The Religious Factor in Conflict

Research on the Peacebuilding Potential of Religious Communities in Ukraine

PAX

About PAX

PAX means peace. PAX is a partnership between IKV (Interchurch Peace Council) and Pax Christi. PAX works together with committed citizens and partners to protect civilians against acts of war, to end armed violence, and to build a just peace. PAX works on the basis of two central values of peace in conflict areas: human dignity and solidarity with peace activists and victims of war violence. In 2017, PAX, as an active member of ICAN, the international coalition for the abolishment of nuclear weapons, was awarded the Nobel peace prize.

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This study has been carried out in the framework of the project "Faith in Religious Pluralism," supported by the Permanent Representation of the Netherlands to the OSCE and coordinated by PAX, the biggest peacebuilding organization in the Netherlands (Stichting Vredesbeweging **PAX** Nederland). The aim of the project is to implement activities that reinforce freedom of religion as one of the key elements of a general human rights policy and to develop practical tools to minimize existing and potential challenges in Ukrainian religious communities while strengthening the tradition of religious pluralism and relative tolerance in Ukraine.

The aim of the study was to explore the peacebuilding potential of Ukrainian religious communities and actors by focusing on individual communities in two target areas (Volyn and Donbas) and to identify opportunities for building peace and eliminating possible destructive influences of religion on the social and political situation in Ukraine.

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Methodology: The study investigates the religious component in society at large, in selected communities, and in people's visions of resolution of the armed conflict. To this end, we carried out fourteen semi-structured in-depth interviews in the framework of qualitative sociology. The interviews were conducted in Donetsk, Lviv, Rivne, and Volyn regions in February and March 2020. Our respondents were active church ministers and lay persons of different Christian faith communions. The particular regions were selected in view of the specificity of the spread of social conflicts that involve representatives of religious communities in Ukraine, as well as in view of the significantly different regional contexts in eastern and western parts of the country. Our analysis took into account previous research and reports on the religious component in conflict and the potential of involving religious actors in peacebuilding in a broad sense. All quotations from the interviews are published anonymously, according to the terms of confidentiality agreed with the participants.

Content:

Abbreviations:

• UCCRO: Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations

• OCU: Orthodox Church of Ukraine

• UOC MP: Ukrainian Orthodox Church in canonical unity with the Moscow Patriarchate

• UOC (KP): Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate

• UAOC: Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church

• UGCC: Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

• RCC: Roman Catholic Church

• RO: religious organization

Religion in Conflict: a Dividing or a Connecting factor?

Both in the framework of conflicts and their transformations, religion can be seen through different prisms. E.g., it can be understood substantively (in view of what it is) or functionally (according to how it manifests itself)[1]. In this research we rely on studies of functional manifestations of religion and take a **constructivist approach**. A constructivist approach considers religion as something to which people ascribe religious characteristics, which is convenient in the context of peace work. For instance, religion can be a part of a **social discourse**, forming a system of symbols that help instill strong feelings or motivations in people by shaping their ideas of the general order of things[2]. This is especially true in conflicts, in particular armed confrontations, where different discourses and narratives of the parties involved may be in conflict with each other.

When analyzing religious discourse, the focus should be placed on the **systems of force and power** in the society, since they are of most influence on conflict and the social structure[3]. In situations of armed confrontation, religion may manifest itself as "strong," i.e. as a main factor of violence, or "weak," i.e. as a secondary factor[4]. As studies have demonstrated[5], starting from late 2013 religion in Ukraine has manifested as "weak" in the reality of the conflict, i.e. it has not been the primary cause of hostilities, but the religious component has either influenced the conflict's escalation or attempted to contribute into peacebuilding. More specifically, sometimes the religious component is instrumentalized by certain political or other social groups and used for labeling a certain community as "one's own" or "foreign." Those manifestations are described in more detail in the research findings.

The experience of international conflicts demonstrates that in most cases religion does not cause wars[6]. Moreover, **religion by itself cannot be either peaceful or militant**; such are only its

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1 Owen Frazer and Richard Friedli, Approaching Religion in Conflict Transformation: Concepts, Cases and Practical Implications// Center for Security Studies (CSS), 2015, p. 8

2 Geertz, C., (1973 [1966]), "Religion as a Cultural System" The Interpretation of Cultures, New York: Basic Books, reprinted in abridged form in Lambek, Michael (ed.) (2002), A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 63.

3 Asad, T., (1993), "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category" in Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

4 The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding *Edited by R. Scott Appleby, Atalia Omer, and David Little// Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 34*

5 M. Cherenkov, T. Kalenychenko, T. Antoshevskyy *Leaders in Trust: The Churches' Social Activism in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine/* Civil Society in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine. From Revolution to Consolidation. SPSS, ed. By Andreas Umland, vol. 193, 2018; see also Kalenychenko T.A. *Public religion in global scope: the case of Maidan protest in Ukraine//* Euxeunios, St. Gallen University. – Religion and Politics in Ukraine after the Maidan protests, 24/2017. – p. 23-38

6 David Smock, Religion in World Affairs Its Role in Conflict and Peace// US Institute of Peace (2008), p.3

aspects and interpretations suggested by people[7]. In a conflict situation, the religious factor most often comes in as a dividing force when some people start to consider themselves to be "closer to God" than other people. In other words, although in theory all people are equal, some appear to be "more equal" and seem to possess special rights and opportunities granted by God. This idea of "being chosen" leads to the deepening of dividing lines and presents a serious threat to potential peacebuilding. In such a situation, religion can foster opportunities and motivations for the reinforcement of opposing identities in the confrontation and contribute to promoting violence.

However, the religious factor can also act as a connecting force. Because people are unwilling to involve non-secular organizations in political processes or lack understanding of how religious organizations can influence the course of the conflict itself, the peacebuilding potential of religious communities and structures often does not receive due attention both in peacebuilding work and in conflict studies. In reality, however, there are different ways in which religious organizations can participate in the **promotion of peace**: as trusted institutions; as bearers of values; as a moral foundation for confronting injustice; as levers for promoting reconciliation; as mobilizers of communities, nations and groups for peacebuilding; and as a motivation for peacemakers[8]. Religious leaders can act as **mediators and facilitators** if they can be neutral representatives to different sides of the conflict.

Thus, from the perspective of the collective action theory, manifestations of religion can influence conflict both in a *destructive* and in a *constructive* way; the latter provides a potential for including the religion aspect into work on future reconciliation.

When considering the religious factor as a potential for peacebuilding, it is important to concentrate on institutions that have influence and spiritual authority on a certain territory and enjoy close relationships with local communities[9]. The influence of religious communities on the formation of citizens' moral identity includes impact on their everyday thoughts and actions, which can also affect post-conflict solutions in the country. A **moral identity** exists in social practices as a product of interpretation of religious discourse, and develops into a way of life in society[10]. If religious actors that are involved in peacebuilding accept the uniqueness of every human being, they can reorient themselves toward the search for joint universal solutions. **Religious peacebuilding** is work that is aimed at building healthy and peaceful communities with the participation of religious actors; it also implies interaction with religious traditions and their contexts through activities that are carried out both inside and between religious movements with the help of dialogical methods and education[11].

Because this report focuses on the potential of the involvement of religious actors in the armed conflict in Ukraine into peacebuilding practices, it is worth taking a closer look at the concept of **faith-based diplomacy**. Such diplomacy is wider than just work with religious organizations, because it does focus on aspects of faith in the diplomatic realm, mind the role of the state, represent and delegate representatives of religious organizations, use a wide range of diplomatic

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7 Johan Galtung, Religion and Peace: Some Reflections// Center for International Studies, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1986, p. 11

8 David Smock, Religion in World Affairs Its Role in Conflict and Peace// US Institute of Peace (2008), p.4

9 Denis Dragovic, Religion and Post-Conflict Statebuilding: Roman Catholic and Sunni Islamic Perspectives// Palgrave Studies in Compromise after Conflict, 2015, p. 13

10 Heather Dubois, Religion and Peacebuilding// Journal of Religion, Conflict and Peace, Volume 1. Issue 2, Spring 2008, p. 4

11 Johan Galtung, Religion and Peace: Some Reflections// Center for International Studies, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1986, p. 8

instruments, and may imply special preparation for diplomats[12]. Thus, the key aspect of faith-based diplomacy is the transformation of relationships through faith and personal beliefs[13].

Faith-based diplomacy relies upon existing **religious narratives** produced by communities and can be applied in different fields. In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, a key aspect is its ability to mobilize religious leaders to spread peace and to act as a third party in negotiations in cases where the conflict does not have a religious dimension (though this places special demands on them). The condition for in-depth dialogue, especially for dialogue between representatives of different religions and denominations, is their understanding of their own traditions and their willingness to meet "the other"[14]. A challenge here is the **asymmetry of power** that exists within and between different religious communities, which may create a disbalance in the relative weight of the different participants involved.

