," published when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union, as well as Russian literature of "anti-Ukrainian content." It is also intended to include all volumes published in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union: "without neglecting genres, such as the romantic novel, narratives about detectives and even children's books," Koval explained.

Eliminating that "harmful" literature would leave Ukraine's public and school libraries with some 100 million books, or half of their current total volume, according to Koval's estimate. But not all copies of Russian books should be disposed of, Koval explained: some should be kept in university and scientific libraries, where Soviet-era fairy tales and children's romance novels will be preserved "for specialists to study the roots of evil and totalitarianism."

The elimination of Russian books must be seen in the broader context of the "decommunization" of Ukraine. Since 2015, all communist parties and symbols have been [banned](#), the war has served to further increase political repression: the Zelensky regime has [banned](#) eleven other parties and put all television networks under government control.

This is not the first time in recent years that the Ukrainian government has banned Russian books. In 2015, 38 books published in Russia were banned. Since then, more books have been added to the list, including two books by popular author of contemporary Russian

crime novels, Boris Akunin, and a memoir by beloved Soviet actor and musician Vladimir Visotski.

In 2018, [the Russian edition of British historian Antony Beevor's 'Stalingrad'](#) was banned, although the ban was later lifted due to pressure from the British embassy. The reason for the ban? A passage describing the murder of 90 Jewish children by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, of which Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera was a leading figure.



Antony Beevor. Photograph: David Levenson/Getty Images

This is the same Flag that in 2021 was honored by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory by its inclusion in a 'Virtual Necropolis' commemorating important historical figures, along with [two SS battalion commanders](#) (iKonstantin Avdiyovich, deputy commander of the 118th Battalion of the Schutzmannschaft and Ivan Omelianovich-Pavlenko, commander of the 109th Schutzmannschaft) who carried out pogroms against the Jews. The monuments to Stepan Bandera are not limited to the virtual realm. In recent years statues have been built in honor of the pogromist, while statues of Lenin and Pushkin have been torn down. And in Chernihiv, a monument to the Soviet partisan and anti-fascist martyr Zoya Kosmodemianskaia was demolished.



On May 21, an image was shared on social media purportedly showing the burning of Ukrainian history books, organized by Russian forces. This image was widely disseminated by the British ambassador to Ukraine, as well as by Sweden's former prime minister, Carl Bildt (who, among other shady businessmen, has been implicated in war crimes in Sudan as a member of the Lundin Group's board of directors).

Later, *France24's* fact-checking website, 'the Observers', showed that the image was taken during a protest in Crimea in 2010. Regarding whether Russian forces have generally engaged in the destruction of books, the *France24* article said: "The Ukrainian authorities have claimed that Russian soldiers have destroyed books in the occupied areas... However, our editorial team has not found any photos showing this destruction."

It is not new for governments to crack down on freedom of expression in times of war. But this attack is only the latest of many perpetrated against the Russian language in Ukraine since before this war. A third of Ukrainians consider Russian as their mother tongue. However, in 2017 a law was introduced stating that Ukrainian should be the language used at all levels of education, while Russian and other minority languages are only recognized for instruction at the preschool and primary education levels. Before his election in 2019, Zelensky had promised to scrap this law, but soon reneged on his promises. This is just a continuation of the chauvinist policies of Ukrainian governments since the 2014 Maidan coup, which have repeatedly repressed the democratic rights of Russian speakers, while glorifying historical Nazis and Nazi collaborators, and allowing fascist gangs to roam freely across the country for years.

This is the same government that supposedly fights for "democracy," a struggle for which it receives billions of euros of support from Western governments. All Marxists must side with the international working class in opposition to these attacks by the Ukrainian government; in opposition to the crocodile-tearing imperialists in NATO; and in opposition to Putin's invasion. War will always bring horror, and capitalism will always bring war. The only way forward is for the workers of all countries to take power into their own hands, through a world socialist revolution!

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