

# Zelensky skips “Ukraine Recovery Conference” after Poland strips him of state honors

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30 June 2026

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was noticeably absent at last week’s “Ukraine Recovery Conference” held in Gdansk, Poland as a result of escalating tensions between the two right-wing governments over Zelensky’s glorification campaign of the fascist Ukrainian Insurgent Army or UPA.

According to its website, the purpose of the annual Ukraine Recovery Conference is “to bolster international support for the country’s reconstruction as well as catalyze investments for Ukrainian businesses.” Zelensky had regularly attended the previous conferences but resorted to sending Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko in his place following the decision of far-right Polish President Karol Nawrocki to strip Zelensky of Poland’s Order of the White Eagle on June 19.

Poland’s highest state honor, the Order of the White Eagle, was first presented to Zelensky by President Andrzej Duda in 2023 as a symbol of alliance between the two nationalist governments. The award had also been presented to former Ukrainian presidents Leonid Kuchma, Viktor Yushchenko and Petro Poroshenko, who all announced on June 20 they would return their honors, in solidarity with Zelensky.

The revocation of the award by Nawrocki has caused significant controversy within the Polish ruling class, which fears a rift between Warsaw and Kiev that could threaten the continuation of the NATO-backed proxy war against Russia. It has yet to achieve any of its aims, yet has killed hundreds of thousands.

In an interview with TVN24, Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski stated that Nawrocki’s decision “was inappropriate, because it humiliated the president of Ukraine personally.”

Polish lawmaker Piotr Fogler returned his own state honor, the Golden Cross of Merit, in protest, stating on Facebook, “I am symbolically returning my decoration to this president in protest against the foolish decision to take the order away from the President of Ukraine, a Ukraine that is fighting.” According to Fogler, Nawrocki is “making a mockery of Poland and all of us.”

Sikorski is closely aligned with US imperialism and speaks for a section of the Polish ruling class that fears a further

escalation of the conflict with Kiev could threaten Polish interests in the war against Russia. The husband of anti-communist historian Anne Applebaum, in 2022 Sikorski thanked the United States government for destroying the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, provocatively implying that the Polish government had inside knowledge of the sabotage operation.

In an attempt to divert attention back to the war and away from the UPA scandal, Sikorski told CBS News in an interview following the conference that he feared Russia would stage a “false flag operation” in the next two years to justify an attack on a NATO member state.

Sikorski said, “We need to communicate to [Russian President Vladimir] Putin that we know what he’s up to and that we will not be taken in and that this would be completely unacceptable, and we would defend every inch of NATO territory.”

While the UPA is celebrated by far-right nationalists within Ukraine and presented abroad by Ukraine’s imperialist backers as benevolent freedom fighters against both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the UPA was largely composed of former members of the Nazi-allied Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). Founded originally in 1942, by 1943 the UPA consisted primarily of OUN members, Ukrainian police, veterans of the disbanded Nazi-led Schutzmannschaft battalion 201, or deserters from the infamous Waffen-SS Galicia division. The organization counted between 25,000 and 30,000 partisans and could mobilize up to 100,000 by 1944. Even as the Nazi Wehrmacht was forced to withdraw from Ukraine amidst the advance of the Soviet Red Army, the UPA continued its own murderous campaign against Soviet partisans, Jews and Poles, in hopes of establishing an “independent” and ethnically pure Ukrainian state.

While the role of the UPA has long been a point of controversy between the two nationalist governments, Kiev has ramped up its glorification of UPA and OUN figures in recent weeks as part of the ongoing imperialist proxy war with Russia, a war in which Poland itself plays an essential role. More recently, Zelensky issued a decree at the end of last month naming a current military unit of the Ukrainian Special

Operations Forces after the UPA, or more specifically, “Heroes of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army.” According to Zelensky, the goal of employing the UPA name for a modern military unit was “restoring the historical traditions of the national army.”

