

UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH - A POWERFUL PEACE ACTOR?

According to the Constitution, Ukraine is a secular state, where its churches and all religious organizations are separated from the state and the legislative process. According to theologian Gennadiy Druzenko, in the framework of the regional scope, Ukraine might be described as one of the most religious countries in Europe.¹ It is an undeniable fact, as the history of the Ukrainian Church dates back to the times of the Kyivan Rus, when its Prince Volodymyr the Great received Christianity from Constantinople in 988. It was one of the most remarkable event in the Ukrainian state creation that united Ukrainian people spiritually. However, it further served as an instrument of manipulations and basis for lies from the Russian side so as to justify its rights for the Ukrainian state. Further centuries are marked by a constant fight of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, one of the most pivotal soft instruments of the Russian hybrid warfare and the Russian foreign policy in promoting ideas of the so-called “Russian World”, to become a powerful actor on the international arena and win hearts and minds of Ukrainians. Nevertheless, in the times of the “Ukraine crisis”, that broke out in 2014 after the illegal annexation of Crimea and the manifestations of the Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine, the question of the religious independence from Russia was more pressing than ever. And finally, on January 9, 2019, a historical event has taken place – Ecumenical Patriarchate Bartholomew signed the Tomos of autocephaly, as a result the newly-established Orthodox Church of Ukraine was granted its canonical independence.

The long history of the Ukrainian Church and recent events illustrate the high importance of this institution in the life of the Ukrainian civil society and political/geopolitical spheres. According to Razumkov Centre’s surveys – 70.4% of Ukrainians trust in God regardless of church attendance.² Moreover, 74/1% of Ukrainians believe that religious leaders have to defend the interests of the poorest groups of citizens, 71% suppose that religion strengthens people’s morality and spirituality, 64% perceive religion as an important way to revive national identity and culture, more than 50% regard religion as an element of a democratic society and a political life.³ The poll which was conducted in March 2019 once again underscores the fact that people do not trust state institutions but express their highest level of trust to civil organizations and church: 68% trust volunteer organizations, 61% - Ukraine’s Armed Forces and the church, 57% - the State

¹Gennadiy Druzenko, “Religion and the Secular State in Ukraine”, in J Martinez-Torron and W C Durham, Jr. (eds) , 2010, p. 719. Available at: <https://www.iclrs.org/content/blurb/files/Ukraine.1.pdf>

² Razumkov Center: Majority in Ukraine Believe in God, May 26, 2016, https://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/social_questioning/63502/ (consulted on 3.02.2019)

³ Mykhailo Mischenko, “The Society’s expectations of Church and Interchurch Relations (public opinion survey)”, Razumkov Centre, November 13, 2018, <http://razumkov.org.ua/en/component/k2/international-conference-reconciliation-strategies-the-role-of-churches-in-ukraine> (consulted on 3.02.2019)

Emergency Service, 56% - volunteer battalions.⁴ All these figures show vividly that Ukrainian civil society perceives the role of the Church as one of the most important in a social and even political life, especially in the context of the Russian aggression and socio-political turmoil inside the country. So, on the background of the Russian hybrid war and the negative influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the EaP region on the whole, the role of Church in the peace-mediation seems to be decisive and to some extent, underestimated.

The current paper aims to analyze the role of Church in peace mediation VS conflict promotion in the case of Ukraine, addressing such issues as:

- official relations between and within different churches in a country and elaborate what kind of results it has in reality;
- the official position of the UOC KP and UAOC towards the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the illegal annexation of Crimea, possible future reconciliation and current geopolitical challenges, reactions to fake news and disinformation;
- the official position, position on the ground and the reaction on the discrimination against LGBT, religious and ethnic minorities;
- based on these points we will analyse whether the church promotes peace or encourages conflicts in Ukraine, trying to answer whether the church could serve as a powerful peace actor or not.

Regarding the multifaceted and philosophical nature of religion, the methodology of the current study will be based on the qualitative and interpretive approaches so as to comprehend deeper the relationship between religion and conflict/peacemaking. The particular case-study of Ukraine will help us to grasp whether the religion is the driver of peace or violence in this country.⁵ Moreover, media interviews, blogs, official documents, interviews on the ground present the main source for the current case-study.

Before reflecting upon official positions of churches towards various issues, it is worth to elucidate what churches we have in Ukraine and what are their official relations, especially after Ukraine received Tomos; and what consequences it has in reality. As it has been stated before, Ukraine enjoys a diverse religious landscape and the UOC has a long history and its own path towards its independence with strong national associations.⁶ According to Nicholas Denysenko, a professor of theology at Valparaiso University and an ordained deacon of the Orthodox Church in America,

⁴Razumkov Centre, “Riven doviry do suspilnykh instytutiv ta elektoralni oriyentatsiyi hromadyan Ukrayiny” , 27 March, 2019, <http://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/riven-doviry-do-suspilnykh-instytutiv-ta-elektoralni-oriyentatsii-gromadian-ukrainy-2> (consulted on 30.03.2019)

⁵ The British Academy, *The Role of Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding*, London, September 2015, p. 11

⁶ Nicholas E. Denysenko, “Chaos in Ukraine: the churches and the search for leadership”, in: *International journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, June 2014, p. 5

“throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet period, autocephalous Ukrainian churches have existed, both in Ukraine and outside of it. While these churches had not yet received formal recognition from their sister Orthodox churches throughout the world, their existence through Soviet persecution and the Cold War demonstrates the Ukrainian determination to renew the Kyivan Metropolia as an autocephalous church”.⁷ The UAOC was proclaimed in 1921 but then integrated into the MP in 1930.⁸ This church emerged in 1942 and 1989 without any canonical recognition from the family of other Orthodox churches worldwide. Finally, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the UOC resumed its efforts to gain independence in 1990, when the Moscow Patriarchate “granted greater ecclesial autonomy to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, and they became known as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church”.⁹ Filaret tried to form the autocephalous UOC without the Patriarch Mstyslav that led to “a split within the autocephalous church between those loyal to Mstyslav and those linked to Filaret, who now call themselves the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kiev Patriarchate.”¹⁰ The UOC KP managed to announce its ecclesiastical independence from Moscow in 1992, having elected its own head – Patriarch Volodymyr (Sabodan) during a council of bishops in Kharkiv, who was replaced by Filaret in 1995. The UAOC has elected Volodymyr Jarema as its Patriarch. As a result, such divisions led to the existence of three separate jurisdictions in Ukraine – UAOC, UOC KP, UOC MP which rather divide than unite the civil society, causing the inter-church schism as well. It is worth mentioning that UAOC and UOC KP present themselves as soft instruments of the Ukrainian nationalism, trying to cut all links with the pro-Russian UOC MP, that has recognized the Patriarch of Moscow as its head. So, up to 2018 the UOC MP was the only church in Ukraine that has been recognized canonically by the whole Orthodox community.¹¹ The major prerequisites for the Ukrainian church to finally get its independence from the powerful Kremlin influence became more visible than ever during the next deterioration of relations between Ukraine and Russia, in the background of great geopolitical events that clearly are espoused with ecclesial claims.

