

Ukraine Revokes Hero Award

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KIEV — A Ukrainian court has officially scrapped the hero status newly conferred on wartime nationalist leader Stepan Bandera, President Viktor Yanukovich's office said Wednesday — a move likely to fuel tension between the pro-Russian east and the nationalist west.

Former President Viktor Yushchenko sparked the ire of east Ukrainians a year ago, shortly before leaving office, by posthumously declaring World War II nationalist Bandera a Hero of Ukraine.

Bandera was the ideological leader of nationalist fighters who fought for independence in western Ukraine in the turbulence leading up to the outbreak of war and beyond.

Bandera, who was assassinated by the KGB in 1959, has near-saint status among many people there, and thousands of Bandera loyalists flock to Kiev every year and march through the streets in his honor.

But this sentiment is not shared by those in the Russian-speaking east of Ukraine who hold views of Soviet history that are closer to those of Moscow.

Yushchenko's award sparked anger in Russia, where Bandera is regarded as a fascist, and from Poland, where he is blamed for organizing the mass killings of Poles. The Simon Wiesenthal Center also expressed outrage, saying Bandera was responsible for the deaths of thousands of Jews.

In a statement on Wednesday, the office of Yanukovych, who took over from Yushchenko in February, said the honor conferred on Bandera "has been found invalid by a court ruling."

Yanukovych's office did not specify which court made the decision or when, but said it upheld a decision last year by a regional court to annul the decree.

(Reuters, AP)

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