Ukraine Marks Victory Day with Europe Instead of With Russia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Ukrainian cadets look on as they take part in a patriotic forum "Two Generations - Two Wars" at the Museum of Great Patriotic War in Kiev, Ukraine May 5, 2015.

For the first time in 70 years, Ukraine on Friday joined most of of Europe in marking the end of the World War II a day ahead of Russia, which it accused of exploiting the anniversary to display its military might.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko had wanted to make May 8 a day of reconciliation to try not only to unite Ukrainians with different views of the war but also set them apart from Russia, which Kiev accuses of stoking a year-old pro-Russian rebellion in its eastern regions.

The issue is fraught in Ukraine, where a minority of men joined a militia that was prepared to ally itself with the Nazi invaders to fight Soviet Communist rule, leaving Ukrainian

nationalism forever vulnerable to accusations of fascist sympathies.

Poroshenko has ditched the title of "Great Patriotic War," used in Russia, for "World War II," the name used in most of Europe, as part of a reinforcement of Ukrainian national identity by the pro-Western government following the ousting of the Moscow-backed Viktor Yanukovich last year.

"On May 8, for the first time, the people of Ukraine will join the European tradition to commemorate the victims of World War II," Poroshenko said in a speech on Thursday.

"The very next day in Moscow, under the pretext of the Great Victory, the aggressor's army will brandish its lethal might in front of the world. Some of the units were in Donetsk a few days ago and soon they will appear on the military parade in Moscow."

Russia denies allegations, for which Ukraine and the Western NATO alliance say they have evidence, that it has sent troops and weapons to back the separatist uprising, in which over 6,100 have been killed.

Most of the 3.5 million Ukrainian soldiers killed in World War Two died fighting for the Soviet Red Army, but Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk said Soviet forces shared responsibility with the Germans for the deaths of a further 4 million civilians across Ukraine.

"Black ploughs of death crossed our lands from the west to the east and from the east to the west," he said in a speech on Friday.

Yet some Ukrainians fear that associating the struggle in World War II with today's struggle against Russia will deepen the splits in a divided population.

It could also hand propaganda gifts to Moscow, which equates Kiev with treachery and fascism, making much of the fact that last year's ousting of Yanukovich was backed by the far-right group Right Sector.

Violence has declined significantly in eastern Ukraine since the signing of a ceasefire agreement in February, but deaths are still reported almost daily. On Friday, the military said two Ukrainian servicemen had been killed and 26 wounded in the previous 24 hours.

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