When it comes to putting this kind of diplomacy into practice, these are some of the most widespread examples of what religious organizations or leaders can do in terms of peacebuilding for the broader society[15]:

> 1. Creating and spreading a moral vision; working with values in the conflict that are based on key principles such as pluralism, inclusion, peacebuilding through resolution of conflicts, social justice, forgiveness, collective healing, independence, and redemption
>
> 2. Working through civil society
>
> 3. Establishing personal relationships with and accessing key actors of the conflict through personal contacts
>
> 4. Engaging in spiritual conversations
>
> 5. Prayers and fasting
>
> 6. Reconciliation rituals

Using a constructivist prism, this study focuses on manifestations of the religious component in Ukraine in 2019-2020, in a context of armed conflict that has already lasted for seven years. We aim at exploring opportunities of religious-based peacebuilding in the context of the religious landscape of Ukraine, taking into account the specifics of narratives, practices and projects that are already being implemented.

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12 Yulia Korniychuk, Relihiyna Dyplomatiya: Peredumovy stanovlennia j zasady rozvytku// Relihiyeznavstvo, Vypusk 36(49), 2016, P.24

13 Jodok Troy, Faith-Based Diplomacy under Examination// The Hague Journal of Diplomacy 3 (2008), p. 218

14 David R. Smock, Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding// United States Institute of Peace, 2002, p.58

15 Brian Cox, Faith-Based Diplomacy and International Peacemaking, p. 36-39

Specific Features of Interconfessional Relations in Ukraine

In order to analyze the actual religious situation and the broader religious context, we will do well to take into account the historic background of the current interconfessional relations. Historically, Ukraine has been a polyconfessional country, in which, already in the era of Kyiv Rus (10th - 13th centuries), powerful religious traditions such as pagan beliefs, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam coexisted. Today, more than 100 faith communities are represented in the country, embracing 32719 religious organizations, 92 religious centers, and 299 religious administrations[16]. Christianity, represented primarily by Orthodox churches of different jurisdictions and the Greek (Ukrainian) Catholic Church, remains a predominant religion and is closely linked to national identity and the process of formation of the Ukrainian state. Protestantism and religious communities formed by indigenous people (first of all the Crimean Tatars) and national minorities (Jews, Poles, Hungarians, Romanians, and Volga Tatars) are also traditionally strong in Ukraine.

Overall, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant religious organizations constitute about 97% of the whole religious landscape, with Orthodoxy being the largest group (its different branches making up about 55% of Christians), Protestantism in second place with around 30%, and Catholicism coming third with approximately 15%[17].

Thanks to the religious pluralism and a high level of competitiveness between religious organizations, and because the Ukrainian state does not formally back any of the larger churches, **a system of religious 'denominationalism' has been established in Ukraine, i.e. a system in which all religions have equal rights and compete with one another**. This situation stands out by its liberal nature and the scale of religious pluralism and is very similar to the model that has developed in the USA[18].

The religious situation and the development of interconfessional relations in Ukraine, as well as of those between the state and the different denominations, have been greatly influenced by regional particularities that have formed over a long period of time as a result of Ukrainian lands having been parts of different political entities and even civilizational systems. Whereas the East of Ukraine was under the influence (and part of) the Russian Empire, the West fell under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the South under the Ottoman caliphate. This means that for a long time Ukraine was positioned on the border between the Catholic/Protestant and the Orthodox worlds, as well as on the border between the Muslim and Christian civilizations. Therefore, when analyzing the specificities of interreligious relations and religious conflicts in Ukraine, it is worth taking those regional and historical peculiarities into consideration.

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16 Religious organizations in Ukraine as of January 1, 2019: https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/resourses/statistics/ukr_2019/75410/

17 Larysa Vladychenko, Relihiyna Merezha Ukrayiny: Analiz Dynamiky Stanom nf 2016 rik:

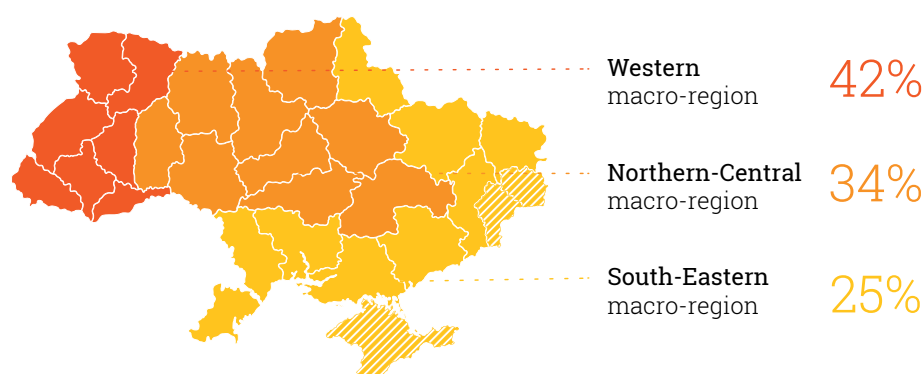https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/expert_thought/analytic/63066/

18 Pohliad Zboku: Relihiyna Systema Ukrayiny Nahaduye Amerykansku:

https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/science/2013/06/130626_jose_casanova_int_ko

In terms of religious specifics, three macro-regions can be identified in Ukraine: a Western, a Northern-Central and a South-Eastern one. The Western macro-region includes Chernivtsi, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Transcarpathia, and Volyn regions; the Northern-Central one consists of Cherkasy, Chernihiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovohrad, Khmelnytsk, Kyiv, Poltava, Vinnytsia, and Zhytomyr regions and the city of Kyiv; the South-Eastern one encompasses Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Luhansk, Mykolayiv, Odessa, Sumy, Zaporizzhia regions and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

The level of religiosity among Ukrainians has an expressively regional character. Already back in Soviet times, citizens in the Western regions of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic showed among the highest levels of religiosity in the USSR with 86% (consisting of 55% believers and 31% hesitant), while in the Southern regions, in particular in Odessa region, it was 62% (with only 9% believers and 53% hesitant)[19].

According to sociological data of the Razumkov Center, a Kyiv-based think tank, in 2018 these regional specificities still played an important role: up to 91% of residents of Western regions and up to 59% of residents of Southern regions considered themselves believers.

RELIGIOUS MACRO-REGIONS IN UKRAINE

Western macro-region **42%**

Northern-Central macro-region **34%**

South-Eastern macro-region **25%**

The Western part of the country also has the highest number of religious organizations (about 42% of the whole religious network of the country), while the Northern-Central regions follow with 34%, and the South Eastern macro-region comes third with about 25%. As shown by religious network monitoring data of the Department for Religious Affairs of Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, this situation has not changed over the past twenty years.

Against the background of the general religious renaissance of the late 1980s - early 1990s, several factors have been of special significance for the overall religious situation: 1) the coming out of hiding of the underground UGGC in 1989, which was liquidated on the territory of the USSR by decision of the Lviv Synod of 1946; 2) the formation of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), and 3) the schism inside the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC MP), (which until 1990 was the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC), as a result of which the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate was created (UOC KP). Thus, in the early 1990s two main lines of interconfessional confrontation were formed in Ukraine: 1) the Orthodox-Catholic one, i.e. between all Ukrainian Orthodox churches, on the one hand, and the Roman and Greek Catholic churches, on the other hand; 2) the inter-Orthodox one, i.e. between UOC MP, UOC KP and UAOC.

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19 Analiticheskiy Otchet Sostoyaniya Mezhkonfessionalnyh Otnosheniy Na Territorii Zapadnykh Oblastey Ukrainskoy SSR (Po Materialam Sotsiologicheskikh Issledovaniy) // "Religiya v SSSR," № 12, 1990, S. 1-25.

In fact, interconfessional relations in Ukraine are now defined by confrontations, at different levels of intensity, between three faith communions: two branches of Orthodoxy (UOC MP in the jurisdiction of the ROC and the autocephalous OCU created in 2019 as a result of the confluence of UOC KP, UAOC and a part of UOC MP), and the Catholic Church of Eastern Rite (UGCC). Each of them pretends to authentically express the national interests of the Ukrainian people and to be the authentic national religion. On the theological level, this is communicated by theologians of all three denominations who argue that their particular church has its roots in "Volodymyr's baptism," i.e. derives from the Kyivan prince Volodymyr, who in 988 baptized the state of Kyivan Rus'.

Conflicts that flared up in the 1990s and, in different forms, have persisted until today, are of a multidimensional nature. Besides the historic, national and religious context that has already been mentioned, the socio-political and economic situation was of great significance. For example, the legalization of the UGCC was a threat to the already influential ROC, one-fifth of whose parishes were located precisely in Western Ukraine[20].

According to a poll conducted among believers in 1994, about 55% of Ukrainians believed that controversies around the right to ownership of religious property and assets were a decisive factor in the conflict. In the second place they named the general crisis and widespread lawlessness, incompetent actions of local authorities, and interference of political parties and civil society organizations into church affairs. Only 22% of respondents believed that the conflict was caused solely by religious factors[21]. A 1998 expert survey showed that most Ukrainian scholars of religious studies identified the following main causes of interconfessional conflicts: property disputes around religious buildings (88%); interference of political parties and civil society organizations (60%); and incompetence of local authorities (56%). As a separate factor in fueling conflict they highlighted the huge impact of political protectionism offered by the authorities to certain denominations[22]. An analytical report of a sociological study demonstrated that, in the 1990s, in the context of a high level of religiosity of the population in Western Ukraine, interconfessional conflicts became an important factor in the political struggles of different social and political groups that exploited those conflicts for their own political purposes. Moreover, independently of the wish of their leaders, the activities of religious organizations became politicized, i.e. political and confessional interests became closely interwoven.

