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CHANGES IN UKRAINIAN ORTHODOXY AFTER THE REVOLUTION OF DIGNITY: THE "RUSSIAN" CONTEXT

ABSTRACT

Within the framework of the implementation of foreign policy employing "soft power", the leadership of the Russian Federation traditionally assigns an important role to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). After the occupation of Crimea and the beginning of the armed conflict in Donbas, the ROC lost much of its direct influence on the situation in Ukraine. Under such circumstances, the new leadership of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) Moscow Patriarchate (MP) has taken on the key role in conveying messages to Ukrainian society favorable to the Kremlin. Initiating the distancing of the church from social processes in the state, the hierarchs of the UOC (MP) have simultaneously taken steps and made statements that, within the framework of Ukrainian-Russian confrontation, clearly demonstrate their support for the Russian point of view. In fact, despite the ongoing armed conflict in the east of Ukraine, the UOC (MP) has been able to maintain its position within Ukrainian Orthodoxy in terms of numbers. At the same time, the emergence of the local autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) in early 2019 marked a fundamental transformation in its religious landscape. The OCU was formed mainly from the UOC-KP (Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate) and the UAOC (Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church) which had not been canonically recognized by the world Orthodox Church, unlike the UOC-MP. Having received the *Tomos* from the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, the OCU

became the only canonical Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Within the two years following its formation, the OCU was recognized by three more Orthodox churches along with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and was included in their lists of the recognized Eastern Orthodox churches (diptychs). This accounts for the OCU's promising prospects while it also signifies a loss of authority by the ROC as well as the growing threats it faces in terms of its weakened influence within world Orthodoxy.

Key words

Ukraine; Russia; UOC (MP) (Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate); OCU (Orthodox Church of Ukraine); autocephaly

After the occupation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbas, the leadership of the Russian Federation lost a great deal of its influence in Ukraine. In such a situation, Moscow started looking for new mechanisms that would allow it to maintain its position of power on Ukrainian territory. Furthermore, the Russian side was undeniably active in its efforts to minimize negative tendencies in spheres where, despite the unfavorable situation, it had managed to maintain control (Hurak & D'Anieri, 2020). An important position in this regard is Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

From the point of view of world Orthodoxy, the territory of Ukraine was still considered canonical territory for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) despite the nearly three decades since Ukraine gained independence. In the last decade of the 20th century there were three key Orthodox churches in Ukraine: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)[1] (UOC (MP)), which was subordinated to the ROC), as well as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). The latter two sought recognition from other world Orthodox churches, but for a long time they were not accepted in the Orthodox world. The Russian aggression against Ukraine caused significant changes in the religious sphere. Taking into consideration the fact that the Orthodox congregation is the most influential Christian community in Ukraine, it is worth emphasizing the paramount importance of the relevant changes for both the internal development of Ukraine and for Ukrainian-Russian relations in general. The role and value of these issues determines the utmost importance of this current research.

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[1] The official name of the church is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. However, by analogy with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate and for clear identification, the unofficial appendix is traditionally used (Moscow Patriarchate).

This article is based on the works of such scholars and experts as Valenta Baliuk, Viktor Voynalovych, Dmytro Gorievyi, Mykola Doroshko, Andrey Pertsev, Alexander Soldatov, Viacheslav Yaremchuk and others, as well as on an analysis of official documents of religious organizations and the texts of speeches of church figures. The objective of the article is to study the fundamental changes that have taken place in Ukrainian Orthodoxy since 2014. The following research questions are asked: what is the relationship between the leadership of Russia and the ROC and how does it affect UOC (MP); what important qualitative and quantitative changes have taken place in religious life in Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity and in the context of Russian-Ukrainian relations.

1. The place of the ROC in Kremlin policy and the relationship between the Russian leadership and the Moscow Patriarchate

After the collapse of the USSR there was an official declaration of separation between church and state in the Russian Federation (Epifanii, 2015). However, in reality the political regime of Vladimir Putin maintains an exceptionally close relationship with the ROC, which gives political scientists grounds to talk about the existence of a "political alliance" between church and government in Russia (Yaremchuk, 2015, p. 250). In the international arena the cooperation between the Kremlin and the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate is intensive and significant. In this context, the quote of the third Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Igor Ivanov (1998–2004) seemed only natural when in 2004 he stated that "convoking the 'Russian world' is the common cause of the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church" ("Vystuplenie ministra", 2004). Vladimir Putin was even more expressive regarding the importance of the union of the state and the ROC in February 2009. During a press conference, while answering questions about the place of Orthodoxy in Russia's future, the Russian president emphasized that along with the nuclear shield they "are the components that strengthen Russian statehood and create the necessary conditions for internal and external security" ("Stenograficheskij otchet", 2007).

