

# Kyiv's "Volhynian Negationism:" Reflections on the 2016 Polish–Ukrainian Memory Conflict\*

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the most recent round of the Polish–Ukrainian discussions on the “Volhynian massacre,” mass killings committed in the years 1943–45 by the underground Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) against the Polish population inhabiting the German-occupied south-eastern provinces of the Polish state in its internationally recognized borders. It focuses in particular on the Ukrainian reactions to the Polish Sejm’s resolution of July 2016, which recognized the massacre as an act of genocide. In the article, the legal and political arguments put forward by Ukrainian critics of the resolution are examined from the point of view of international law. The article also analyzes the political consequences of the Volhynian debate for Polish–Ukrainian relations and offers a possible explanation for the phenomenon of “Volhynian negationism”—that is, the tendency, widespread in contemporary Ukraine, to reject the notion that the Volhynian killings represent a case of ethnic cleansing. The sources of this phenomenon include a common perception of the historian’s role as “defender of the national interest”; ignorance with regard to international law; and the ethno-nationalistic approach that prevails among Ukrainian historians when it comes to the issue of Polish—Ukrainian relations. Last but not least, Russia’s aggression has affected the Ukrainian public discourse, radically increasing the popularity of anti-Russian views, and, consequently, nationalistic views on Ukraine’s history.*

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