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The Political,
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Session: The Orthodox Impasse, Part I

9:15AM MST, March 15, 2024

“Decolonizing” the church: The Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s responses to Ukrainian decolonization

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 sparked acute discussions about the place of the Russian cultural legacy in Ukrainian public space. There appears to be social consensus that toponyms and monuments connected to Russian imperial and Soviet history must be removed to further what Ukrainian authorities term "decolonization." Given how intertwined Ukrainian history and Orthodox Christianity are, it is hardly surprising that any discussions about coping with Russian colonial legacies involve the issue of the Church. These discussions mainly concern either the "Russian church" possessing national heritage sites, such as Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, or the Church spreading ideas of the so-called "Russian world." "Ecclesiastic decolonization" in public discourse encompasses banning the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate: UOC-MP) or rejecting the veneration of saints that are somehow linked to Russian imperial history. This paper explores how UOC-MP parishes respond to these discussions by adapting their religious

Andriy Fert is a PhD in history, he is a UNET non-resident fellow at the Zentrum für Osteuropa- und internationale Studien in Berlin. He is an expert on the interplay of religion and nationalism, secular martyrs, and the churches' role in memory politics, particularly as they pertain to inter-Orthodox conflict in Ukraine today. Fert also coordinates several educational projects for secondary school history teachers at the Ukrainian office of the Institute for International Cooperation of the Deutscher Volkshochschul Verband. Based in Kyiv.