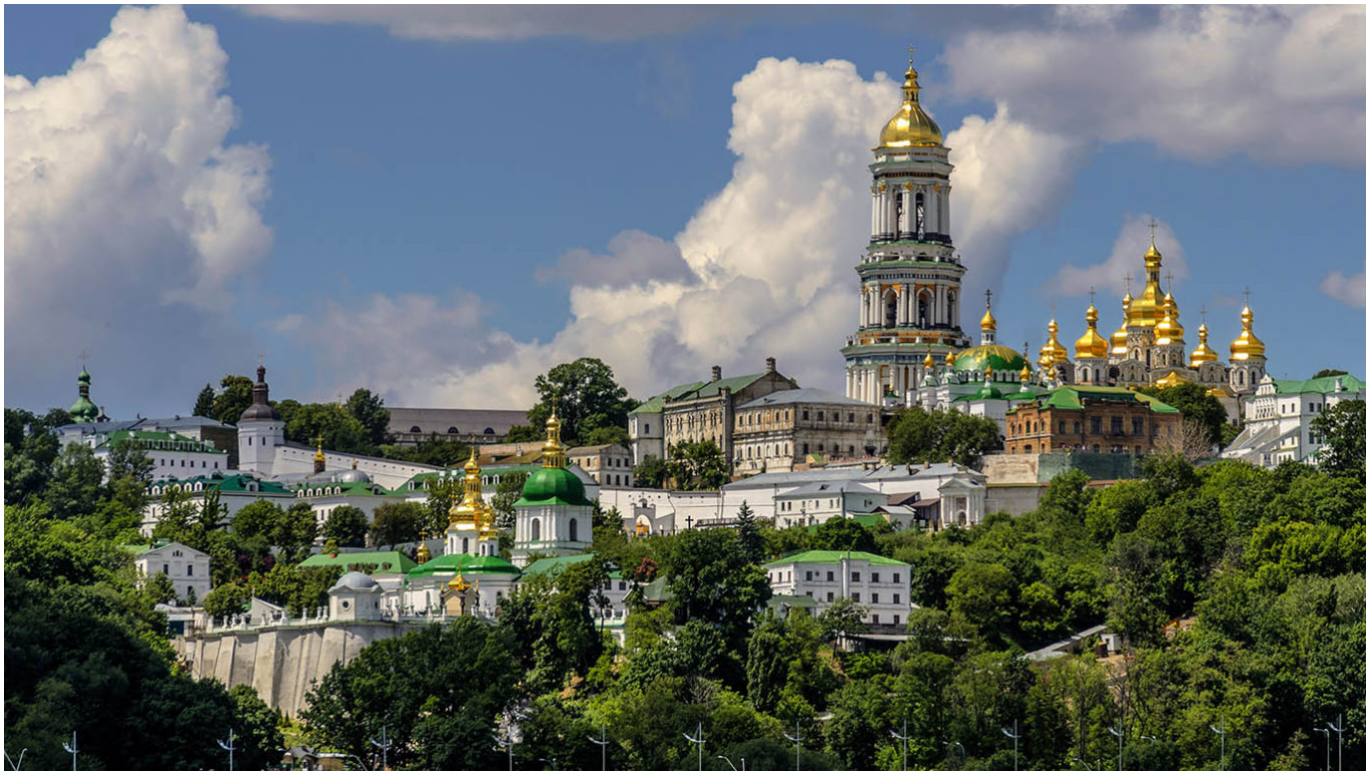
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Ukrainian Lawmakers Vote to Ban Orthodox Church Suspected of Ties to Moscow

By AFP

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Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra in Kyiv, Ukraine. **Falin (CC BY-SA 3.0)**

Ukrainian lawmakers on Tuesday voted to ban the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as Kyiv continues to sever religious, social and institutional ties with entities it believes are aligned with Moscow.

Ukraine has for years sought to limit its religious connections with Russia — a process greatly accelerated by Moscow's 2022 invasion, which was endorsed by the influential Russian Orthodox Church.

On Tuesday, 265 lawmakers in Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada voted to pass legislation outlawing religious organizations with suspected ties to Russia, including the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The bill needed 226 votes to pass in the 450-seat parliament. Forty-nine seats are vacant due to Russia's occupation of eastern Ukrainian territories and the departure or removal of lawmakers.

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Tuesday's vote in the Ukrainian parliament was welcomed by President Volodymyr Zelensky's office.

"There will be no Moscow Church in Ukraine," Andriy Yermak, Zelensky's chief of staff, said on Telegram. The bill now needs Zelensky's signature for it to become law.

First Deputy Chairwoman of the Verkhovna Rada, Iryna Herashchenko, called the vote "historic" and a "matter of national security."

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which officially broke ties with the Russian Orthodox Church in 2022, has been accused by some lawmakers of maintaining covert connections with Russian clergy despite the ongoing war.

In 2019, the Istanbul-based head of the Eastern Orthodox Church granted the Orthodox Church of Ukraine — a breakaway faction — religious independence from the Moscow Patriarchate. The split was triggered by Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war between Kyiv and Moscow-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Despite the schism, many parishes and worshippers continued to follow the church with suspected links to Moscow.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova condemned the Verkhovna Rada's vote on Tuesday, accusing Ukraine of trying to "destroy true Orthodoxy."

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