In 2014 former Ukrainian, often called pro-Russian, President Viktor Yanukovich refused to sign Ukraine’s Association Agreement with the European Union. An ordinary act, at first sight, that led

⁷Olena Goncharova, “Honest History: Ukraine’s Orthodox Church battles for independence”, Kyiv Post, June 15, 2018, <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/honest-history-ukraines-orthodox-church-battles-for-independence.html> (consulted on 3.02.2019)

⁸ Ronald G. Roberson, “The Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kiev Patriarchate and Ukrainian Autocephalous Church”, July 2007, <http://www.cnewa.org/default.aspx?ID=50&pagetypeID=9&sitecode=hq&pageno=1>, (consulted on 3.02.2019)

⁹ Nicholas E. Denysenko, “Chaos in Ukraine: the churches and the search for leadership”, in: *International journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, June 2014, p. 3

¹⁰ Ronald G. Roberson, op.cit.

¹¹ Irina du Quenoy, “Church and State in Ukraine and the Power of Politics of Orthodox Christianity”, February 14, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/02/church-and-state-in-ukraine-and-the-power-politics-of-orthodox-christianity/>, (consulted on 1.04.2019)

to the bloody clashes between Ukrainian people and security forces, the escape of Yanukovich to Russia – the Revolution of Dignity has truly shown the aspiration of Ukrainians for a better life. Nevertheless, the political turmoil in Ukraine led to the agile actions of the Russian President Vladimir Putin – the illegal annexation of Crimea, the unannounced war in Eastern Ukraine, Russian hybrid aggression, the appearance of the political prisoners. Thus, the war in Eastern Ukraine, that is called by the world community the “Ukraine crisis”, is not an internal domestic problem of Ukraine (alone) – it should be best seen, instead, as one of the biggest internationally contextualized conflicts since the end of the Cold War.¹² In such harsh times, the role of the Church seems to be important and relevant more than ever, taking into account the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church is one of the most powerful soft tools of the Russian hybrid warfare, which is called to win hearts and minds of civil societies of its target countries. So, what are the official positions of the UOC KP and UOC towards the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the illegal annexation of Crimea, possible future reconciliation and current geopolitical challenges? Does the Church truly helps to unite Ukrainian people in such war times or not? How is the Ukrainian Tomos would impact the geopolitical situation in the EaP region vs. Russia? What Church could do for resolving/trespassing the Donbas conflict? And what Church could do in helping IDPs?

Before the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, the general religious situation was rather stabilized as the Ukrainian model of the church-state relations presupposes the separation of church and state that is enshrined in the Constitution.¹³ According to the American sociologist of religion Jose Casanova, the Ukrainian model of church-state relations implies the equality of all religions before the Constitution and ensures their development on the basis of free competition.¹⁴ The reasons for such Ukrainian church-state relations have been identified by the Ukrainian religious studies scholar and president of the Ukrainian Association of Religious Freedom Victor Yelensky. First, due to the presence of multiple centres of power, none of the religious organizations has a dominant position and all of them are interested in maintaining high legal standards of religious freedom. Second, religion is not a key element of the Ukrainian statehood. Third, a high level of religious freedom has never been a threat to the positions of power. And finally, there is the high level of tolerance towards people of other religions that developed during the history of Ukraine. Moreover, the idea to get the canonical independence for the single UOC was presented on the agenda of the political establishment of those times, but still due to the huge influence of the UOC-

¹² Khrystyna Karelska, A “Hybrid Peace” in Donbas? Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine and the (Im)Possibilities of Conflict Resolution, College of Europe, Warsaw, 2018.

¹³ Iuliia Korniichuk, The Impact of the Russian-Ukrainian Military Conflict on Religious Life in Ukraine, National Pedagogical Dragomanov University Ukraine, 2016, p. 1.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 2

MP and inter-church feuds could not have been realized fully.¹⁵ The pre-Maidan period could be characterized by such a well-known proverb – “where there are two Ukrainians, there are three hetmans”.¹⁶

However, the religious situation began to deteriorate since the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich in 2010. His reign was marked by his pro-Russian position and attempts to give some preferences to certain churches or church. Even at the legislative level, there was an attempt to inscribe into law the “Declaration on the dignity, freedom and human rights”, where the government had to abandon equal treatment of all religious organizations and build relationship with them “depending on their size, level of conformism with the country or region, their contribution to the history and culture and their civic position”.¹⁷

The Revolution of Dignity led not only to deep polarization among the civil society, but also to the polarization in the official positions of different churches in Ukraine, regarding the issue of the European integration then. The UOC KP fully supported the aspirations of people who fought and died on the Maidan Square, whereas the UOC MP rejected any ideas of the Ukrainian rapprochement with the EU. The UAOC openly proclaimed that they fully supported the rapprochement with the Christian Europe.

St. Michael’s cathedral became a shelter and some kind of a symbol to the protesters. One of the witnesses of those events said: “The carpets are laid for the protesters, they are fed and given tea”.¹⁸ Other cathedrals followed this example and worked round-the-clock for all who needed to rest.¹⁹ Cathedrals were also used to mobilize people, for instance during another attempt to assault Maidan on the night of December 2013, the monks of the Cathedral sounded the bells, as they always mobilized people in hard times. Father Agafiy remembers people who phoned and begged him to ring the bells of the St. Michael Cathedral on the night of 10 to 11 December, so as to awaken the Kievans who could come to Maidan and help.²⁰ During all violent clashes between civic protesters and the police on the street Grushevskiy, the priests of various churches constantly prayed trying to stop violence.²¹ Even Yanukovich himself and the representatives of the

¹⁵ Jose Casanova, *Between Nation and Civil Society: Ethnolinguistic and religious Pluralism in Independent Ukraine*, in: *Democratic Civility: The History and Cross-Cultural Possibility of a Modern Political Ideal*, ed. by R.Hefner, 1998, p. 215

¹⁶ Geraldine Fagan and Aleksandr Shchipkov, *Rome is not our Father, but neither is Moscow our Mother: Will there be a Local Ukrainian Orthodox Church?*, in: *Religion, State and Society*, August 2010, p. 3