Zelensky did not explain what “traditions” he was referring to, but in the years 1943–1945 the UPA carried out a murderous campaign in the German-occupied regions of Volhynia, Eastern Galicia, Polesia and Lublin which resulted in the massacre of an estimated 100,000 ethnic Poles. The massacres were part of the UPA’s attempt to weaken Polish control over regions it claimed for its future ethnically pure Ukrainian state.

Apart from ethnic Poles, the UPA troops also murdered Jews, Russians, Armenians and other minorities. At the peak of this campaign of ethnic cleansing, women and children constituted the majority of victims. Ukrainians who had married Polish spouses or opposed the UPA were likewise targeted. According to Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, noted biographer of Stepan Bandera and historian of Ukraine’s far-right, in July 1943 alone UPA forces attacked “520 localities and killed between 10,000 and 11,000 Poles.”

The re-naming of a military unit after the UPA came just days after Ukraine’s political and military leadership re-interred the ashes of the World War II Ukrainian nationalist, fascist leader and Nazi collaborator Andriy Melnyk and his wife Sofia. Melnyk had been buried in Luxembourg since his death in exile in 1964.

As the WSWS noted, the public and provocative glorification campaign of far-right Nazi collaborators and war criminals is a strategic ploy by the Zelensky regime to legitimize its rule in Kiev and justify the continuation of the proxy war against Russia that has killed hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians and further impoverished the working class.

Moreover, a recent string of corruption scandals has revealed that Zelensky and his closest allies in the Ukrainian ruling class have used the war to shamelessly enrich themselves and their oligarch friends as the working class suffers and dies in massive numbers.

Well aware that it cannot afford to totally alienate its closest ally Poland, Zelensky sent his chief of staff Kyrylo Budanov to Poland to meet with Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, in an attempt to smooth tensions between the two sides over the UPA controversy.

Following the meeting, Kosiniak-Kamysz wrote in a post on X that “Poland and Ukraine are partners when it comes to security. But when it comes to history, we must tell each other the truth.”

“Today, during a meeting with General Kyrylo Budanov, head of President Zelensky’s office, I clearly set out Poland’s expectations regarding the decision to name one of the military units after the UPA. The memory of the victims of Volhynia is

not up for negotiation. There are boundaries that must not be crossed.”

Despite reports in the Polish press that a compromise had been reached at the meeting and that the UPA name would be rescinded, sources within Budanov’s office later rejected any notion that a deal had been reached, and said that the UPA name would remain. “The information the Polish press conveyed does not correspond to reality,” the source told Ukrainian news outlet Liga.net, ultimately leading to Nawrocki revoking the award on June 19. Budanov himself is one of the figures most closely associated with the Ukrainian far-right and the glorification of Ukrainian fascism in Zelensky’s government.

Whatever the outcome of the dispute between these two nationalist governments, the public conflict underscores that their war alliance against Russia is as fragile as it is reactionary. Yet despite its supposed opposition to the murderers in the UPA, as part of the imperialist proxy war against Russia, Poland continues to serve as the primary international logistics and supply hub for the billions of dollars in western military aid destined for Ukraine. The majority of these weapon transfers—including artillery ammunition, armored vehicles, and rocket systems provided by the US, Canada and various European allies—transit through the Rzeszów-Jasionka Airport in southeastern Poland before moving across the border to Ukraine. Emphasizing that, for now, everything must be subordinated to the joint war effort, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk recently stated, regarding the controversy, “Cooperation serves the interest of both our states and nations, while conflict serves Moscow’s interests.”

Following the conference in Gdansk, Ukrainian Prime Minister Svyrydenko announced that Ukraine had signed over 160 agreements valued at an estimated \$11.7 billion. Included in the agreements were new European Union and World Bank financing, infrastructure investments, and “new partnerships in the defence industry and energy sectors.”

In addition, Ukrainian drone manufacturer SkyFall signed a memorandum of understanding with Poland’s state development bank, Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK), “opening the way for potential European Union financing of future defense and dual-use technology projects,” as Ukraine, Poland and the EU plan jointly to continue and escalate the imperialist proxy war against Russia.



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