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Zelensky Signs Decree on Russian Territories 'Historically Inhabited' by Ukrainians

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. **president.gov.ua**

Updated with Russian officials' remarks.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Monday signed a decree calling for the preservation of Ukrainian national identity in Russia.

The decree, announced to coincide with Ukraine's Day of Unity on Jan. 22, states that "Russia has systematically destroyed national identity and oppressed Ukrainians in the lands historically inhabited by them," namely the "modern Krasnodar, Belgorod, Bryansk, Voronezh, Kursk and Rostov regions" of Russia.

It calls for Ukraine's cabinet of ministers to work in coordination with international experts to develop an action plan for preserving Ukrainian identity on Russian territory.

"This is the restoration of truth about the historical past for the sake of Ukraine's future,"

Zelensky said in a video where he announced the decree.

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"We must take steps not only to strengthen the unity of Ukraine and our people, but also to act for the unity of rights and freedoms, the truth about Ukrainians, the truth about us, and the truth about our history," he added.

As part of the decree, Ukrainian authorities also plan to create a center that will collect information on crimes committed against ethnic Ukrainians living in Russia, as well as evidence of Moscow's "policy of forced Russification, political repression and deportations."

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev slammed Kyiv's announcement as "primitive propaganda sparked by failures on the front line."

"There is nothing to comment on, because Ukrainians are Russians, and Malorossiya ['Little Russia'] is a part of Russia," Medvedev said, using an anachronistic term to describe modern-day Ukraine.

Roman Starovoit, governor of Russia's Kursk region on the border with Ukraine, linked Zelensky's decree to Western "forces that want to destroy Russia and take away its historical lands."

"Zelensky's actions today prove once again that our president is right to launch a special military operation," Starovoit wrote, referring to Russia's nearly two-year invasion of Ukraine.

President Vladimir Putin has claimed that much of Ukraine is historically Russian land and that Russians living there today are oppressed — claims he used to justify the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Besides the decree, Zelensky also announced Monday that he had submitted a bill to Ukraine's parliament that would allow dual citizenship for ethnic Ukrainians and their descendants abroad.

The bill would not apply to Russian citizens.

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