It is also worth noting that the character of interconfessional conflict has changed over the years. If in the late 1980s – mid-1990s tensions within the Orthodox environment were defined by property disputes between Greek Catholics and Orthodox, as well as by diverging attitudes of believers and high-ranking clergy towards the question of independence of the Orthodox Church, towards the end of the 1990s those two questions lost their sharp edges. Meanwhile, inter-Orthodox conflict acquired a personal dimension since it got associated with the person of Filaret (Denysenko) and his ambition to be enthroned as patriarch[23]. Filaret was the chief candidate for the position of patriarch of the ROC in 1990, but lost to Alexei II (Ridiger). As a result, Filaret took the lead of the movement for separation from the ROC, which led to the formation of the UOC KP in 1992. In 1997, the Council of Bishops of the ROC excommunicated Filaret from the church and anathemized him; this anathema was lifted by Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople only in 2018.

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20 Yelenskyi V. Pravoslavno-Greko-Katolicheskiy Konflikt v Ukraine: Poslednidya Faza //
https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/studios/materials_conferences/33986/

21 Mizhkonfesiyni Konflikty v Ukrayini: Prychyny I Naslidky // Liudyna i Svit, 9, 1995, P. 16.

22 Experty Pro Netradytsiyni Relihiyi i Mizhrelihiyni Konflikty // Ofitsiynyi Visnyk Derzhavnoho Komitetu Ukrayiny u Spravah Relihiy // Liudyna i Svit, 6, 1999, P. 28.

23 See for instance: Relihiyeznavets: Ambitsiyi Filareta Mozhut Zashkodyty Pravoslavyu // https://p.dw.com/p/3IQSA

An important consequence of this violent stage of interconfessional conflict in Ukraine was the strengthening of the role of the state in interreligious relations, which manifested itself in two key events: the formation of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (UCCRO) in December 1996 at the initiative of President Leonid Kuchma[24], and the signing, in the presence of the President, of the 'Memorandum of Christian denominations on the inadmissibility of the use of force in interconfessional relations' in July 1997[25].

A new escalation of interreligious conflict started in 2014 as a result of the Euromaidan uprising, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the beginning of the war in the East of Ukraine. The "church issue" became rapidly politicized against the background of the rise of patriotic sentiment in society.

A vivid manifestation of this was a renewal of transfers of individual religious communities from one jurisdiction to another (in this case from UOC (MP) to UOC KP). 39 communities left UOC (MP) for KP and two more joined UAOC. Besides, thirty cases were reported where part of a community left the UOC (MP) in order to register a new religious organization. These transfers would quite often take radical forms, resulting in forceful seizures of church buildings[26].

It was at that same time that the relations between the ROC and the Patriarchate of Constantinople became tense for a number of reasons. From the collapse of the USSR onward, the ROC has increasingly aggressively claimed a leadership role in global Orthodoxy, which became an important element of Vladimir Putin's geopolitical activity and foreign policy as one of the instruments of promotion of the "Russian world." Additional factor were the personal ambitions of patriarch Cyril, head of the ROC, and his competition with patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople. These led to the refusal of the ROC and some of its allies to take part in the Pan-Orthodox Council on the island of Crete in 2016, which Bartholomew perceived as a personal offense. All these factors contributed to Bartholomew's willingness to interfere in the inter-Orthodox conflict in Ukraine, even though for a long time Constantinople had been avoiding this, explaining its non-interference precisely by the risk of worsening its relations with the ROC. In October 2018, by decision of its Synod, the Patriarchate of Constantinople lifted the anathemas from the chairmen of UOC KP and UAOC, Filaret (Denysenko) and Makariy (Maletych), and started the process of granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine[27]. On December 15, 2018 the OCU was founded at the Unification Council as a result of the confluence of the UOC KP and UAOC and with the participation of two metropolitans of the UOC (MP).

According to a survey by the Razumkov Center, causes for conflict in the Ukrainian religious sphere in 2019 were almost identical to those in the early 1990s. Property factors remained the major cause of conflict (36%), political factors came second (33%), while personal issues ("church

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24 The UCCRO was founded as a representative interconfessional consultative and advisory organ, whose aim was to unite the efforts of religious and civil society organizations specialized in national and spiritual revival of Ukraine; coordination of interchurch dialogue both in Ukraine and abroad; participation in the development of immediate and long-term prognoses concerning state-church relations and normative acts projects related to those issues; performance of collective charitable activities (in Derzhavnyi Departament U Spravakh Relihiy // Liudyna i Svit, 10, 1997, P. 25).

25 Memorandum Khrystyyanskykh Konfesiy Ukrayiny Pro Nespryjnyattya Sylovykh Diy U Mizhkonfesiynykh Vzayemovidnosynakh // Liudyna I Svit, 8, 1997, P. 25-26.

26 Voynalovych V. Suchasne Ukrayinske Pravoslavya: Stari I Novi Vyklyky // Naukovi Zapysky Instytutu Politychnyh I Etnonatsionalnykh Doslidzhen im. I.F. Kurasa NAN Ukrayiny, 2018, 3-4, p. 151.

27 Konstantynopol Povernuv Ukrayinu V Svoye Lono, - Komunikat Synodu //
https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/orthodox/constantinople_patriarchy/73003

hierarchs want power") followed in the third place (29%)[28]. At this stage, national identity played a key role in the intensification of the inter-Orthodox conflict, i.e. society expected churches to demonstrate a pro-Ukrainian position. Among believers of the Autocephalous OCU, adherents of a national orientation of church and religion constituted the majority (58%); among believers of the UGCC and UOC Kyiv Patriarchate (a small structure headed by Filaret, which separated from the OCU in June 2019) they formed a relative majority (47% and 49% accordingly); among believers of the UOC (MP) and those who identified themselves as "simply Orthodox" the relative majority was opposed to this position (46% and 40% accordingly in favour)[29].

To complicate matters, President Petro Poroshenko chose the very issue of autocephaly as a key point of his election campaign in his so-called "Tomos Tour," which dragged the inter-Orthodox conflict even deeper into the political field. As President Poroshenko declared in his state of the nation address to parliament (and on twitter): "'Army, Language, Faith' is not a slogan. It is the formula of contemporary Ukrainian identity. The army protects our land. The language guards our heart. The Church guards our soul." Not surprisingly[30], after the elections, when the new rulers ceased to look at the religious factor in terms of its mobilization potential, the intensity of the inter-Orthodox conflict decreased, and transfers of communities from UOC (MP) to OCU practically came to a halt.

At the same time, ***the emergence of the OCU and its opposition to the already existing UOC (MP) led to growing polarization of the religious question in society, and extremely complicated their possible unification into a single autocephalous church***. As Protestant theologian Mykhaylo Cherenkov points out, "the Ukrainian model of interchurch relations does not work any longer. Our attempts to 'ukrainize' and 'democratize' Orthodoxy to make it compatible with other Ukrainian churches appeared to be just as naïve as they were unsuccessful. Ukraine is indeed divided, and the questions of "language" or "Moscow" are not the most important ones. The main and deepest division is between Western and Eastern Christianity, i.e. between the Byzantium-Moscow and Catholic-Protestant traditions."[31] Our analysis shows that the intolerance of the two biggest Orthodox churches towards each other is a mutual process: the UOC (MP) does not recognize the autocephalous status of the OCU, while the OCU and Ecumenical Patriarchate do not recognize the UOC (MP) as an autonomous church, but only as dioceses of the ROC that are situated in Ukraine.

At the same time, the current situation has a strong potential for the formation of a democratic and pluralistic society. As American sociologist of religion Jose Casanova points out, "it is so fortunate that the Ukrainian democracy has so many churches and religious communities, and that the local Orthodox church cannot be controlled by the government (…). Religious pluralism in Ukraine is a decisive factor for civic pluralism and for democracy (…). I hope that many Ukrainians will not choose to join the new church, and that the Moscow patriarchate will remain. It is very important that it be that way."[32]

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28 Derzhava I Tserkva v Ukrayini-2019: Pidsumky Roku I Perspektyvy Rozvytku Vidnosyn. – K.: Tsentr Razumkova, 2019, P. 8.

29 Ibid., P. 7.

30 Challenges of religious situation in Ukraine //

https://www.paxforpeace.nl/publications/all-publications/challenges-of-religious-situation-in-ukraine

31 Cherenkov M. Khrystyyanska Yednist Yak Vyklyk //

https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/expert_thought/aut-hors_columns/mcherenkov_column/67074/

32 Humeniuk N. Religioved Jose Casanova – Ob Ukrainskoy Avtokefalii I Tserkvi v Sovremennom Mire //

https://hromadske.ua/ru/posts/relyhyoved-khose-kazanova-ob-ukraynskoi-avtokefalyy-y-tserkvy-v-sovremennom-myre-ochen-vazhnaia-peredacha

Listening to Communities' Voices: An Anthropological Dimension

In our opinion, it is exactly in such a religious context that the essential obstacle to the realization of the potential of religious actors for peacebuilding in Ukraine lies. In order to have an impact on the current situation of societal conflict, religion should have all the attributes of a full-fledged actor. Instead, religious players often act as "re-actors" and not "actors" in the social context, which points to a need for change within religious groups themselves[33]. When religious communities are not ready to act within a pluralistic paradigm, they can influence the mobilization of polarizing forces in conflict, the development of separatism and the emergence of new states[34]. In other words, besides the fact that all social institutions experience crisis during any conflict, the peacemaking role of certain social groups or actors (including religious ones) places especially high demands on them.

