

# 'Everything Russian Must Go': Ukraine's Kharkiv Renames Streets

By [Patrick Fort for AFP](#)

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"It's about imperialist culture. The Russians imposed their culture, their writers, everything," says a passerby on Pushkin Street who does not want to give his name. **TASS**

Before the war, it was called "Moscow Avenue." But now this wide boulevard which runs through Ukraine's second city has been renamed "Heroes of Kharkiv" in honour of those fighting against invading Russian forces.

"Here in Kharkiv, there is no place for an avenue named after the capital of the occupier that is killing our people," explains arts student Evgen Deviatka on the newly named street running through the heart of the northeastern city.

Kharkiv has already renamed three of its streets and toppled a statue of Alexander Nevsky, a medieval Russian hero celebrated for his military victories.

In time, more than 200 streets or squares could be renamed or come under scrutiny.

Lying some 50 kilometers from the Russian border, Kharkiv came under attack at the start of the February 24 invasion, enduring long weeks of deadly bombardment before Ukrainian forces were able to push the Russians back.

But the city, which counted 1.4 million residents before the war began, remains under threat.

"Names are associated with a certain nation or country. What is being done by this country, we can all see. So everything Russian must go," declared 59-year-old engineer Laryssa Vassylchenko.

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Soldier Mykyta Gavrylenko is standing in front of what remains of the pedestal where Alexander Nevsky's statue stood until it was pulled down by a truck a few days ago, smashing the paving stones as it fell.

"These are people who oppose Ukrainians and try to attack us, they kill our citizens, they hurt us, they just humiliate us," he muses.

For Yury Sidorenko, spokesman for Kharkiv's city hall, "the time has come" for such change.

"Russian toponyms, names for squares, streets and towns, we must be clear: they won't be on any map of Kharkiv," he told AFP.

But city officials don't want to rush into it, he says.

"There are many names at stake, I can't say how many because that's a question which must be decided by city authorities together with the public," said Sidorenko.

And it's not as simple as it seems.

If changing the name of Moscow Square or Belgorod Avenue seems obvious – Belgorod being the city over the border from which Russia launched part of its initial attack – other changes are less straightforward.

What of those places named after historical Russian writers or artists who have nothing to do with the country's modern history?

"It's about imperialist culture. The Russians imposed their culture, their writers, everything," says a passerby on Pushkin Street who does not want to give his name.

Although he says he has nothing against the 19th-century Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, the street was clearly named after him "because he is Russian."

Here the walls now feature artwork and graffiti by Ukrainian street artist Gamlet, who has written "British Street" underneath several of the name plaques, in a nod to the United Kingdom's staunch support for Kyiv since the war began.

On the road formerly known as Moscow Avenue, local residents preempted city hall by covering the name plaques with makeshift signs reading: "Grigory Skovoroda Avenue" after

an 18th-century Ukrainian philosopher.

But "Heroes of Kharkiv" is the name of choice, with the new moniker even showing up on Google Maps.

"It's a good name, better than Moscow Avenue," chuckles Yulia Butenko, a local craftswoman. "I said ages ago that these names should be changed," she added, while acknowledging the complications.

Take the celebrated 19th-century Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, who is revered in both countries. "He wrote about Ukraine but in Russian," she said.

And the same was true of Kyiv-born Russian author and playwright Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940). "So it's complicated."

As for Tchaikovsky, Russia's most famous composer, "he didn't do anything bad to Ukraine, but it's also Russian culture."

And then there's the case of writer and satirist Ostap Vyshnia (1889-1956).

"He's Ukrainian, but he wrote a lot about the Soviets in a positive way!" she says, exasperated.

Such questions even intrude on mundane day-to-day life.

"I didn't buy (a certain yellow) cheese today because it's still called 'Russian' cheese," she sighed.

"It's all very ambiguous. I'm worried about 'Pushkin Street' because I like Pushkin but I'll accept it if it's renamed."

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