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Vladislav Maltsev, “Tserkvy vyshly na Maydan”, *Relihiya v Ukrayinii*, 2013, https://www.religion.in.ua/zmi/ukrainian_zmi/24334-cerkvi-vyshli-na-majdan.html, (consulted on 3.02.2019)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Ilya Barabanov, “Vazhno, chtoby sobytiya na Maydane stali privivkoy ot nasiliya i agresii”, *Pravoslaviye v Ukraine*, 11 February, 2014, <http://orthodoxy.org.ua/data/vazhno-chtoby-sobytiya-na-maydane-stali-privivkroy-ot-nasiliya-i-agressii-mitropolit-antoniya>, (consulted on 10.02.2019)

opposition met with priests on a regular basis to mediate the political crisis somehow.²² Nevertheless, with the growing civil unrest and bloodshed, one of the synodal declarations called for parishes of the UOC-KP to cease praying for the president and government during liturgical celebrations.²³ After Yanukovich's escape, Patriarch Filaret claimed that the UOC-KP's decision to cease praying for the government resulted in Yanukovich's demise.²⁴ It is noteworthy here, that Filaret called to condemn and hate not the Russian people, but their President and leaders – “That is why I first address the entire Ukrainian people: our country is treacherously attacked by the enemy, who occupied the part of Ukraine and seeks to destroy all our statehood and independence, and return us to the Kremlin imperial yoke. So, the sacred duty of each of us is to help protect our common Ukrainian house from the attacker... Once again I will repeat the words spoken many times on behalf of our Church in these days: the Ukrainian people does not have and should not have any hatred or hostility to the Russian people, even in the face of military aggression against our country. We want and I am sure – in the future we will have friendly and equal relations between independent Ukraine and democratic Russia based on mutual respect to sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of each other. In these difficult days I would like to testify that the Kyiv Patriarchate is with the Ukrainian people. We pray and ask God to protect our country and people from the invasion of strangers, we ask the Lord to strengthen Ukraine with invisible force in the struggle for justice, freedom and peace”.²⁵ To put it succinctly, the UOC-KP clearly showed the enemy's identity, made an attempt to renew the dialogue with the UOC MP so as to restore the Orthodox unity and avoid further Orthodox divisions in the civil society during such a fierce chaos. The Ukrainian Council of Churches and religious Organizations wrote a letter to Putin demanding that he withdraw his forces from Ukraine.²⁶

Overall, during the war in Eastern Ukraine, churches and other religious organizations have showcased their rather strong social role as they helped soldiers, the civil population, IDPs with shelter and humanitarian aid, for instance – “the UOC KP gathered 500.000 hryvnias on the needs of the Ukrainian army...to raise funds for the Ukrainian army, there are boxes in each temple, and every Sunday after the liturgy priests of the UOC KP must remind the parishioners of the importance of such a fundraising. All churches must appeal to their flocks to make their flocks donate and help strengthen our Armed Forces. Thus, the soldiers will know that church supports

²² Ibid.

²³ Nicholas E. Denysenko, “Chaos in Ukraine: the churches and the search for leadership”, in: *International journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, June 2014, p. 11

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

them”.²⁷ Likewise, the priests of the UAOC support soldiers spiritually and materially with clothes, food, medicine during the whole period of the war directly in the zones of the conflict – “the volunteers brought food, clothes, medicine to the soldiers and crosses, prayer books. The delegation, headed by the priest of the UAOC, visited 8 military units and handed over products and clothes of a total weight of about 1.5 tons”.²⁸ Svyatogirsk Lavra gave a shelter in their walls to 400 IDPs, including 100 children and 50 pregnant women, having provided them with all necessary facilities and three meals a day, appealing to other people to support this initiative and help financially.²⁹ Traditionally before Easter, the UOC spiritually supports the Ukrainian army by sending blessed Easter cakes to the front. Epifaniy continued such a tradition this year as well – “we are traditionally consecrating Easter cakes and send them to our glorious warriors who defend our territorial integrity...the UOC spiritually feed our soldiers”.³⁰ Moreover, Epifaniy actively supports chaplains of the UOC who are present in the Ukrainian army and spiritually support our soldiers.³¹ He hopes that chaplaincy will be implemented at the national level, that will guarantee chaplains the social protection as “practically each soldier needs a spiritual conversation with a clergyman chaplain”.³²

Thus, all churches and religious organizations have been actively involved, and still continue to be involved, in the tragic events of the Euromaidan and war in Eastern Ukraine “to provide people with psychological support and messages of reassurance in the times of severe emotional distress and every day tragedy.”³³ They were, and still have such a potential, the main tools to mobilize and unite people, adhering to a particular ideological policy, a set of beliefs that are supported by a particular state so as to avoid panic and chaos. In this vein, according to the theologian researcher Denys Shestopalets, the ideological war between Russia and Ukraine on both local and

²⁷ Kiyevskiy Patriarkhat peredal na nuzhdy armii polmilliona grivn, 31 March 2014, https://gazeta.ua/ru/articles/life/_kievskij-patriarhat-peredal-na-nuzhdy-armii-polmilliona-griven/550085, (consulted on 3.04.2019)

²⁸ Ukrayinska Pravoslavna Tserkva, Shhodennyk spivpratsi tserkvy ta ukrayinskoyi armiyi, 11 March 2016, <http://news.church.ua/2016/03/11/shhodennik-spivpraci-cerkvi-ta-ukrajinskoji-armiji/>, (consulted on 5.03.2019)

²⁹ Svyatohirska lavra prynyala u svoiykh stinakh 400 bizhentsiv, UNIAN, 13 June 2014, <https://religions.unian.ua/orthodoxy/928295-svyatogirska-lavra-priynyala-u-svojih-stinah-400-bizhentsiv.html>, (consulted on 5.03.2019)

³⁰ Mitropolit Yepifaniy otpravil na peredovoyu osvnyashchennyye paski, UNIAN, 23 April 2019, <https://www.unian.net/society/10527933-mitropolit-epifaniy-otpravil-na-peredovoyu-osvnyashchennyye-pashi-video.html>, (consulted on 28.04.2019)

³¹ Predstoyatel PTSU zaklykav deputativ prynyaty zakon pro viyskovykh kapelaniv, RISU, 24 April 2019, https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/community/faith_and_weapon/75549/, (consulted on 28.04.2019)

³² Ibid.