The denominational affiliation of people can define the boundaries between social groups[35], even within one territorial community. To be an Orthodox Christian in Ukraine means to be part of a privileged majority despite inner jurisdictional divisions. However, the transitional state of society influences the way the crisis in religious affiliation develops, leading to the rethinking of dominant identities. Against the backdrop of these changes, confessional affiliation becomes more important as a form of organizing social and cultural differences in a context of deformation of social structures[36]. Sometimes people identify themselves as "Orthodox" through ethnic or cultural affiliation, i.e. without any grounding in their faith, which is reflected in the use of political, national or factors in the rhetoric of representatives of religious organizations when they seek to satisfy the needs of potential or actual believers. Thus, confessional identity functions as a **civilizational and political marker[37]**, which becomes especially relevant in the context of local and external conflicts.

Besides, as mentioned earlier, many aspects of the current situation seem a repetition of the early years of Ukraine's independence, with **redistribution of religious property** becoming a way

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33 Andrew M. Greeley; Religion and Social Conflict. Edited by Robert Lee and Martin E. Marty. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 180

34 Rethinking Secularism, Edited by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen// Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 197

35 Yuri Bureyko, Konfesiyna Identychnist Pravoslavnykh Ukrayintsiv v Umovakh Suchasnykh Vyklykiv // SKHID 1 (141) January-February 2016, P. 56

36 Ibid, p. 55

37 Igor Yakovenko. Ukraina: Religiozno-Tsyvilizatsionnaya Sostavliauchshaya Politicheskikh Konfliktov // Religiya i Konflikt / pod red. A. Malashenko I S. Filatova ; Tsentr Karnegi, 2007, p. 61

to claim one's own status in the region (province)[38]. At the same time, at the level of small territorial communities, religion, as one of the subsystems of Ukrainian society, still plays a role as a central channel for communication or coordination of efforts;[39] something to take into account in peacebuilding work. Under these circumstances, in the context of armed conflict, **interjurisdictional and interconfessional conflict lines** can cause even greater divisions.

In order to investigate the religious component in the life of local communities, in general social and political trends, and in people's visions of resolution of the armed conflict, we have developed a special research design. The study was carried out in a qualitative sociology framework and based on the method of semi-structured in-depth interviews. Overall, from February to March, 2020 fourteen interviews were conducted in Donetsk, Lviv, Rivne and Volyn regions with active church ministers and lay persons of different Christian denominations. The analysis took into account previous research and reports on the religious component in conflict and the potential of involving religious actors in peacebuilding in a broad sense. All quotations are published anonymously, according to the terms of confidentiality agreed with the participants.

Clarifying the subjective perception and the role of the religious sphere in the Ukrainian context of armed conflict, we have paid special attention to perceptions of the conflict, potential ways of its resolution, and the possible roles of churches and religious organizations in this process.

Armed conflict

The key question that reflects one's subjective attitude towards the conflict is **how one defines the conflicting parties**. Although this may seem a very direct question because it openly pushes respondents to pronounce their own political position (which, under certain circumstances and with a lack of trust towards the interviewer, can lead to insincere and conformist answers), still it enables the researcher to make conclusions concerning the dominating discourse among representatives of individual denominations. Representatives of different religious organizations give fundamentally different answers, demonstrating a wide spectrum of interpretations of the conflict: from the unambiguous identification of Russia as sole aggressor and main actor in the conflict, to the description of events in the East of Ukraine as a civil conflict caused by Euromaidan and the ensuing change of power causing disagreement among residents of certain regions of the country.

Identifying Russia and Ukraine as sides to the conflict is characteristic for all denominations, although with different levels of confidence. The most unambiguous is the position of the OCU, both in the East and in the West of the country. OCU representatives express themselves in a direct way:

> "*Unambiguously* [the sides of the conflict are] *Russia and Ukraine. There is more than enough evidence.* [...] *Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics are absolutely puppet structures*" (Resp. 1).

OCU representatives imagine post-conflict regulation to take place on the "Ukraine-Russia" level, emphasizing the geopolitical ambitions of Ukraine's neighbor:

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38 Robert M. Hayden, Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia

and the Balkans// Current Anthropology, Volume 43, Number 2, April 2002, p. 214

39 Michał Wawrzonek, Religion and Politics in Ukraine: The Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches as Elements of Ukraine's

Political System// Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, p. 6

"*If they* [non-government controlled areas] *are returned, Ukraine will again be drawn towards Russia. They will again create a pro-Russian majority in parliament, and we will again move to that side*" (Resp. 7).

Individual representatives of Protestant churches show a similar position:

"*If there is no support on the Russian side, it will all end soon. This is why it is quite obvious what the sides of the conflict are. Russia is an empire*" (Resp. 3).

Respondents also drew attention to the artificial nature of the armed conflict, which could become possible only with outside interference: "*This conflict does not have a place in our hearts. It is a provoked, an international conflict*" (Resp. 6). This position, however, cannot be called typical of representatives of Protestant churches, who demonstrated great differences in their views on the conflict. The position of individual respondents who serve close to the demarcation line was more reserved. Such respondents would not give a direct answer as to who the conflicting sides are; they tended to avoid conversations on the topic of "who is right and who is wrong" and emphasized the need for establishing peace and ending violence.

Individual representatives of religious organizations are curious why some Ukrainian residents so easily bought into ideas that are dominant in the non-government controlled areas (NGCA).

"*It is worth looking into the very essence of the schism, which is intolerance. It concerns language, other people, other positions. If not for intolerance, we wouldn't have the situation that we have now.*" (Resp. 6).

UOC (MP) representatives did not show unity in their vision of the conflicting sides. This was the group of respondents that demonstrated the broadest variety of answers, which can be roughly grouped into three main positions:

(1) The position already mentioned for OCU representatives, according to which Russia is responsible for the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine: "*This all would not have happened without the interference of the Russian Federation*" (Resp. 6).

(2) Russia is identified as an aggressor, but the self-proclaimed republics are also viewed as subjects of the conflict:

"*There are different levels. Some say this is a civil conflict; others say this is a war with Russia. I believe this is a war with Russia. […] DPR and LPR are not full-fledged helmsmen in this conflict, and therefore they cannot take full responsibility for ending it.*" (Resp. 10).

It is this intermediate vision that is most popular. Features of this discourse can also be observed in indirect responses by some respondents, for example, when questions concern potential parties in negotiations. Even though respondents focus on the people living in the non-government controlled areas, they expect the biggest effect from direct political negotiations at the level of the leadership of Ukraine and Russia.

(3) According to a more extreme position, "DPR" and "LPR" are independent republics, which seceded from Ukraine because of the coup d'État after the Euromaidan events. However, in the opinion of these respondents, the self-proclaimed republics now continue to

exist because of Russian support: *"Donbas asked Russia's help and we know that; therefore, of course, we need to talk with them, too"* (Resp. 5). Adherents of this position see the resolution of the conflict precisely in negotiations with "DPR" and "LPR", and not with Russia: *"There are forces that are in charge of the process in the seceded Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and we have to speak with them and look for common ground"* (Resp. 5).

In their vision of the **possibilities for resolving the armed conflict in the East**, representatives of different religious allegiances were more univocal. The question of possible ways of resolving the conflict and of the likely participation of religious structures in this process was practically the only one that united all respondents. They all agreed that the only and most expected resolution of the situation would be a political decision because it is impossible to resolve the conflict "from below."

Respondents from different religious backgrounds testify to the peacebuilding potential of churches and their possible participation in the process of reconciliation; they recognize, however, that at this stage church efforts or similar independent initiatives alone cannot lead to significant changes. Religious structures look powerless in the face of geopolitical power games:

"Only when they agree on some pause at the higher level of Putin-Zelensky, we will be able to start speaking about peace at our level. For now we can only pray for all" (Resp. 13);

"At the grassroots level we can speak with the sides of the conflict, for example, with soldiers on both sides, but it will not bring any significant effect because the conflict exists on a higher level" (Resp. 3).

Representatives of the UOC (MP) in different regions of Ukraine also stated that full participation of churches in the resolution of the armed conflict is not so much impossible as it is irrelevant because church and state each have their own business to attend to. These respondents highlight the delimitation of areas of responsibility between the state and religious communities.

"God has given freedom to man and also to the church, therefore it has to act in accordance with the laws of the state; the only condition is that it should let people coexist. Any faith communion has to have its own borders" (Resp. 5).

At the same time, respondents have different ideas about the meaning of a political resolution. Not a single representative of a religious community tended to subscribe to the position of "peace at any price," but their visions of possible negotiations and formats for the desired political decision were rather diverse: from a refusal to further negotiations, to broadening their format and more active involvement of the sides. An OCU clergyman discards the need to change the negotiation format or to involve new participants (who are not represented in the Minsk format):

"The very fact of negotiations is a betrayal. All negotiations, except those within the Minsk format, are already an attempt to reconsider what was stated by the Minsk documents, and this means a betrayal and surrender of interests... Normal reconciliation is only possible when we return Crimea and the temporarily occupied territories to Ukraine on our own terms. I don't want to live together with them. I saw the consequences of what they did" (Resp. 1).

