

Vatican Confirms Apology to Moscow Over Pope's Comments

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Pope Francis. **RICCARDO ANTIMIANI / EPA / TASS**

The Vatican confirmed on Thursday that it had apologized to Russia after Pope Francis made comments in which he singled out the allegedly cruel role of Russian ethnic minorities in the Ukraine conflict.

Vatican spokesperson Matteo Bruni was asked about Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova saying earlier on Thursday that the Vatican had apologized for the pope's comments.

"I can now confirm there were diplomatic contacts to that effect," he said.

Pope Francis said in an interview in November that some of the "cruellest" actors among Russia's ranks in Ukraine were "not of the Russian tradition," but rather ethnic minorities such as "the Chechens, the Buryats, and so on."

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The comments drew indignation from Russia, with Zakharova describing them as a "perversion" and "beyond Russophobia."

Moscow has been accused of drawing disproportionately from its own ethnic minorities when drafting reservists to fight in the war in Ukraine.

Kremlin critics contend that non-Russian minorities from impoverished and isolated regions of the country are dying in far greater numbers in Ukraine than ethnic Russians.

Non-Russian ethnic minorities have also been accused — often without any evidence — of playing outsized roles in places such as the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, where UN investigators are investigating allegations that Russian soldiers massacred civilians.

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