³³ Denys Shestopalets, The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, the State and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, 2014-2018, in: Politics, Religion, Ideology, 5 December 2018, p. 3

international levels aims to establish their own interpretation of events as predominant and thus to make their agenda and the means of its realization legitimate.³⁴

The Head of the Information Administration of the Kyiv Patriarchate, Archbishop Eustratius (Zoria) blessed those priests of KP who wished to provide pastoral and prayer assistance to parishioners who took part in public demonstrations in Kyiv. The only condition was not speak on political topics on behalf of the Church.

Regarding the violent actions of the police towards the protesters, the leaders of Orthodox churches totally condemned such a rout by force of the Euromaidan. The Patriarch of the UOC KP Filaret strongly condemned any act of violence: “As a Church, we morally condemn the cruel use of force to civilians... We also appeal to everyone, especially the police, the protesters as well, to prevent further increase of force”.³⁵

Metropolitan Borispolsky and Brovarsky Antony of the UAOC highlighted the role of the state to protect each citizen and society from sin. Such a policy is blessed by the Church. In cases when authorities demand from its citizens to renounce Christ and to force them to sinful acts, the Church reserves the right to urge its members to peaceful civil disobedience. Considering the issue of the European integration, the Metropolitan stated that “a broad discussion about Ukraine’s geopolitical vector of development is strongly needed so as to avoid any public confrontation”.³⁶

The central message of Patriarch Filaret’s speeches at that time “has revolved around exposing and condemning the aggression of Russia against Ukraine”.³⁷ Right after Yanukovich escaped the country, on March 11, 2014 the UOC KP published an official letter where the illegal annexation of Crimea was described as “an armed secessionist mutiny coup”.³⁸ Filaret emphasized that such tragic events were the result of the Russian aggression, Ukraine was a victim, Russia posed a great threat to the whole security order and world peace, the West must implement the 1994 Budapest memorandum, and he compared Putin’s actions to Hitler’s ones.³⁹ Later on in 2017, Filaret once again debunked the myth, supported by the UOC MP and ROC, that the war in Eastern Ukraine is purely a civil war: “The church should not tell lies. There is no civil war in East Ukraine – there is an aggressor, Russia, there. They interfered in our affairs, temporarily occupied Crimea even

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Glavy Tserkvey v Ukraine osudili zhestokost' militsii vo vremya razgroma Yevromaydana, NewsOnlineUa, <https://news.online.ua/620411/glavy-tserkvey-v-ukraine-osudili-zhestokost-militsii-vo-vremya-razgroma-evromaydana/>, (consulted on 25.02.2019).

³⁶ Ilya Barabanov, “Vazhno, chtoby sobytiya na Maydane stali privivkoy ot nasiliya i agressii”, Pravoslaviye v Ukraine, 11 February, 2014, <http://orthodoxy.org.ua/data/vazhno-chtoby-sobytiya-na-maydane-stali-privivkroy-ot-nasiliya-i-agressii-mitropolit-antony/>, (consulted on 10.02.2019)

³⁷ Denys Shestopalets, The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, the State and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, 2014-2018, in: Politics, Religion, Ideology, 5 December 2018, p. 11

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 12.

though Russia is a guarantor of our territorial unity...the whole strength of the secessionists comes from Russia's help with its military forces and arms."⁴⁰

One of the most famous Ukrainian historians and theologians Viktor Yelensky said that none of the Ukrainian churches kept silent after November 30, 2014 – priests provided not only spiritual help, but also the material one.⁴¹ Once again, despite Ukrainian religious pluralism, the theologian highlighted the key and deep role of Ukrainian churches during the Euromaidan events and the ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine.

Olexandr Paliy, the Kievan historian and political scientist, views Euromaidan as the peaceful struggle with the Soviet Union legacy and the oligarchic political system, and church is simply the bearer of social spirituality and morals in this struggle.⁴² An expert Katerina Shchetkina notes that the institution of the church becomes a part of social and public life of Ukraine – “church does not go to the podium or hold demonstrative performances regarding the topic “church-state” as it was in 2004. Church is present and helps where it is necessary”.⁴³

So, Maidan and further “great geopolitical” events has shown that the institution of the Church appears to be a crucial factor in the formation of the future of Ukraine. The phenomenon of Civic Church was witnessed at that time that integrated various churches, denominational representatives, spiritual leaders and citizens, united by a common goal to build a bright future of Ukraine, on the basis of higher spiritual values and religious-national ideas.⁴⁴

Time has elapsed since 2014, the illegal annexation of Crimea and Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine have been witnessed as well as religious schism in the ranks of the UAOC, UOC KP and the powerful UOC MP. In the aftermath of the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity and further strengthening of the Ukrainian national identity – the issue of the autocephaly of the UOC has been raised more than ever vis-à-vis the so-called Russian World. All in all, the Russian aggression accelerated the process of the unification of the UOC as, the original ideas for an independent church first emerged in 1921 during UNR, that were difficult to achieve due to the Soviet rule and the lack of recognition by the rest of the Orthodoxy. Ukrainian aspirations for its independent Orthodox church revived right after the fall of the Soviet Union, when on October 22, 1989, at the Council of Priests and Laity in Lviv, the revival of the UAOC was proclaimed.⁴⁵ The unification

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 13.

⁴¹ Elenskii Viktor, Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the Ukrainian Project, in: Russian Social Science Review, vol. 56, no. 3, 2015

⁴² Bohdan Kostyuk, Ukrayinska Tserkva ta Yevromaydan, Radio Svoboda, 25 December 2013, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/25212453.html>, (consulted on 20.03.2019)

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Gorkusha Oksana, Filipovich Lyudmila, Narodzhena on Maydani - Gromadianska Tserkva of Ukraine, RISU, 15 May 2014, https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/studios/studies_of_religions/56419/, (consulted on 20.03.2019)

⁴⁵ Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, RISU, June 2011, https://risu.org.ua/en/index/reference/major_religions/~UAOC/33294/, (consulted on 20.03.2019)

process of churches in Ukraine began 1990-s when the UOC KP elected its Patriarch Metropolitan Filaret (Denysenko) who demanded autocephaly for UOC in the context of the gained independence. After refusal, he managed to form the “self-styled” KP and for such actions he was declared anathema by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1997.⁴⁶ The UOC KP and UAOC have functioned as unrecognized churches since the 1990-s and have been the major instigators of a break with Russian influence and the establishment of a new independent unified church.⁴⁷ In the wake of the Euromaidan, demands for the autocephaly and criticism for the UOC MP highly increased again. In 2016 the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko appealed to the Council of Bishops of the UOC MP and its Primate Metropolitan Onufriy (Berezovsky) reminding about Ukrainian aspirations for autocephaly – “Not only do we unanimously endorse and support the aspirations of the Ukrainian Orthodox flock to full independence, i.e. the canonical autocephaly, but take all steps to get this vital issue of our church legally resolved”.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the issue regarding the autocephaly of the UOC was withdrawn from the agenda of the pan-Orthodox Council in Crete in 2016.