Another representative of the OCU from a Western region holds a similar position, emphasizing **the need to reach peace through victory**:

"Not a peace through defeat or surrender, but victory. That will be just peace. Unjust peace is a loss of territories, a loss in the war, a loss of part of our independence" (Resp. 7).

Representatives of the UOC (MP) also speak of the inadmissibility of capitulation and surrender of national interests: *"Peace at any price, as our President suggests, is not possible now"* (Resp. 6). They do think, however, that it is necessary to broaden the negotiation format and engage representatives of the self-proclaimed "republics:"

"[...] now it is popular to say that one 'does not speak with terrorists.' If we do not do that, we will move to a nationalistic, almost a Nazi state, in which people are not able to live and respect those who think differently" (Resp. 5).

The discourse of representatives of the UOC (MP) in the East on the content of a political decision is also very different from the OCU discourse: *"If a region returns to Ukraine, it needs to have its own rights, for example, in terms of the use of language, or a certain autonomy in decision-making"* (Resp. 5).

Although representatives of religious structures speak of difficulties and even the impossibility of resolving the armed conflict "from below", they believe they can contribute to the process in certain spheres, both now as well as in peacetime, after the signing of a conditional peace agreement: *"The position of the UGCC is to first establish justice and then do reconciliation. In terms of reconciliation, this is possible on a microlevel"* (Resp. 4).

Religious organizations emphasize the fact that they are respected by the faithful, which gives them wider possibilities for action:

"When churches spread certain ideas during their church services, they can contribute to spreading peace. It is especially important to influence those people who enjoy certain authority in a community and can become agents of peace" (Resp. 3).

This provides opportunities for post-conflict regulation, informing the population, and managing local tensions. Thus, the church may occupy its own niche in a broader process of reconciliation: *"The state may deal with soldiers, while we can work with old ladies who believe in all kinds of wild legends"* (Resp. 12).

Representatives of different denominations also underline the need for information and media work after Ukraine regains control over the non-government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. However, different denominations see the aim of such campaigns differently. The OCU speaks of the need for social adaptation of people from the non-government controlled areas to the new political reality and the need to promote a national consciousness:

"[To] apply all the instruments that humankind has ever invented in order to influence people. Such values can be language, culture, the Ukrainian church (not as a specific confession but as a concept). To provide an aggregate of identities that are specific exactly to those people, who live on such a large territory" (answering the question of what a church can do for peace).

Such thoughts are motivated by fears that the local population in the non-government controlled areas, having spent a substantial period of time in the sphere of (pro-)Russian propaganda, may stay attracted to the ideas of the "Russian world" after Ukraine regains control of the territories.

In UOC (MP) circles, people emphasize that with time new values will need to be shaped, which could be shared by people from different parts of Ukraine, and that the church can play a key part in this process.

Representatives of the UOC (MP) from different parts of Ukraine believe that by now their church is the single structure that has preserved connections with believers on both sides of the demarcation line, as well as in Crimea, and that therefore it has a unique potential for reconciliation and dialogue:

> *"The UOC (MP) is the single institution in Ukraine represented in all regions of Ukraine, among all nationalities. It is represented in Donbas, and in Crimea. The UOC (MP) can act as a peace-building platform in Ukraine"* (Resp. 12).

It is interesting to note that representatives of the RCC in Ukraine also speak of their unique peacebuilding potential because the RCC is represented in different parts of Ukraine and maintains a neutral position on the conflict in the East. OCU representatives, meanwhile, stress the "Ukrainianness" of their religious organization, which should foster the unification of Ukraine's citizens around a national church.

Looking into the future and speaking of the potential for conflict resolution, representatives of different religious denominations say that it will be much easier to reach positive peace and mutual understanding when some time has passed: "A new generation will come, less principled in this regard, and then those questions will be resolved" (Resp. 1).

Another interesting feature is the ***militaristic tone in the narratives of representatives of different religious organizations in the East of Ukraine.*** Their statements about the need for a powerful army, the accumulation of armament, and compulsory recruitment contrast sharply with their previous thoughts about the need for common prayer and a search for reconciliation in God, yet they are a vivid reflection of the specific situation in a region where the war is not happening only on TV:

> *"Ideally, it would be good to have a huge army, nuclear weapons and so on. Peace should have a revolver in hand. People should be kind and armed to the teeth* (Resp. 2).

> *"A young person should serve in the army. It levels out all differences. There is no need to be afraid that you will lose time – because what are you doing now? And this provides a valuable experience, which brings us closer to peace"* (Resp. 6)

Overall, we cannot state that certain views on the settlement of the conflict prevail among certain religious organizations; rather, those views become more radical (in both directions) as one approaches the demarcation line, and depend on one's personal experience with the war. Only respondents in the East (Donetsk and Kharkiv regions) spoke actively and independently about issues of peace, war, the conflicting sides, and other related problems. Respondents from other regions expressed their opinions less emotionally, preferring to give concrete examples of the involvement of religious organizations in certain projects in the East of Ukraine, their participation in dialogue processes, or their vision of the role of their church in the post-conflict regulation that shall follow the political resolution of the conflict. What is more, in other regions the topics of interconfessional relations, the role of other churches, the influence of religious actors on public opinion, and local conflicts appeared of much greater interest to respondents, while the topic of the war moved to the background. Representatives from the East were more cautious

with ideological statements, and their judgements were of a more practical character. The distinguishing feature of regional discourse of the different denominations in the East was the need to put an end to civilian suffering and create conditions for safe coexistence, much more than the accent on the "right" geopolitical solution. *"The war has not yet ended there."* (Resp. 13).

Building Peace

Considering the specifics of the armed conflict in Ukraine, we can constate that the context of hybrid warfare creates special conditions for the functioning of religious organizations. When we focus on peacebuilding and recognize the need for "actors" (rather than "reactors") (see above), we can state that ***religious leaders have to consistently promote a policy that is strategically thought through from a conflict sensitivity perspective, stay neutral and be "above" the conflict, and steer clear of politicization***.

Respondents emphasized in particular that churches can and should create a platform for reconciliation, because sometimes they alone can provide a safe space. The key issue is to remember that religious communities *"have to be Christians instead of becoming radicals."* The emphasis on national identity can jeopardize such attempts and undermine the foundations for a common rethinking of history and the origins on which the future can be built.

In the opinion of church ministers, religious organizations should first of all avoid politicization, as a first step through which religion can be freed from political influence and gain more trust. Religion should speak from a place of spirituality instead of solving political (property) problems and issues around the redistribution of resources.

Recognizing the need to restore the neutrality of church leaders, quite a few respondents from different churches and ministerial contexts ***emphasize their expectations as to the role of the state***. They expect state representatives to assume the role of an arbiter that could act as a third party in case of controversial questions or conflicts. If this happens in accordance with the principle of the rule of law, while minimizing the influence of local authorities (who can favor certain religious communities), it can lay the ground for trust and direct depoliticization in communities. As one of the priests admitted:

> *"The state should take the position of an arbiter. It should not use the church as a means of pressure or for dealing with political audiences... Even a pan-Orthodox decision on the Ukrainian issue will not help to fully resolve the conflict. Too many wounds have been inflicted upon each other. We can only hope that in combination with a change of generations, a Pan-Orthodox resolution can bring some result. For the next ten years we can only expect problems."*

Respondents' biggest demand concerns local state representatives, in particular, police and local courts, which are most often involved in different corruption networks, favoring "their own" people. Practicing church ministers conclude that if the state maintains its role of guarantor of the rule of law and sticks to the principle of separation of church and state, religious communities will enjoy independence and security guarantees and will experience justice in case where decisions in land and property disputes are necessary. However, such a scenario and its practical implementation may actually deprive representatives of religious communities of additional opportunities and benefits which they currently enjoy (such as a fast-track procedure for obtaining land, court decisions in favor of their "own" people, a simplified procedure in cases of community transfers and other administrative or property decisions). Such cases are described in more detail in the section on interchurch relations.

According to the plans of the current leadership of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, this role would have to be assumed by the restructured State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience, which, in particular, has the mission to promote the "strengthening of mutual understanding between religious organizations of different faith communions and resolution of contentious issues in the relations between such organizations under the law"[40]. In fact, the Service can act as an independent mediator on behalf of the state in order to promote harmony among different religions. This is probably one of the practical solutions, provided that courts and state bodies in the regions function properly. One of the ideas suggested by respondents was the creation of local commissions, which would include representatives of local authorities, opposing political parties, and different church ministers (with different positions). Such commissions could learn to receive and respond to requests from the community, building cooperation and demonstrating unity.

Concerning peacebuilding in the broader civil society sphere, church representatives envisage their leading role in different ways:

> "Peacebuilding starts with the church," says a military chaplain. "Everything starts from the idea of reconciling people with God. Peace is a state of rest, of absence of hatred towards your neighbor."

For one, this means proper spiritual assistance and education of members of their parish and the community as a basis for future actions. For others, it means an active social service which reaches out beyond parishes, while maintaining the key messages of peace and concord despite diversity.