This kind of statement totally correlates with the full support given to the ROC by the Russian leadership in both symbolic and practical spheres. For instance, according to the press, during religious holidays Vladimir Putin traditionally visits Orthodox churches, sometimes he pays visits to monasteries to "be far from the turmoil … [and] focus on the main things" ("Monahi Valaama", 2014; "Putin vstretit", 2020). Very unusual manifestations of his support have taken place there. Firstly, in 2013 the Russian president announced that he had

been secretly baptized as a child ("Putin byl kreshchen", 2013). Later, in the film *Patriarch*, released in 2016 to mark the 70th anniversary of Patriarch Kirill (Gundiaiev), Putin after consideration concluded that he had been baptized by the patriarch's father, the priest Mikhail Gundiaiev ("Putin soobshchil", 2016).

The financial dimension of the Kremlin's support for the ROC is also important. Thus, according to publicly available information, during 2012–2015 alone the ROC and related structures received at least 14 billion rubles from the budget and from state organizations, and three of the patriarch's four residences were provided by the state ("Rassledovanie RBK", 2016). In general, it is a common practice in modern Russia for key state corporations headed by presidential proxies, as well as for Kremlin-dependent oligarchs, to provide significant financial support to the ROC.

Furthermore, these structures also promote Russian church interests outside the state. It is not unusual for them to provide financial assistance to local Orthodox congregations supporting the Moscow Patriarchate within the framework of world Orthodoxy ("Biznesmeny o pomoshchi RPC", 2016; Kondratova, 2020). A special place in the promotion of Russian religious interests abroad belongs to the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society. Being headed by Sergei Stepashin since 2007, the former head of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation Minister of Internal Affairs, and even acting prime minister in 1999, the society has established control by the ROC over several shrines in Jerusalem, Nazareth and Bethlehem (Kondratova, 2020; "Relihiina rezydentura", 2018).

On their part, the leadership of the ROC provides effective support for the initiatives of the Russian government. Since 2009, the Moscow Patriarchate has been openly and actively involved in promoting the doctrine of the "Russian world" (Yaremchuk, 2015, p. 252). It is worth mentioning that when giving a speech at the Third Assembly of the Russian World Foundation in November 2009, Patriarch Kirill went beyond the statutory goals of the ROC and called for coordination of the mutual efforts of church and state to form a strongly-united Russian world which is to become "a powerful subject of global world politics" ("Vystuplenie Svyatejshego", 2009a). In September 2012, the ROC came up with an initiative for a nationwide referendum on the reunification of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, which according to the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate should be a step towards strengthening integration among post-Soviet states (Zdioruk, 2017). It is also common practice for the ROC to demonstrate support for the Russian leadership on the eve of an election. Quite a significant role may be attributed to the episode on the eve of the presidential election in February 2012 when Patriarch Kirill called the development of relations between

church and state under Vladimir Putin a "miracle" to be proud of ("V. V. Putin priekhal", 2012). At the same time, he called Putin's opponents a minority who admire Western consumer culture and pose a major threat to Russia (Bryanski, 2012).

In recent years some Western and even Russian authors point out that Russian aggression in Ukraine and its aftermath has complicated relations between Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Kirill. They see the patriarch's refusal to participate in the solemn celebration of the capture of Crimea (Pertsev, 2017; Seddon, 2019) as a confirmation of this. A further aspect in this regard is his appeal to allow Ukrainians to determine their future, made after the announcement of the decision of the Russian Federal Assembly on 1 March 2014 giving Vladimir Putin grounds to use Russian troops on Ukrainian territory (Yaremchuk, 2015, p. 260). In the same way, we find the events of 14 September 2018 extremely interesting: on that day, an extraordinary meeting of the ROC synod took place which was used to discuss the pre-announced granting of autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (UOC). At noon, when the discussion was ongoing, there was a statement by Dmitry Peskov, a spokesman for the Russian President, that the Kremlin was "monitoring" the work of the synod and they would vouch for the "preservation of the unity of the Orthodox world" as the best scenario (Soldatov, 2018).

However, these contradictory points did not disrupt the close and mutually beneficial cooperation between the Kremlin and the ROC. Following the recommendations of Vladimir Putin ("Obrashchenie Prezidenta", 2017), church hierarchs often demonstrate in their attitudes and resolve on activities that go beyond canonically justified limits. For example, shortly after the above decision of the Federal Assembly, the department of the Moscow Patriarchate issued a statement on the issue of church-society relations, justifying Russia's right to support "Russian people" in "historically Russian" territories, and they also expressed their hopes that "this mission of Russian warriors (…) will not encounter fierce opposition which may lead to a large-scale collision" (Yaremchuk, 2015, p. 260). Instead, on 18 July 18 2014, the day after the Russian Buk missile system shot down a Malaysia Airlines plane over the territory of Donbas, and the Ukrainian military in Donetsk and Luhansk regions were subjected to systematic shelling from Russian territories (Hurak, 2015, pp. 172–173), Patriarch Kirill praised Vladimir Putin's activities and admonished "the whole world" for not understanding Russia as "it poses no military threat or danger" ("700-letie", 2014).