Only on January 6, 2019 a unique historic event was marked – Primate of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine Epifaniy, received the long-awaited Tomos of autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in Istanbul. It is argued by experts whether this decision has truly come from the church or has been a political one before presidential elections. On the day of Epifaniy’s enthronization (Feb 2, 2019) Poroshenko stressed that church is and will be independent of the state. At the same time he believes that “the church and the state will now be able to enter onto a path toward genuine partnership of the church and state for joint work for the good of the country and the people”.⁴⁹ Regarding Russian reaction, Metropolitan Epifaniy was even more blunt – “the Russian Orthodox Church is the last advance post of Vladimir Putin in Ukraine” and that the appearance of the OCU undercuts the imperial goals of the Kremlin leader.”⁵⁰ The position towards the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea is clear – “Putin is losing here in Ukraine the support which he had before because if he had not had this support, there would not have been a war in the Donbas. And therefore, we will consistently maintain ourselves as a single church recognized and canonical in Ukraine. And gradually Russia will lose this influence through the souls of Orthodox

⁴⁶ Constantinople removes anathemas from schismatic leaders, Greek media reporters, Constantinople, October 11, 2018, <http://orthochristian.com/116406.html>, (consulted on 20.03.2019)

⁴⁷ Andreja Bogdanovski, The long lead up to the separation of the Ukrainian Church, December 2018, p. 3

⁴⁸ President Poroshenko issued the address to the Council of Bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, RISU, January 2016, https://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/state/church_state_relations/62339/, (consulted on 25.03.2019)

⁴⁹ Paul A. Gauble, Orthodox Church of Ukraine won’t be a State Church, Poroshenko says, EuroMaidan Press, February 2019, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2019/02/04/orthodox-church-of-ukraine-wont-be-a-state-church-poroshenko-says/>, (consulted on 27.03.2019)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Ukrainians here”.⁵¹The UOC expresses its full support for peace and release of all political prisoners, who are being illegally detained in Russia, it is obviously seen from Epifaniy’s speeches – “together with the prayers of gratitude, we are also praying to God today for our Ukrainian people, who have been suffering for five years from the war brought from outside to our peaceful home. We ask Your Holiness [Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I], the entire mother church and all local churches to pray for fair peace for Ukraine and we believe that, as God heard our joint sincere prayers for peace and unity for our church and fulfilled what we had asked for, so the Lord will hear these prayers and give peace and unity to our state, and well-being and prosperity to the Ukrainian people. We especially ask for God's protection of those who, for their love for Ukraine, are now suffering from captivity, unfair imprisonment or persecution, suffering from war and enslavement”.⁵²

Epifaniy also appeals to the international community to protect churches and clergies of the UOC in the so-called DNR and LNR territories – “Already from March 1, 2019 and on, the communities and clerics of our Church face a threat of complete prohibition of their activities, the complete confiscation of community property and the deportation of priests from the so-called DPR territory”.⁵³ He asked everyone to pray for them and for all people there who are constantly suffering from the violation of their basic human rights.

In recent official statements, the Ukrainian church leader emphasized that Ukrainian state does not meddle in the religious affairs unlike Russia – “I think that Putin, when he made a decision whether to unleash a war with Ukraine or not, paid a lot of attention to the church factor. Patriarch Kirill had come to Ukraine several times, convening certain people. However, sometimes they were “photoshopped in”. And, apparently, Putin got the impression that he has absolute support here and will be greeted with flowers. The Ukrainian people showed him a completely different picture. However, in the so-called Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate there was, and still is, real support of Russia”.⁵⁴ At the same time, Epifaniy does not deny the fact that UOC supports close relations with the state authorities that contributed to the process of uniting all the Orthodox churches into one and finally getting the long-awaited Tomos.⁵⁵ Current Church-State

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Leader of Ukraine’s church asks Orthodox churches to pray for peace, release of captives, UNIAN, January 2019, https://www.unian.info/society/10400367-leader-of-ukraine-s-church-asks-orthodox-churches-to-pray-for-peace-release-of-captives.html?utm_source=unian&utm_medium=related_news&utm_campaign=related_news_in_post, (consulted on 20.03.2019)

⁵³ OCU Primate calls on international community to protect churches and clergy of OCU in occupied Donbas, RISU, February 2019, https://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/ocu/74863/, (consulted on 30.03.2019)

⁵⁴ Epifaniy: No state intervention in church’s affairs in Ukraine, unlike in Russia, UNIAN, March 2019, <https://www.unian.info/politics/10467300-epifaniy-no-state-intervention-in-church-s-affairs-in-ukraine-unlike-in-russia.html>, (consulted on 30.03.2019)

⁵⁵ Ibid.

tight cooperation has been once again confirmed during the day of electoral silence when the incumbent president Petro Poroshenko together with other authority representatives and Metropolitan Epifaniy took part so as to pray for fair elections – “Lord, give us unity”. After a landslide victory of Volodymyr Zelenskiy in the presidential elections on April 21, 2019, the religious situation has slightly deteriorated. Patriarch Filaret accused the Head of the UOC Epifaniy of breaking agreements that were reached during the unification council on December 18, 2018 – “the primate is responsible for the external representation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), and the patriarch is responsible for the internal church life in Ukraine, but in cooperation with the primate. The primate shall do nothing in the church without the consent of the patriarch. The patriarch chairs the meetings of the Holy Synod and the UOC meetings for the sake of preserving unity, its growth, and affirmation”.⁵⁶ Filaret refuses to recognize the UOC-KP as liquidated and tends to keep its influence on the church, whereas Epifaniy supports the “Greek system” of the OGU by Phanar.⁵⁷ Filaret also accuses Epifaniy of the lack of communication and cooperation and even suspects that Epifaniy takes decisions under someone’s control. Recently, the President-elect Volodymyr Zelenskiy has posted a video message of all leaders of Ukrainian religious denominations to Ukrainians who live in Crimea and the so-called LNR/DNR territories but Epifaniy refused to be shown in such a video – “The cleric was allegedly worried that it would seem if he was calling for talks with militant leaders. The hierarch did not like the piece he was offered to voice, calling on parties to stop "speaking the language of the cannons”.⁵⁸ On the one hand, it clearly indicates the willingness and readiness of the new President to cooperate with all religious leaders so as to establish the long-awaited peace in Eastern Ukraine and reintegrate territories and people, on the other hand, it shows the dependence of Ukrainian churches on the position of the authorities and potential schism between UOC-KP and UOC.