Respondents suggest several practical solutions to the problems of future reconciliation and reintegration of the non-government controlled areas. In particular, they mention the organization of facilitated dialogues, during which representatives of very different religious movements could meet in safety and confidentiality . In the ministers' opinion, it is important to gather those representatives of religions organizations who are active and open to cooperation, and to give them an opportunity to exchange their views in a safe space. Trainings on actual topics common for representatives of different religious organizations could be another instrument; these would foster unity and the development of personal relationships.

At the same time, respondents exclude "dialogue for the sake of dialogue", as it will not attract wide audiences and will not provide possibilities to get away from declarative statements. According to the church ministers, dialogue should concern neutral topics or challenges they all experience in their everyday life and in their ministry. These may be regionally specific or touch upon general trends in the development of ministry, where an exchange of views and joint actions may bring better results. Here, it is important to consider the balance in status and opportunities of different religious organizations, as became clear in local and regional church councils. Some of those councils became irrelevant as soon as a certain confession or church reached a level of impact that allowed them to monopolize the regional religious 'market'. Leaders of such churches can renounce joint action for the sake of preserving their own status and increasing their influence.

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40 Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 812 dated August 21, 2019 on Approval of the Decree on State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience and Changes to the Decree on Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, on: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/812-2019-%D0%BF

Even under such conditions, interchurch initiatives that aim to achieve concretely defined results in social ministry may be effective. Economic development would be a relevant topic, which would attract all categories of citizens. Other relevant topics may include e.g. concrete issues or documents in chaplain ministry (first of all in medical and penitentiary chaplaincy) as well as care for families in difficult circumstances. According to the respondents, work with youth and families is a topic that is relevant for all and that requires much more service than they can currently provide. Most of the ministers mention the idea of preparing leaders among future pastors and priests, as well as the need to work with the "new generation," on which they put their special hopes as this generation can be freed from the context of previous interchurch confrontations and conflicts. In particular, the skills for future leaders would need to include effective and peaceful communication, analysis of the context in which they work, and group facilitation skills, which may significantly alleviate and transform their work with social groups in general.

Here is one example of their understanding of how to establish communication and search for common ground:

> *"It is necessary to communicate with people a lot, to be with them, to analyze what causes the absence of peace among them. To understand the main triggers and factors that mainly turn people against each other, and to understand how one can effectively work with these. To create possibilities for them to be able to hear each other, to put themselves in each other's shoes, to sense each other's experience. Deep psychological rehabilitation is needed."*

Such initiatives can be based on the Strategy for Participation of Churches and Religious Organizations in Peacebuilding entitled "Ukraine Is Our Common Home," which was approved by the UCCRO in 2017[41]. It highlights local influence via religious leaders who can promote the idea of peace as cultural capital through cultural community projects, youth work etc. Although the implementation framework of the Strategy was not concretized, its general principles and prescriptions can serve as a legal basis that can also create practical space for communities implementing peacebuilding initiatives with the approval of church leaders.

Such dialogues can also form a basis for public discussion of topics and values that unite local communities and Ukrainian citizens in general, which in turn may help create a practical vision of a shared future, because "everyone is tired of the war, but no one knows how to start talking about that." This is why church representatives, if acting conflict-sensitively, could successfully create and spread such exchange platforms.

Interchurch Relations

The trend of contextual changes in the work of religious organizations may well indicate a risk of return to a situation similar to that of the 1990s, with crises and conflicts around the redistribution of religious property and influence. This problem has escalated since the intensification of the public narrative about "pro-Ukrainian" and "pro-Russian" religious communities in relation to the war in the East.

Once again, church leaders are pushed to turn to the state as an arbiter in contradictory issues, especially concerning changes in the jurisdictional affiliation of Orthodox parishes. Representatives

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41 News item about the Strategy on the official UCCRO website:

https://vrciro.org.ua/en/documents/uccro-peacebuilding-strategy-ukraine

of both sides, UOC (MP) and OCU, have testified to the abuse of resources by local authorities as well as to the involvement of unauthorized persons, support groups, and law enforcement officers. Under such circumstances, when outcomes depend on the regional domination of a certain jurisdiction and the loyalty of the authorities on different levels, only the impartiality of local authorities, properly functioning courts and law enforcement organs can help stabilize the situation.

Such local conflicts do not end with a redistribution of property and an impact on the ministers' personal lives, but have deeply negative consequences in the form of overt and hidden hostility that goes beyond strictly religious questions, creating dividing lines within families and in communities. Such disputes can have consequences for years to come because of the value-based character of the conflict, which touches upon issues of religious and national identity, and because religious confrontations intersect with joint practical aspects of daily life.

As respondents in the regions emphasized, changes in the social and political context concern the whole Christian environment. Religious institutions, which since the first protests on Maidan have gone through a series of critical challenges and found themselves at the forefront of the apparition of a new identity, are now faced with the problem of precisely formulating their position in society. According to clergymen, events since 2013 created new opportunities for rethinking the position of the UGGC. However, the Greek Catholic community, despite attempts to widen the geography of their parishes and reach a country-wide level by moving eastwards, *"still remains a Galician church"* (Resp. 4). In the meantime, new potential (and for the time being still latent) conflict lines appear, where the main opponents are the OCU and the UGGC: the two "pro-Ukrainian" churches that have so far been trying to be inclusive, demonstrate a relative openness, and respond to requests from society by supporting the national identity in a context of armed conflict. Respondents estimate that the idea of unification of those two churches will not materialize, and therefore, in the absence of an external "irritant" in the form of the UOC (MP), new tensions may arise.

At the same time, Protestant communities have been actively integrating into social life and civic initiatives. They remain autonomous in respect to each other (although certain unions and church communities follow a common strategy), but maintain strong ties among believers and gradually enlarge the Protestant community in Ukraine. Orthodox and Catholic clergymen emphasize the Protestants' willingness to actively serve people and respond to social challenges, although for now their influence only reaches their own communities and in public perception they are still confronted with the stigma of a "non-traditional church."

As the respondents see it, the peacebuilding potential must be carried by churches that declare and maintain a neutral position and have believers on both sides of the demarcation line. Representatives of the UOC (MP) emphasize the particular position of their own church:

> *"The UOC (MP) is the only institution in Ukraine represented in all of the regions, among all nationalities. It is present both in Donbas and in Crimea. The UOC (MP) can act as a peacebuilding platform in Ukraine. The church as an institution cannot influence the peace process between the two states because this is not its business, but what it can do is facilitate the integration of a society which for already five years has been living in a different world [i.e. a different reality on two sides of the demarcation line since the start of the war – authors]."*

Yet the UOC (MP) functions in a different political context and it the ways in which it influences public opinion are ambiguous. It is dependent on an administrative center in Moscow, and within Ukraine it is oriented at a socially, economically and politically scattered faith community.

Representatives of the Roman Catholic Church have also been perceived in this integrational role, given the positive image of Pope Francis, who enjoyed great trust among Ukrainians over the past years[42]. However, the initiatives that Papal Nuncio Claudio Gugerotti[43] has undertaken to "build bridges" with the non-government controlled areas met a lot of resistances among the so-called "patriotic intelligentsia." The controversy in views on the way out of the crisis and in attitude towards people living in the non-government controlled areas became most evident in the polemics in absentia between well-known Ukrainian religious studies scholar Liudmyla Fylypovych and the Nuncio[44]. As Fylypovych declared:

> *"I am personally not persuaded by the Vatican's arguments concerning the expediency of those trips. The Nuncio has stated that the main task of the church is to build bridges. The question is between whom and between what? To build a bridge with the enemies of Ukraine? At the height of military confrontation? In a situation where the enemy does not even think of repentance and is sure of doing everything right, killing thousands of people? We cannot refuse the "Pope for Ukraine" initiative[45] because it is a huge amount of money for us right now. The question is who they will support and whom those resources will go to… I do not see the use of helping the separatists."[46]*

Reproaching the Nuncio for his conservatism and rigidity, Fylypovych underlines that "the Italian Nuncio Archbishop Gugerotti promotes the Vatican's interests and ***has little attention for the pro-Ukrainian demands of contemporary religious life***"[47] [highlight by the authors]. Thus, it is primarily a "pro-Ukrainian position" that this part of the intelligentsia expects from Ukrainian religious denominations, and in the context of the conflict in the East they also expect them to renounce any negotiations with the "separatists." This indicates a lack of willingness to perceive the church as a structure that connects and keeps contact with parishioners who have other political views than "pro-Ukrainian" (even if they are not necessarily "pro-Russian").

