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Ukrainians Told to Ignore Leaflets that Call for Death to Moscow's Priests

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Activists and supporters of the All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda (Freedom) Party take part in a procession to mark the Day of Ukrainian Cossacks to honour the role of the movement in Ukraine's history, in Kiev, October 14, 2014.

Ukraine's Security Service has urged citizens to ignore "fake" nationalist leaflets that call for violence against priests of the Moscow-based Orthodox Church, one of the main churches in Ukraine.

The leaflets, copies of which have been circulated on pro-Russian websites, aim to "stoke inter-confessional hatred, destabilize and provoke tensions in the society," the security service said Monday in an online statement.

A copy of a leaflet accompanying the statement called for "death to Moscow's preachers."

"Every kopek given to the Church of the Moscow Patriarchate is a bullet for a Ukrainian

soldier," the leaflet said.

The security service called the fliers "primitive fakes" and a "provocation," aimed at inciting violence "between those who will buy this lie, and those who will come to the defense of the 'victims.'"

Earlier this year, batches of fliers appeared in the eastern separatist region of Donetsk, ordering Jews to "register" at a government office or face deportation, but Jewish community leaders dismissed the fliers as a provocation.

The leaflets, which were handed out in front of the city's main synagogue by men wearing balaclavas, were signed by separatist leader Denis Pushilin, although he later disassociated himself with the flyers in an interview with the Jewish Kiev news site.

Following the latest "provocation," Ukraine's security service listed a hotline telephone number for people who could provide information about the latest "provocation" or similar incidents, and pledged to promptly investigate all reports.

Clerics from two of Ukraine's main Orthodox churches — one loyal to the patriarchate based in Moscow, and the other to the patriarchate in Kiev — have been engaged in a series of spats following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the conflict between pro-Russian separatists and government forces in eastern Ukraine. The third main Orthodox church in the country is the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church.

But in a rare show of reluctance to endorse the Kremlin's views, the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia has refrained from speaking out in favor of Ukraine's separatists, whom state-run media have backed.

The church has also avoided openly criticizing the separatists, mostly limiting its statements to denouncements of the conflict as a "fratricidal war."

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