In the context of all tragic events since 2014 and especially during the Presidential elections, the constant cases of the “hate speech” are witnessed from the Russian side. The official position of the UOC regarding the hate speech is clear and firm – “the Church calls on the faithful in the spirit of Christian responsibility to refrain from aggression in communication. We would like to remind the words of the Gospel: “I say to you, that every empty word that men say, they will answer the judgment day” (Matthew 12:36). This applies not only to the words spoken aloud, but also to those

⁵⁶ Patriarch Filaret talks of split, schools Metropolitan Epifaniy, May, 2019, <https://www.unian.info/society/10549452-patriarch-filaret-talks-of-split-schools-metropolitan-epifaniy.html>, (consulted on 16.05.2019).

⁵⁷ The Patriarch stressed the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate had not been liquidated, May, 2019, <https://www.unian.info/society/10546605-patriarch-filaret-admits-split-in-newly-formed-orthodox-church-of-ukraine.html>, (consulted on 16.05.2019).

⁵⁸ Zelenskiy posts “peace message” of Ukraine’s religious leaders to residents of occupied Crimea, Donbas, May 2019, <https://www.unian.info/society/10547817-zelenskiy-posts-peace-message-of-ukraine-s-religious-leaders-to-residents-of-occupied-crimea-donbas.html>, (consulted on 16.06.2019).

printed on paper or electronically transmitted texts distributed through the Internet.... Everyone has the right to his own opinion and position, especially when it comes to responsibility for the future of Ukraine, but the clergy must express their views constructively, remembering the spiritual responsibility and calling to give others a good example in words and deeds.”⁵⁹ Generally, the UOC is against any manifestations of the hate speech and any divisions among the civil society. However, the role of the UOC in mediating conflicts upon the ground of the hate speech is very limited in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. For instance, in Crimea the Russian authorities and its media represent Ukrainians as fascists, nationalists who must be eliminated; the UOC-KP is presented as “nationalist blessing group for murder, that has no relations to the official church at all”⁶⁰ Such hate speeches cause people to feel fear and hatred and make people an easy target for further manipulations.⁶¹ It also leads to further spreading of hate in social media and civil society. The Russian media also presents the transition of the parishes of the UOC MP to the UOC as the illegal and violent process, done by force.

Nevertheless, currently more than 500 parishes out of the 12.000 of the UOC MP joined the UOC and their transition has been peaceful, despite all the manipulation, hate speech and fake news from the Kremlin. The intentions to continue such a peaceful transition was underscored by the Primate of the UOC himself: “This process is gradual, and I adhere to the position that we must not measure this with time and quantity. This process should be gradual, peaceful, voluntary. The basis is not quantity but the absence of conflict or war. We have no right to incite another religious front in Ukraine. We have enough war in the east. If we open the religious front inside the country, then this can end very sadly for the Ukrainian state. [...] There is no need to take into account the figures and set chronological frames”.⁶²

However, despite all the assurances from the UOC that state does not meddle in the religious affairs but merely contributes to the unification process, the Ukrainian authorities and the President himself actively poses Tomos as their own great political victory vis-à-vis Russia during election campaign. The former President Petro Poroshenko even organized the so-called Tomos-tour around Ukraine. But, the UOC’s independence is the logical result of its constant struggle against the UOC-MP and the aspirations of its believers. At the legal level, the Parliament of Ukraine adopted a new bill on January 17 that changes the affiliation of the religious communities in

⁵⁹ Ukrayinska Pravoslavna Tserkva zasudzhuye proyavy “movy nenavysti”, April, 2019, <https://www.pomisna.info/news/ukrayinska-pravoslavna-tserkva-zasudzhuye-proyavy-movy-nenavysti/>, (consulted on 8/05/2019)

⁶⁰ Iryna Sedova, Mova vorozhnechi – tse zasib kontrolyu nad suspil'stvom v Krymu, Crimean Human Rights Group, April 2018, <https://crimeahrg.org/uk/8040/>, (consulted on 8.05.2019)

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² About 400 UOC-MP parishes joined Orthodox Church in Ukraine, Ukrinform, April 2019, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-society/2651057-about-400-uocmp-parishes-joined-orthodox-church-of-ukraine-epiphanius.html>, (consulted on 30.04.2019)

Ukraine. It directly addresses the parishioners from the structure of a religious organization whose governing centre is located outside Ukraine – “an organ of a state that has committed military aggression against Ukraine.” Moreover, it restricts access to military units for the Moscow Patriarchate’s clergy.⁶³

The director of the Brussels-based NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers stressed that “Interreligious conflicts would be highly detrimental for the social, political, and regional stability of Ukraine. Neither (Ukrainian) President (Petro) Poroshenko, who personally deployed huge efforts to obtain the autocephaly of a ‘truly’ independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church before the presidential election, nor the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, should instrumentalise religious divides for political purposes. It is, unfortunately, the trend that we are witnessing on both sides and the EU should not remain a passive observer of such a situation”.⁶⁴

According to an American theologian Shaun Casey, Tomos will lead only to the unification of the UOC and will provide with an opportunity to cooperate with religious diversity.⁶⁵ Moreover, in order to avoid geopolitical turbulence, it is of high importance to analyze complex relations between religious groups and the government, especially in the context of the “Ukraine crisis”. The Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun emphasized that Tomos deals with the structure of Orthodox (Eastern) churches, that is unlike in centralized, pyramidal structure of Catholicism with the Pope on the top, are divided into local churches and constitute some kind of Commonwealth.⁶⁶ Therefore, Tomos is viewed as an opportunity to heal the schism between these local churches and unite all its believers to avoid potential splits in the civil society in the long term.

In the final part of the current paper we will reflect upon how the church deals with the social issues - the official position and reaction of church on hate speech and discrimination against LGBT, religious and ethnic minorities, as well as its relation with far-right groups.

Nowadays, the issue of LGBT rights has been put rather high on the political agenda worldwide. One of the key questions under consideration here is the official position of the Church towards the LGBT movement. The case study of Ukraine will illustrate here such a position towards the representatives of the LGBT minority and whether the Church leads to the unification or depolarization of the civil society regarding this mainstream issue. Moreover, the reaction of the Church on questions of the discrimination (if such) will also be addressed.