Public and politicians in Ukraine focus mainly on the relations between the UOC (MP) and the newly created OCU, which has recently separated itself from patriarch Filaret (Denysenko), the leader of the former UOC KP. However, respondents point out that the confrontation is primarily of interpersonal character and that its motives, although partly theological, are mainly political, while none of the sides sees possibilities for dialogue or agreement. OCU clergymen claim that they are ready to receive priests from the UOC (MP) and to recognize their sacraments, but they do not see reasons for dialogue with their church structure because of the preferences of its highest leaders and its connection with the ROC. On the other sides, UOC (MP) representatives

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42 Derzhava i Tserkva v Ukrayini-2019: Pidsumky Roku ta Perspektyvy Rozvytku Vidnosyn, Tsentr Razumkova:

http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2019_Religiya.pdf

43 Arkhiepyskop Gugerotti Pro Poyizdku na Skhid: Tut Potribna Terapiya Lubovi:

http://kmc.media/2020/01/05/arkhiyepyskop-udzherotti-pro-poyizdku-na-skhid.html

44 See the polemic in detail: Relihiya Duzhe Povilno I Slabo Povertayetsya U Publichnyi Prostir Ukrayiny – Prof. Ludmyla Fylypovych (2017), *RISU*:

https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/expert_thought/interview/65628/ and Gugerotti Claudio, "Kolyshniy" Koleha Zvetrayetsya iz Zapytannyam Do Pani Prof. Ludmyly Fylypovych (2017), RISU,

https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/expert_thought/open_theme/65705/

45 Humanitarian projects directed at assisting those who suffered from the conflict that started in Ukraine in 2014. In the framework of this initiative, about sixteen million Euro has been accumulated, of which five million Euro from the Papal Foundation and eleven million in donations from Catholic parishes of Europe.

46 Relihiya Duzhe Povilno I Slabo Povertayetsya U Publichnyi Prostir Ukrayiny – Prof. Ludmyla Fylypovych, (2017), *RISU*:
https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/expert_thought/interview/65628/

47 Ibid.

stress that even the Tomos on autocephaly did not become the historical decision that would free the church from the sin of schism and that they expect public repentance from the OCU, after which they will be able to consider next steps towards agreement.

In this situation, the UOC (MP) remains the largest church, both geographically and in terms of the number of parishes. It still has a strong influence in the East, including in the non-government controlled areas and Crimea. Meanwhile, in the public narrative, hate speech prevails, and UOC (MP) is being depicted as the "church of the occupant," a "pro-Russian church," a "fifth column," the "UOC FSB," and "Moscow's priests." The domestic political interests of its clergy remain diverse, and local religious communities are rather influenced by the local public discourse and the individual personality of the priest, which was especially significant during the transfers of parishes in 2014-2019 (mainly in Rivne, Ternopil, and Volyn regions). ***In the public narrative, the whole church structure of the UOC (MP) is still perceived as a monolith, although it looks very different depending on the region, the administration of the diocese, and the personal views of the individual priest.***

Interjurisdictional transfers of parishes have led to open conflicts, creating new dividing lines through local communities, and have gone beyond the issue of church identity. Abuse of power and influence, of support groups and of property and possessions led to massive violations of the law, all the more as changes were introduced into the law without the necessary explanation.

OCU and UOC (MP) representatives reject the possibility of mutual dialogue except for the sake of preserving old interpersonal contacts, which are not public and occur behind the scenes, out of respect to the person of a clergyman, not to his nominal affiliation. According to the respondents, generations will be needed to overcome this interchurch conflict:

"History has shown that church conflicts last for at least thirty years. A new generation needs to come. And this will take a few decades... We are thinking more broadly about what will happen to Orthodoxy in general. It will keep its current status, while Europeanization and new trends are bigger challenges."

The reluctance towards dialogue and cooperation is caused by powerful enemy images and intolerance towards each other as church structures. Because geopolitical factors influence theological ones, and sometimes move onto a geoclerical level, the coming years will most likely be spent establishing a new balance between the Orthodox circles in Ukraine. However, decreasing politicization of religious communities may lead to much faster changes.

Although skeptical about the renewal of cooperation between the different denominations, respondents emphasize the need to renew interreligious dialogue on the basis of social service, where representatives of different faith communities can gather and cooperate to solve problems that are equally relevant to all. They see the beginning of this movement in the interpersonal connections of priests with one another, which (provided that the church hierarchy doesn't stand up against it) can lead to the development of horizontal networks of cooperation.

The authors of this research know of successful examples of such cooperation and the use of the religious factor for the benefit of community development among different religious groups. Although this particular issue was not in the center of this research, the authors believe it warrants detailed attention of experts and research community.

Discussion and Conclusion

Religion as a Dividing and as a Connecting factor in the Context of present-day Ukraine

Religion is not a reason for, nor the main trigger of the armed conflict in Ukraine, though its role implies social influence, be it in the form of escalation of the confrontation or, on the contrary, of de-escalation. Despite a number of opportunities and a significant potential for reconciliation, the religion factor magnifies some of the conflict fault lines that are present in Ukrainian society, and interacts with political differences and other identity markers (on individual and group levels). Such public manifestations of the influence of religion highlight differences in opinions and become yet another obstacle on the way to reconciliation. Moreover, internal conflicts between certain denominations, the high competitiveness of the religious environment, and the theologization of politics impact both the changes within the religious field and the position of religion in broader society. The presence of many different denominations and religious movements, and the ideological differences between them, turn the religious sphere in Ukraine into a space of overt and covert confrontation. Religious actors often expect the state to take an arbiter's role between them, and do not always have the resources of influence, power, strategic vision and positioning necessary to constructively engage in peacebuilding processes.

In Ukraine, Orthodox Christianity is closely linked to national and political issues, and in this regard certain parallels can be drawn with the situation in Russia. For example, according to the Pew Research Centre, about half of all Ukrainians (51%) believe that it is important to be Orthodox in order to be authentically Ukrainian. The same is valid for Russia, where 57% say that it is important to be Orthodox in order to be authentically Russian. About half of the people in both countries (48% in each) indicate that religious leaders enjoy certain influence in political matters, although the majority of Ukrainians (61%) and about half of Russians (52%) would prefer otherwise[48].

On this matter we can agree with Rev. Cyril Hovorun, who states that in order to understand social and political processes in contemporary states that associate themselves with the Eastern Christian tradition (in particular Ukraine), the concept of "civil religion" is a useful hermeneutic key[49]. In his view, we can observe the collision of two types of civil religion in Ukraine: the Russian imperial one that is propagated as the "Russian world" (represented by the UO (MP)), and a

48 Masci D. (2019). Split between Ukrainian, Russian churches shows political importance of Orthodox Christianity. *Pew Research Center*: https://pewrsr.ch/2Mb7huz

49 Hovorun K. (2015). Pravoslavnaya Grazhdanskaya Religiya. *Russkiy Zhurnal*:
http://www.russ.ru/Mirovaya-povestka/Pravoslavnaya-grazhdanskaya-religiya

Balkan-style nationalistic one, in which a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals constitute a quasi-religion of the nation (represented by the UOC KP and later the OCU)[50]. A good illustration of this "quasi-religion of the nation" is the meme "atheist of the Kyiv Patriarchate," which spread widely among the intelligentsia that positions itself as patriotic and was coined by President Petro Poroshenko's advisor Yuri Biryukov:

> "In other words, I am really, really an atheist. But I am undoubtedly an atheist of the Kyiv Patriarchate. And I have been following the story of the Tomos not because it will somehow affect me, but because the whole country needs it."[51]

It is obvious that the emphasis here is on the necessity for the state to change the canonical status of one of the Orthodox churches of Ukraine. During the struggle for autocephaly, texts were circulated about the importance of precisely the national, state and civil dimensions of autocephaly for all citizens of Ukraine without exception, in spite of the secular character of the state:

> "Then there is the autocephaly, and such a desired freedom for all who consider themselves Orthodox Christians of independent Ukraine. However, bearing in mind how closely history, politics, and patriarchate are interwoven for the UOC, it is not only Orthodox Christians who await freedom. It is not only Christians of other denominations. It is not only monotheists. Jews, Hare Krishnas, Hinduists and Postafarians – it is **all those who not only believe in God, but also in the ultimate independence of Ukraine in all matters** [highlight by the authors]. *Even atheists describe themselves like that in social media: "I am an atheist. But I am an atheist of the Kyiv Patriarchate." I am surprised that not everyone understands how important it is for a country, even though it is a secular country, to have its own local autocephalous church"[52].*

In our opinion, the place of the UOC KP as representative of the "nationalistic civil religion" of the Balkan type was taken over by the newly created OCU after the Unification Council and the granting of autocephaly, although within the OCU there are different sentiments. At the same time, as we indicated earlier, there is a risk that the newly created church will borrow some of the more doubtful qualities from its main rivals (the ROC and the UOC (MP)), such as a reactionary character, an obsession with "traditional values"[53], and a certain "imperial" nature of the Orthodox civil religion. In particular, one can observe close typological proximity between Petro Poroshenko's key election message "Army. Language. Faith." and the Russian imperial maxim of "Orthodoxy. Autocracy. Nation." Thus, we can state that one of the key factors of the religious situation in Ukraine, and one which specifically influences the peacebuilding potential of Ukrainian religious organizations, is the expectation, in certain politically active circles, that Ukrainian Orthodoxy (and other denominations) acquire the features of a *civil religion*.

With the demand from the most active part of society to form an Orthodox civil religion, the transformation of the Ukrainian religious environment after the granting of the Tomos of autocephaly carries both a potential for peace and for new conflicts. The ambiguity of the situation remains, primarily because the previous, conventionally stable, balance of power (with

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50 Ibid.

