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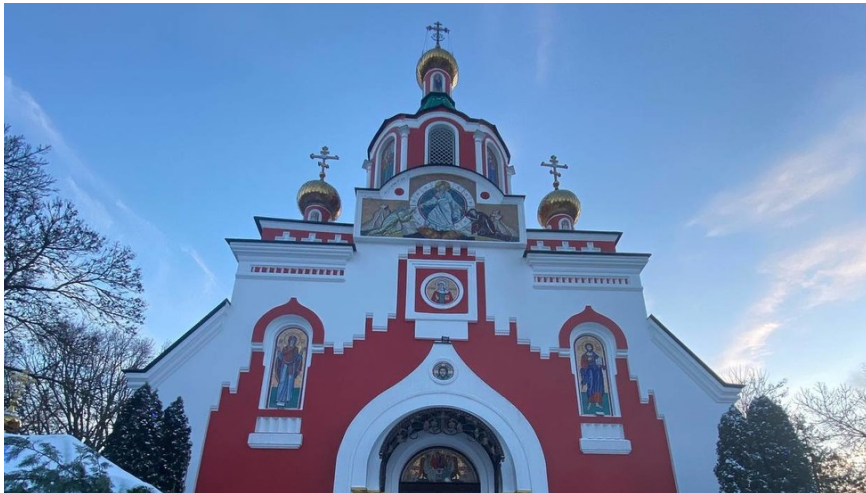
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Ukraine jails priest for supporting Russia

The government in Kiev has been intensifying its crackdown on the country's largest Orthodox church



Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Odessa. © Facebook

The government in Kiev has sentenced an Orthodox priest to prison over alleged pro-Russia remarks, as it continues a widening campaign against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC).

Archpriest Ivan Pavlichenko, a cleric at the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Odessa, was handed a five-year jail term after the local Court of Appeal overturned his earlier suspended sentence, according to the Center for Public Investigations and reported by regional media over the weekend.

Investigators said Pavlichenko was convicted of *"justifying Russia's armed aggression"* and *"inciting religious and national hatred."* The trial court found him guilty but handed down a suspended term, which prosecutors appealed as being too light.

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The case was built on recordings of the priest's private phone conversations collected by security services inside his car. Investigators say he criticized Ukraine's leadership, discussed the conflict, quoted Russian politicians, and questioned Kiev's official position.

Prosecutors also pointed to comments about Russian strikes on Odessa. Pavlichenko allegedly said the attacks were aimed at drone-production sites and blamed Ukraine for placing military equipment in residential areas.

The appeals court also ordered the confiscation of his property and barred him from holding positions in state institutions for three years.

Local outlets claimed Pavlichenko attended pro-Russian events before 2014 and visited Crimea with his family in 2016. Supporters in Odessa called the verdict politically motivated persecution for his views and past civic activity.

The ruling comes as Kiev intensifies its pressure on the UOC, which officials accuse of maintaining ties to Russia despite the church's declaration of independence from the Moscow Patriarchate in May 2022. The campaign has included raids on parishes and arrests of clergy, as well as a search of the Kiev-Pechersk monastery.

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Last year, Vladimir Zelensky signed legislation allowing the state to ban religious organizations affiliated with governments that Kiev deems *"aggressors,"* effectively targeting the UOC. Kiev has openly supported the rival Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), which the UOC and Russian Orthodox Church view as schismatic.

Moscow has said it will not abandon Orthodox believers in Ukraine and [vowed](#) to ensure that *"their lawful rights are respected."*

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Ukraine's ex-foreign minister explains why he's not at the front

Dmitry Kuleba has said he will only join the military if he receives a summons, despite urging Ukrainians to return home to fight with “shovels”













Former Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba. © Thierry Monasse/Getty Images

Former Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba has said he will not volunteer for frontline service, stating in an interview with Ukraine's Channel 5 on Sunday that he will only join the army if drafted.

Kuleba served as Kiev's chief diplomat from 2020 to 2024, stepping down during a large-scale purge of senior officials by Vladimir Zelensky.

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Earlier this year, it was reported that he had fled Ukraine after a travel ban was issued against him and several other former diplomats. Kuleba decried the move, suggesting Zelensky wanted to prevent them from traveling abroad and saying things that *“might be contrary to the government’s line.”*

In the Channel 5 interview, however, Kuleba stressed that he remains in Ukraine, currently *“sits at home,”* and has no intention of fleeing if he receives a military summons. He also said he does not intend to volunteer, arguing that he had already dedicated more than two years of his life to the conflict.

Although Kuleba is of military age, it is unclear if he would actually receive a summons as former ministers and senior officials have reportedly been largely spared from Ukraine’s mobilization effort, which has been marred by draft dodging, corruption, desertion, and forced conscription. Ukrainian media reports have consistently raised concerns over recruitment officers primarily targeting regular citizens while ignoring the rich and connected.

While in office, Kuleba made repeated calls on Ukrainians abroad to return home to join the armed forces. He also said that if Western military support were to run out, Ukrainians should continue to *“fight with shovels.”*



Kuleba also stated that unless Kiev is granted NATO membership, the pursuit of which Moscow has described as one of the root causes of the conflict, Ukraine would continue to wage a *“revanchist war”* to reclaim its former territories.

Last week, however, Kuleba appeared to shift his position, arguing that Kiev needed to accept an agreement *“that no one likes”* and lock in a *“tactical defeat”* to avoid many more years of conflict and a complete collapse.

Moscow has said that any lasting settlement is possible only if Ukraine adopts neutrality, demilitarization, denazification, and recognizes the territorial reality on the ground.

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