⁶³ Martin Banks, Politics cloud relations between rival Orthodox patriarchates in Ukraine, New Europe, February, 2019, <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/politics-clouds-relations-between-rival-orthodox-patriarchates-in-ukraine/>, (consulted on 5.03.2019)

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Natalya Humenyuk, “Vyborgtsi rozumnishi, vony ne dumayut: pishov do moyeyi tserkvy, holosuyu za noho, eks-poslanets’ Derzhdepu SSA z relihiyi”, Hromadske UA, April, 2019, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/viborci-rozumnishi-voni-ne-dumayut-pishov-do-moyeyi-cerkvi-golosuyu-za-nogo-eks-poslanec-derzhdepu-ssha-z-relihiyi>, (consulted on 25.04.2019)

⁶⁶ Interview with the Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun, the Sunday Show, Hromadske.EU, January, 2019.

It is worth mentioning that the official position of the Catholic Church has recently been changed towards the LGBT. For instance, in the USA, Ireland and Germany gay marriages have been allowed and the discrimination of the LGBT minorities has been prohibited at the official level. But such liberal tendencies towards the LGBT have not been witnessed in Ukraine yet on a large scale. Ukrainian priests have declared the LGBT minority as the main threat that destroys family values. The Archpriest of the UOC KP Sergii Chudinovich expressed such a position towards the constant discrimination of the LGBT minority despite the thesis that God loves all his creations – “the Church based on the Word of God categorically opposes sin. If sexual acts of a man are sinful, then such acts are useless and unnecessary. The Church condemns sin, not a man”.⁶⁷ The priest of the UOC KP Vyacheslav Kolesnikov said that “the Church views homosexuality as some kind of the deviation, violation of natural order. Such people should not be expelled from the society, they must and should be equal members of the society. When homosexuality is the result of fornication – such behaviour should be condemned as unacceptable. Homosexuality should never be advertised. But no criminal prosecution and no violation of human rights are allowed”.⁶⁸ The executive director of the “Tochka Opory” Bogdan Globa emphasized that “the Church needs some kind of an enemy. The LGBT minority perfectly suits such a role. Since this minority is usually not visible. It is not numerous in society and could be easily accused of all possible sins”.⁶⁹ The negative position towards the LGBT minority has been also expressed by the Metropolitan Borispolsky and Brovarsky of the UAOC. He fuelled his arguments against the LGBT by facts that even the Catholic Church and much of the Protestant community negatively evaluate such relationships.⁷⁰ The official position of the UAOC is supported not only with comparisons with other churches worldwide, but also by extracts from the Bible. In Leviticus’ book it is written “do not lie with your husband as a woman. This is the abomination”. The Apostle Paul clearly writes to the Corinthians: “You deceive yourself... the husband... will not inherit the Kingdom of God”.⁷¹ He stated that many religious communities evaluate homosexuality as a sin. Moreover, other

⁶⁷Oleksiy Simonchuk, LGBT and Church: is there any possibility to compromise?, National LGBT Portal of Ukraine, January, 2017. Available at: https://www.lgbt.org.ua/materials/show_3710/ (consulted on 29.12.2018).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Synodal Information and Education Department of the UOC, Metropolitan Antoni: Church does not support the LGBT movements as it is an open propaganda of the sinful lifestyle, June, 2018. Available at: <http://news.church.ua/2018/06/16/mitropolit-antonij-cerkva-ne-pidtrimuje-rux-lgbt-tomu-shho-ce-vidkrite-propaguvannya-grixovnogo-sposobu-zhittya/> (consulted on 29.12.2018).

⁷¹ Ibid.

confessions do not support the LGBT-movement, viewing it as an open propaganda of a sinful lifestyle.⁷²

It is important to highlight that within KyivPride the presentation on “Orthodoxy and LGBT” was organized, where the relevance of such a discussion was questioned once again. But the Metropolitan Borispol'sky and Brovar'sky of the UAOC thinks the discussion and an open dialogue are of high importance for the Church. It should learn as well how to conduct such a dialogue. Nevertheless, it might be concluded that the narrative of the Church regarding the LGBT-movement will not be changed in the near future. As in such dialogues the UAOC will continue to stick to its moral principles, which flow directly from the Holy Writing, pointing out to mistakes and helping people to correct them.

The Metropolitan also paid his attention to such concepts as “equality” and “equality of rights”. Christianity proceeds from the fact that for each of us the God assigns special tasks. There is a special call addressed for each group of people. For instance, a man is called to protect his native land, a woman is called to be a mother. But the March of Equality is perceived to be a substitution of concepts. When a person strives to legitimize his sinful lifestyle, this is not a desire for equality. This is a rebellion against the order established by God.⁷³

Filaret, as the Head of the UOC KP, emphasized that the loss of spirituality is not a threat for Ukraine. Moreover, there is no church in Ukraine that supports gay marriages at the official level. According to Filaret, a gay can be a Christian, but a Christian by name. In reality, a Christian must not do it. That is why, in Europe there are a lot of Christians by name, but as a matter of fact they are far from Christianity. But we want the Church to stimulate Christian life. However, on the question whether he would read the burial service to a gay, Filaret answered positively – “if he is a Christian I would do it. He is a sinner, but a Christian. The Church prays for everyone, even for serious sinners, so as God will forgive their sins. Everything depends on God”.⁷⁴

The position of the UOC after Tomos towards the LGBT minority was expressed by Epifaniy – “the church clearly distinguishes where there is a sin; we cannot call a sin good. There is a person we treat with love. But there is a sin that we must stop and talk openly about it. There is a lifestyle that is incompatible with the Christian views. That is why there is a position of the Orthodox Church, the appeal of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and regarding this issue we are adamant. That is why we base on the basics of the Holy Scripture, where it is clearly stated that it is a sin. We, as a Church, cannot call it good. Therefore, people must repent of their sins, correct their mistakes. If a person repents, admits his mistakes, so of course, he can take part in the sacrament

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

of communion.”⁷⁵ Moreover Epifaniy stressed that – “we should distance our church from the conservative Russian tradition...church must be open, must be the spiritual guide of the Ukrainian people. We must be with people and understand their problems. But the process will be gradual”.⁷⁶ Regarding the relationship with ethnic minorities, especially in Western Ukraine, the UOC keeps the language of worship of a particular ethnic minority, for instance in Bukovina the language of worship is Romanian.⁷⁷ Generally, the transition of church communities of national minorities to the UOC is peaceful and based on mutual respect to the religious choice. However, the situation is tense in Eastern Ukraine, where Russia still influences and destabilizes such a transition process and fuels it with fake news and forcible seizure of temples of the UOC in the area of the so-called DNR/LNR territories. In Crimea, the Russian-occupation authorities simply refused to register the UOC.⁷⁸