51 FB-page of Yuri Biriukov for August 31, 2018.

52 Brodskaya O. (2018). Nezalezhna Vira Dlia Nezalezhnoyi Ukrayiny: Tomos Potriben Navit Ateyistam. *Channel 24*:

https://24tv.ua/ru/nezalezhna_vira_dlya_nezalezhnoyi_ukrayini_tomos_potriben_navit_ateyistam_n1318262

53 Brylov D. (2019). Challenges of religious situation in Ukraine. *PAX*.

https://www.paxforpeace.nl/publications/all-publications/challenges-of-religious-situation-in-ukraine

the coexistence of three churches – UOC (MP), UOC KP and UAOC each with their own status) has been changed. In the current situation, all "players" in the religious field have equal conditions: all are canonical and can use that status within their own state. But the very narrative of changes in the church landscape, as well as the labeling of believers of certain jurisdictions, can create new room for conflicts which are in the first place about civil and political identities.

Yet our research also highlighted a powerful peacebuilding potential in the "pro-Ukrainian" wing of the UOC (MP), which is able to work with its believers on both sides of the conflict divide. At the moment, however, this potential is not being realized. On the one hand, the "patriotic" public perceives the UOC (MP) as a homogeneous structure and stigmatizes all its representatives as "agents of the Kremlin." On the other hand, pro-Ukrainian circles within the UOC (MP) experience pressure from conservative powers and pro-Russian circles within their own church.

Despite those difficulties, religion in Ukraine has (and does realize) a significant potential for reconciliation, dialogue and peacebuilding on the local level, in individual communities and in single actions and initiatives; and significant further development of this potential is to be expected. This especially concerns horizontal networks of cooperation across denominational divisions, as well as social initiatives and individual examples of representatives of religious communities acting as social actors rather than reacting to events post factum.

Based on our research on the peacebuilding potential of religious communities, and considering the risks related to the conflict sensitivity of the religious sphere in Ukraine, we focus the attention on religion as a dividing and a connecting factor and formulate recommendations to be considered for the future.

Religion as a Dividing factor:

◊ In the Ukrainian context, religious affiliation divides rather than reconciles. Most churches have clear political preferences and reciprocal claims to one another. The active politicization of religious communities reinforces existing divides, which has a negative impact on social groups instead of contributing to peacebuilding in a broader sense.

◊ Overt and covert competition between religious jurisdictions and denominations around property issues and influence lead to more conservatism among church leaders and to capsulated religious communities. Abuse of access to resources increases the risk of corruption with the use of regional and national political leverage and the monopolistic domination of a certain jurisdiction in a given region.

◊ Religious communities have not formed a shared vision of peace either within themselves or in the interfaith discourse between them. This hampers more concrete conversations or planning for peacebuilding in practical terms.

◊ The spread of hate speech among representatives of religious communities, both on the organizational and the interpersonal levels, deepens divisions and leads to labeling of representatives of certain organizations. Persistent stigmatization can block all attempts at internal dialogue or external cooperation even in circles of church ministers themselves.

Religion as a Connecting factor:

◊ Religious communities that actively seek to meet spiritual and social needs without getting politicized enjoy wide social and cultural capital and, thanks to a high level of trust and their access to different population groups, can unite local communities around them.

◊ Two church structures, the RCC and the UOC (MP), which are officially present in the non-government controlled areas, have the potential to create safe spaces for meetings and negotiations between representatives of the different conflicting sides. However, this possibility places very high demands on their representatives, in particular in terms of safety, confidentiality, and impartiality of their involvement.

◊ A new generation of believers and church ministers, free from internal and interconfessional stereotypes, is more ready for the liberalization of religious service (in particular social service), and for the formation of strategic (rather than reactive) responses to crisis issues.

◊ Individual, charismatic representatives of religious communities can significantly strengthen unification initiatives or discourse on topics of relevance for their communities, thanks to their personal network and reputation.

◊ Despite their sometimes formal character, joint actions and declarations aimed at peacebuilding form a public narrative for religious communities and are important in terms of their representation at a higher level.

Possible steps forward:

1. Strategic education of young church ministers, especially in the field of conflict sensitivity and effective communication, as they in the future will produce narratives for church communities and work with local communities.

2. Formation of a shared public narrative of peace and its conceptualization to help create a strategic vision for the work of religious organizations.

3. Common interreligious work on the "Ukraine is Our Home" Peacebuilding Strategy; developing a practical plan for its implementation and communication of this in the regions.

4. Long-term support of grassroots initiatives of religious communities' cooperation through a network of "insider mediators," as well as establishing their cooperation with secular initiatives.

5. Evaluation and strategic implementation of the potential of a neutral state representative for dealing with disputes and guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for religious organizations, on the example of the State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience attached to the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, PAX recommends the following steps to different groups of actors in order to maximize the impact religious actors and communities can have on sustainable peace in Ukraine:

For the Ukrainian government:

1. To provide legal and institutional mechanisms to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all faith-based communities. In particular:
    - the State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience under the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine to take a coordinating role in the process;
    - legislative and executive authorities to (strive to) adopt legal acts that secure religious pluralism in Ukraine and protect freedom of belief according to the best international practices and standards, and in line with the Ukrainian tradition of protecting freedom of belief;
    - the government, with support from parliament, to designate a neutral state representative for the resolution of disputes on religious grounds.
2. To continue the positive practice of dialogue and consultation with religious leaders on key matters for the society.
    - the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations to remain a key interlocutor for the Ukrainian government, as a unique inter-faith forum for dialogue and consultation.
3. To adhere to an inclusive public discourse, based on respect for human rights and dignity, preventing instrumentalization of the religious sphere for political and security goals.
4. Through nation-wide initiatives (e.g. discussions, roundtables, educational initiatives) and cooperation with civil society organizations and/or the international (donor) community, to support empowerment of religious actors to take an active role in peacebuilding processes, human rights protection and dialogue initiatives:
    - the Ukrainian government can build upon previous experience with such initiatives, like the national roundtable "Faith, religion" conducted in 2020 and the human rights driven the Religious Freedom Roundtable in Ukraine established in 2019.
5. To provide support to faith-based communities located outside big urban agglomerations in their exercise of the right to freedom of religion, notably by ensuring that information about this right is easily accessible for and actively shared with these communities.
6. To address issues of faith-based prosecution in Crimea and non-government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions through political, diplomatic and international initiatives. This includes facilitating the process of bringing to justice perpetrators responsible for religion-based prosecution in a way that increases perspectives for reconciliation (restorative justice).

For religious actors in Ukraine:

1. To encourage and ensure strategic education of young church ministers who in the future will produce narratives for church communities and work with local communities, with a focus on conflict sensitivity and effective communication.
2. To provide long-term support to grassroots initiatives for cooperation between religious communities through a network of "inside mediators," and the establishment of cooperation with similar secular initiatives.
3. To initiate a process to formulate a shared public narrative of peace and its translation into a strategic vision for the activities of religious organizations.

4. To continue joint interreligious work on concretization of the Peacebuilding Strategy "Ukraine is Our Common Home", including the development of a practical action plan and accompanying communication plan for the regions.
5. To address issues of faith-based prosecution in Crimea and non-government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions by different means, making use of their networks and actively searching to learn from international experiences of reconciliation after (faith-based) prosecution in a way that increases perspectives for durable peace (restorative justice).

For civil society organizations in Ukraine:

1. To recognize the important role of religious organizations in the civil society landscape in Ukraine and engage with them whenever common goals justify so.
2. Whenever possible, to liaise with religious organizations for the promotion of peacebuilding and dialogue initiatives.
3. To cooperate with media representatives and outlets which help to promote and stimulate evidence-based, factual and inclusive public discourse, based on respect for human rights and dignity, preventing instrumentalization of the religious sphere for political and security goals.
4. To continue the positive practice of dialogue and consultation with religious leaders on key matters for the society – e.g. in the framework of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations.
5. To participate actively in initiatives that support the empowerment of religious actors to take an active role in peacebuilding processes, human rights protection and dialogue initiatives.
6. To address issues of faith-based prosecution in Crimea and non-government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions by different means, harnessing international experiences of reconciliation after (faith-based) prosecution. This includes facilitating the process of bringing to justice perpetrators responsible for faith-based prosecution in a way that increases perspectives for reconciliation (restorative justice).

For the international (donor) community:

1. To proactively seek opportunities to involve, include and/or consult faith-based communities and their leaders in initiatives aimed at civil society development, peacebuilding and dialogue in Ukraine.
2. In communication with Ukrainian government and religious leaders, to bring forward cases of (and be ready to address) politicization and securitization of the religious sphere as a threat to religious pluralism in the country, its democratic development and ongoing peace efforts in the Donbas.
3. To take appropriate action in response to Russia's policy of instrumentalizing Orthodoxy for political gains and especially foreign policy objectives.
4. To establish and/or continue the positive practice of dialogue and consultation with religious leaders on key matters for the society – e.g. in the framework of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations.
5. To provide targeted financial support for the initiatives that include capacity-building and awareness raising when it comes to exercising the right to freedom of religion in faith-based communities, especially those situated outside big urban agglomerations.
6. To address issues of faith-based prosecution in Crimea and non-government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions through diplomatic and knowledge-sharing initiatives. This includes facilitating international exchanges to learn from experiences with bringing to justice perpetrators responsible for religion-based prosecution in a way that increases perspectives for reconciliation (restorative justice).

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