

Ukrainian POWs Transferred to Hungary – Russian Orthodox Church

By [AFP](#)

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Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. **Yaroslav Chingaev / Moskva News Agency**

A group of Ukrainian "prisoners of war" has been handed over to Hungary, according to the Russian Orthodox Church, with Kyiv saying Friday they had not been informed of the move.

The transfer took place on Thursday "with the blessing" of Russian Orthodox leader Patriarch Kirill "within the framework of cooperation between churches and at the request of the Hungarian side," the Church said in a statement.

Those handed over are "prisoners of war" of Transcarpathian origin — from a region in western Ukraine bordering Hungary, where around 100,000 ethnic Hungarians live — the statement said, adding the transfer was born out of "Christian humanity."

Ukraine Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko said they had learned from public statements by the Hungarian side that Russia has handed over 11 Ukrainians of Hungarian

origin to Budapest.

While the release of Ukrainian prisoners of war "is always good news," Kyiv has not been informed about the negotiations between the Hungarian and Russian sides, Nikolenko said.

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He said the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry had invited the Hungarian charge d'affaires "for a substantive conversation" to get more information about its citizens and be able to meet them.

"During the meeting, they emphasized the need to coordinate cooperation on such sensitive issues as the release of prisoners of war," Nikolenko said on Facebook.

Hungarian Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjen described the transfer as "a gesture of the Russian Orthodox Church towards Hungary."

"These people owe their freedom to it," Hungarian Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjen told local news site atv.hu.

Semjen, who is in charge of church affairs, declined to give further details "in the interest" of those concerned.

Last year the EU stopped short of blacklisting Patriarch Kirill, a staunch supporter of President Vladimir Putin, after Hungary objected to sanctions on "religious freedom" grounds.

Kirill has lavished praise on Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban — who has showered the Russian Orthodox church's branch in Hungary with state funds — calling him a "leader with firm convictions."

Hungary has sought to maintain close ties with the Kremlin despite its invasion of Ukraine.

Due to a long-running feud with Kyiv over minority rights in the Transcarpathian region of western Ukraine Budapest has also vowed to hold up Kyiv's efforts toward EU and NATO integration.

Semjen said the Budapest-based Catholic aid organization the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service helped in the transfer.

The group said in a statement sent to AFP that it "was asked to participate in saving people's lives," declining to comment further "in order to protect the people entrusted to us."

The Hungarian government did not reply to a request for comment by AFP.

Last September, Pope Francis claimed, in an interview in a Jesuit journal, to have mediated with Russia to speed up the release of some 300 Ukrainian prisoners.

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