To sum up, religion is one the most potent ideological tool and factor between Russia and Ukraine. The autocephaly of the UOC will impact profoundly the EaP region and the Orthodox community generally and provoke the Kremlin for harsher actions and manipulations, as it has lost one of its vital soft instruments of its hybrid warfare toolkit and its trump card in Ukraine per se – the UOC MP that is directly subordinated to the ROC, and viewed as a fifth column or an arm of the Russian secret service that is called to tear apart Ukraine at the ideological level. Tomos of the UOC is a symbolic answer to the Russian aggression generally. The UOC’s autocephaly could have a “domino effect” in the EaP region as well, but at this moment there no political and social preconditions for such a move. It will change the balance of power in the Orthodox world and show in the future whom the rest of the Orthodox churches will support, thus revealing once again the real geopolitical moods and genuine attitudes towards Ukraine. On the contrary, Ukraine has finally gained one of the major instruments of the mobilization and marker of its national identity – the UOC. On the eve of the 1020th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus’ in Ukraine, the Patriarch Bartholomew elaborated that: “the Ecumenical patriarchate exercised always its obligation by attuning its sensible spiritual antennas to the needs of the Orthodox people and to the peculiar

⁷⁵ Yepifaniy nazval usloviya, pri kotorykh gotov dopustit geyev i lesbiyanok k prichastiyu, March 2019, <https://strana.ua/news/188666-epifanij-zajavil-cto-hotov-dopustit-lhbt-ko-prichastiju-esli-oni-ispravjat-svoi-oshibki.html>, (consulted on 30.03.2019)

⁷⁶ Yepifaniy zayavil prankeru, chto PTSU “budet rabotat” nad priznaniyem LGBT, no eto “dolgiy put” , December 2018, <https://strana.ua/news/178013-v-ptsu-zajavili-cto-hotovy-nachat-reformy-v-tserkvi-i-postepenno-priznat-lhbt.html>, (consulted on 1.01.2018)

⁷⁷ Aleksander Dmytruk, Nova tserkva Ukrayiny na Bukovyni obitsyaye zberehty movu sluzhinnya dlya natsmenshyn, January 2019, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/nova-cerkva-ukrayini-na-bukovini-obicyaye-zberehti-movu-sluzhinnya-dlya-nacmenshin>, (consulted on 25.04.2019)

⁷⁸ Okupanti vidmovilisya reyestruvati v krimu ukrayinsku tserkvu aktivisti, April 2019, <https://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1795777-okupanti-vidmovilisya-reyestruvati-v-krimu-ukrayinsku-tserkvu-aktivisti>, (consulted on 27.04.2019)

circumstances of each age, but always within the established framework of the Orthodox tradition”.⁷⁹ Taking into account the long history and fight for the autocephaly by the Ukrainian church, tragic events since 2014 and never-ending “Ukraine crisis”, Tomos seems to be a logical outcome that Ukrainians need spiritually to stay united and fight against the enemy, thus prompting the Ecumenical Patriarchate to finally grant the long-awaited Orthodox independence from Russia. Moreover, according to Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun “the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church will contribute to the diversity of a religious landscape”.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, Archbishop Evstratiy Zorya of the UOC-KP encapsulates clear anti-Russian position – “having a church that is dependent on Russia is...a threat to our national security and a threat to our existence as Ukrainians”.⁸¹

It is obvious that the Russian Orthodox Church will continue to twist facts and persuade the remainder of the Orthodox Churches not to recognize the UOC. It is still a potential threat of a religious war in the background of a volatile political and economic situation in Ukraine, especially during the election year that could trigger more provocations from the Kremlin side, that has already ushered in that the autocephaly was illegal, wrong and immoral, and the transition of the parishes of the UOC MP was done by force. Nevertheless, the whole process of granting Tomos to the UOC has been peaceful, avoiding all violence, forceful seizure of parishes and successfully debunking Russian propaganda. However, the influence of the ROC at the geopolitical level is still huge that has been once again witnessed by the denial of the UOC’s autocephaly by the Orthodox Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia, Church of Poland and the Serbian Orthodox Church. The UOC has a stronger influence inside Ukraine that it used to have before its autocephaly and has to develop it further in order to unite the country, to win more hearts and minds and contribute to mobilization of the civil society. It still has to develop its potential on the geopolitical arena vis-à-vis the ROC and operate independently from the state authorities, adjusting to its own cultural ideology and interest of the Ukrainian civil society so as to become one of the most trusted institutions in the Ukrainian society and harbinger of long-awaited peace. All in all, as it was foreseen by one of the theoreticians of Ukrainian nationalism, Viacheslav Lipinskii, - “the future of the UOC depends not on its directing all its energy toward a superficial Ukrainization, very materialistic in its tendencies, but on a great inner spiritual and religious upsurge”.⁸² The newly-established UOC should not be dependent on the authorities so as to avoid further divisions, its constant dependence on the official policy of the state that could lead to the deterioration of its

⁷⁹ Nicholas E. Denysenko, *Chaos in Ukraine: the churches and the search for leadership*, International journal for the Study of the Christian Church, June 2014, p. 5

⁸⁰ Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun, *Why Ukraine needs a free and recognized Orthodox Church*, EuroMaidan press, May 2018, p. 14

⁸¹ George Soroka, *A house divided. Orthodoxy in post-Maidan Ukraine*, New Eastern Europe, 2018, p. 6

⁸² Viktor Elenskii, *Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the Ukrainian Project*, Russian Social Science Review, August 2015, p. 13

positive image or an authoritative peaceful actor in the civil society and in the Orthodoxy world. Inner feuds between Filaret and Epifaniy could potentially deepen the inner church schism and only divide its laypeople, especially after Filaret's claims that he did not know the content of the Tomos.

The position of the church towards the LGBT minority in Ukraine is not a radical one, but it is based on the Holy Writing and strictly condemns homosexuality. On the whole, it does not lead to a deep polarization in the civil society regarding this issue. The church acts as moral guide here, asking people to repent of their sins and lead a righteous life. Regarding the transition of churches of various ethnic minorities to the UOC in Western Ukraine, this process is peaceful; the situation in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea is still influenced by Russia, and the process of such transition is based on intimidation and hate speech that flow from the Russian authorities. Generally, the UOC is against any manifestations of the hate speech and any divisions among the civil society. However, the role of the UOC in mediating conflicts upon the ground of the hate speech is very limited in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

The UOC clearly and openly condemns the Russian aggression and generally adheres to the peaceful settlement of the conflicts that have been illustrated by some empirical examples above during one of the most tragic events - the Euromaidan, war in Eastern Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea. All in all, the newly established UOC has a great potential to become a powerful peace actor, a moral guide and unite people spiritually, regarding all sharp socio-political and geopolitical issues unless it is torn by inner feuds and its dependence on the authorities.

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