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Western Ukraine: Drive for Independence□□□

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Summary:

An analysis of independence movements in Western Ukraine and the role of the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

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Western Ukraine: Drive for Independence

While the eastern Ukraine has been under Russian influence since the Czarist era, parts of the western Ukraine, along with the three Baltic states and Moldavia, were annexed under the secret terms of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. More than 90 percent of the 10 million people who live in the western Ukraine are Ukrainians. Political groups there—like the Helsinki Union, Christian Union, Leva, and the recently created Christian Democratic youth organization—are openly advocating secession. Although party officials have put pressure on Rukh to exclude these organizations from its ranks, individuals can still join the popular front and are among its leaders.

The banned Ukrainian Catholic (Uniate) Church is also viewed by Moscow as a force for independence. At Friday's historic meeting between President Gorbachev and Pope John Paul II [redacted] Gorbachev will discuss legalization of the church, which was incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church in 1946 because of its alleged link to nationalism. [redacted] Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze have expressed concern about the nationalist aspect of the Ukrainian Catholic Church whose estimated 5 million worshipers in the western Ukraine are the most activist and well-organized group in the republic. Timed to put pressure on Soviet authorities before Gorbachev's meeting on Friday, tens of thousands of Ukrainians demonstrated yesterday in three western Ukrainian cities to demand legalization of the Uniate Church. And Deputy Foreign Minister Adamishin said last week that legislation on religious freedom planned for early next year will allow Ukrainian Catholics to register.

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Meanwhile, Ukrainian Catholic activists have already acquired more than 80 churches by simply occupying empty ones or, in some cases, Orthodox priests have come over and brought the church with them. This weekend, authorities in L'vov gave back a small church to L'vov Catholics, which passed into Russian Orthodox hands after the Uniate Church was banned in 1946.



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