

Washington Post.- 16.11.2018

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Ukraine tore down its Lenin statues. The hard part is filling the spaces left behind.

Україна позбулася пам'ятників Леніну, але тепер треба встановити щось нове

Прийнятий в Україні закон про декомунізацію заборонив ряд радянських історичних постатей, гасел і символів, які довелося прибрати з громадських місць. Як пише Washington Post, тепер українці шукають смисл і ідентичність для простору, який вивільнився після знесення всього, що нагадувало про комуністичну імперію. На вирішення питання, що поставити замість радянських ідолів, українцям знадобиться час.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/ukraine-tore-down-its-lenin-statues-the-hard-part-is-filling-the-spaces-left-behind/2018/11/15/5a33a222-e1e8-11e8-b759-3d88a5ce9e19_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.69c623f8aba8

A woman sweeps leaves from the ground near a statue of the Virgin Mary and four angels that stands in the place where a monument of Vladimir Lenin used to be located in Hryhorivka, Ukraine. (Oksana Parafeniuk/For The Washington Post)

Four angels and the Virgin Mary mark the spot where the Communist used to stand.

“We used to get drunk next to the Lenin,” a 45-year-old mechanic named Volodymyr said as he passed by.

“Now it’s a sin to drink there, I guess,” his friend Yulia said.

Five years after the start of Ukraine’s pro-Western revolution, the once-ubiquitous figure of Vladimir Lenin has been eradicated by law. So have other symbols of the Soviet era — gone from the country’s squares, streets and buildings.

But Ukrainians are still searching for meaning — and identity — in the spaces left behind.

Depending on where you look, those spaces are now an empty pedestal. Or replaced by a wooden cross. Or a new plaque on a rock. Or fresh tiles. Or just a circle of bare earth.

As elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, the likeness of Bolshevik leader Lenin remained the focal point of hundreds of towns and villages for years in Ukraine after Communism’s demise.

Then came the protests, starting in November 2013, that toppled Ukraine’s Moscow-friendly government — touching off Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the war in eastern Ukraine and a race by the new authorities in Kiev to erase all vestiges of Soviet rule.

The ensuing “decommunization” laws spelled out scores of historical figures, mottos and symbols to be deleted from public spaces. But they didn’t say how toppled statues should be replaced.

[Analysis: Century later, Russia still revising story of imperial family’s slaying]

E:Kirbi

Volodymyr Viatrovych, head of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, stands by a map of Ukraine. This map, he said, still has the old names of the cities, towns and villages renamed under the “decommunization” laws that he helped to write and implement. (Oksana Parafeniuk/For The Washington Post)

E:Virbi

An empty pedestal, where a Lenin monument was removed, stands behind a history museum in Obukhiv, Ukraine. (Oksana Parafeniuk/For The Washington Post)

Volodymyr Viatrovych, head of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, which helped write and implement those laws, says all known Lenin statues on Ukrainian government-controlled territory have now been dismantled — more than 1,300 since the decommunization laws were passed in 2015. One exception: monuments near the site of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

What remains, he acknowledges, are hundreds of empty spaces and pedestals, often in towns' central squares. In the institute's internal jargon, the vacancies are known as "stumps."

"The fact is, the question of how to fill these spaces will remain the subject of discussion among Ukrainians for some time," Viatrovych said. "Our views of our history are still being formed."

Ukraine's search for new symbols to replace its Lenins reflects the country's larger struggle to reorient itself toward the West amid economic turbulence and the continuing war with Russian-backed separatists in the east.

Ukraine's rapid push also draws parallels to other pressing debates around the world on how to deal with history and memory — such as whether to preserve statues of Confederate figures in the United States or reinterpreting Columbus Day to acknowledge the decimation of Native Americans by European settlement.

Government proponents say Ukraine needs to free itself from Russia's sway by embracing and developing a national narrative and national heroes. Critics say that the government is ceding too much power to far-right nationalist groups and enforcing an official ideology just as the Soviets did.

"It's not a condemnation of propaganda, but it's the exchange of one propaganda for another," said Ievgeniia Moliar, a Kiev activist and art historian critical of the government's hard-line approach to decommunization. She sees an unflattering parallel in Ukraine's new monuments rising on the very spots — sometimes on the very same pedestals — where Lenin used to stand.

E:Virbi

Ievgeniia Moliar, 37, right, plans an upcoming event with her colleague and logistics manager at a fine arts museum in Ukraine. Moliar, an activist and art historian, is working on revamping the museum and rethinking Soviet memory. (Oksana Parafeniuk/For The Washington Post)

Ukraine — like much of central and Eastern Europe — was already bringing down many of its Lenin and Soviet statues in the 1990s. But the push to remove the rest after the 2014 revolution was remarkable in its legally mandated scale and speed.

Moliar, who has tracked Lenin replacements across the nation, says the most common genres are the religious and the patriotic. □

In the central Ukrainian city of Bila Tserkva, frozen-dumplings magnate Liudmyla Drygalo thought of both. She and fellow activists created a makeshift memorial to Ukrainians who died in the 2014 protests and the war in the east and erected a wooden cross to stand in Lenin's place.

The square was always a central gathering place, Drygalo said. By exchanging Lenin for a cross, she said, "We kept this tradition and simply swapped out the symbol for one that would be close to everyone's heart."

[Far from former Soviet Union, a place where a communist can still dream]