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Kiev Council Votes to Rid City of Soviet-Era Images of Lenin, Hammer and Sickle

By Jennifer Monaghan

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A statue of Soviet state founder Vladimir Lenin is seen at a street in Chernobyl, northern Ukraine.

The Kiev municipal administration has voted in favor of removing by August 24 all Soviet-era Communist emblems from all buildings belonging to the city council amid the authorities' ongoing backlash against Russia.

Council member Oleksandr Vovchenko wrote on Facebook last week that his draft bill on the measure had been approved by 86 of 120 representatives. The council confirmed the decision in a statement on its website.

Specifically, members voted to remove the hammer and sickle symbol — the emblem of the Soviet Union — and images of Bolshevik revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, both of which are common sights across the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine. An inventory of such symbols on council-owned properties will be compiled by the municipal authorities before

June 28, the council statement read.

The symbols are to be removed by August 24 — which Ukraine celebrates as Independence Day, marking the anniversary of its declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 — and replaced by "state symbols of Ukraine" by March 2016, the statement added.

Vovchenko explained his motivation for authoring the bill by saying: "On the most important buildings in Kiev — the Kiev City Council and the Kiev City State Administration — we still have the emblem of a defunct state that took the lives of tens of millions of Ukrainians."

He added in his Facebook post that artwork by Soviet artists, including mosaics and bronze reliefs, will not be affected by the decision.

Relations between Kiev and Moscow have soured since a popular uprising drove out Ukraine's pro-Russian then-president Viktor Yanukovych last February. A month later, Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine, and since then pro-Russian separatists whom Kiev accuses Moscow of backing have been fighting government troops in eastern Ukraine.

Amid the unrest, in which more than 6,000 people have died, according to the latest UN figures, dozens of Lenin monuments across Ukraine have been toppled, defaced or relocated.

Last month, the Ukrainian parliament passed a law banning the promotion of Communist and Nazi symbols, including the hammer and sickle.

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