2. UOC (MP) in the "Russian coordinate system" after 2014

Before the Revolution of Dignity, Ukraine occupied an exceptional place in the activities of Patriarch Kirill. It was to Ukraine that he paid his first pastoral visit ("Vystuplenie Svyatejshego", 2009b). To understand the scale of the ROC's activities in the Ukrainian lands before the Russian aggression, it should be borne in mind that Patriarch Kirill visited Ukraine seven times during 2011 alone (Yaremchuk, 2015, p. 257). To make a proper comparison, it should be noted that his predecessor, Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow, who held the patriarchal throne in between 1990 and 2008, was in Ukraine only four times during his reign (Nesterenko, 2014). Despite the constantly announced pastoral nature of his visits, Patriarch Kirill has traditionally made them politically propagandistic (Zdioruk, 2017). After the Revolution of Dignity, the ROC lost many ways and opportunities to influence events in Ukraine directly. At the same time, the facts indicate that it was the UOC (MP) that took on a leading role in spreading rumors in Ukraine harmful to Ukrainian national interests, those rumors being created by Russian political 'technologists'.

Before outlining the activities and position of the UOC (MP) leadership concerning issues important for Ukrainian society after the Revolution of Dignity, we consider it necessary to clearly determine the status of UOC (MP) within the ROC. It should be emphasized that quite opposite approaches regarding its status and role exist. On the one hand, on 20 December 2018, during the so-called "Great Press Conference", Vladimir Putin emphasized that "the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate was completely independent… The only connection was spiritual when they mentioned the Patriarch of Moscow and 'All Russia' during sermons" (Putin, 2018). However, experts on Ukrainian-Russian relations claim that the UOC (MP) is "de facto a branch" of the ROC and that along with the ROC they make up "important soft-power instruments in the Kremlin's hybrid warfare against Ukraine" (Karelska & Umland, 2020).

In analysis of ROC and UOC (MP) relations fundamental documents show that the second statement is more accurate. In particular, the current Statute on the Administration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (hereinafter – the Statute) states that it is "connected with Local Orthodox Churches through the Russian Orthodox Church" (Statut pro upravlinnia, 2007). Naturally, it is not included in their list of recognized Eastern Orthodox churches (diptych). In the introductory part of the Statute, it is noted that the UOC (MP) is independent and autonomous only "in its management and structure" and it is

also a "self-governing part of the Russian Orthodox Church" (Statut pro upravlinnia, 2007). It is only logical that there is no mention of the UOC (MP) among world orthodoxies. The prologue of the Statute states that the UOC (MP) is independent in its 'governing and orders', while it is "a self-governing part of the ROC" (Statut pro upravlinnia, 2007). The subordination of UOC (MP) to ROC is also indicated by the current statute of the ROC itself. In particular, in paragraph 1 of section X which is, in fact, devoted to the UOC (MP), it is stated that "the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is self-governing [not "independent"! – I.H. & S.K.] with the right to broad autonomy". The same section states that its synod makes decisions on the establishment and dissolution of UOC (MP) dioceses with the further approval of the ROC Council of Bishops. The synod is also defined as the highest court for the UOC (MP) (Ustav Russkoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi, 2017).

The beginning of Russian aggression in 2014 caused significant changes to the lives of Ukrainians, and in the religious sphere these were supplemented by a change in the leadership of the UOC (MP). After the death of Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan), it was Onufriy (Berezovsky) who became the new head of the UOC (MP) in August 2014. It should be emphasized that while still the *locum tenens* of the Kyiv metropolis under the sick Volodymyr, Metropolitan Onufriy did not use the words "Russian aggression" or "occupation"; he called Ukrainians and Russians "people of the same blood", without actually recognizing Ukrainians as a separate nation (Nesterenko, 2014).

Becoming the head of the UOC (MP), Metropolitan Onufriy, on the one hand, tried to isolate it from societal processes as much as possible, urging priests to limit their activities beyond church walls only to social service (Voinalovych, 2018, p. 149). At the same time, UOC (MP) leadership in the context of the Ukrainian-Russian multifaceted confrontation has clearly demonstrated and continues to demonstrate support for the Russian side. A situation with symbolic significance occurred on May 8, 2015 in the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine. On that day, in a sign of respect for the anti-terrorist operation all those present rose from their seats except for representatives of the UOC (MP), led by Metropolitan Onufriy. An equally symptomatic situation occurred in May 2020. For several weeks due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the leadership of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP) chose not to participate in public events. On May 8, the UOC (MP) hierarchs ignored the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation, which has been celebrated in Ukraine at state level since 2015, which should be close in spirit to them as members of the clergy. Instead, on May 9, they solemnly laid flowers at the Eternal Flame Monument in the Park of Glory of Kyiv, thus

imitating the leadership of the Russian Federation and the ROC, as the latter celebrated the victory over fascism on this day ("Ahenty politychnoi relihii", 2020).

Furthermore, the hierarchs of the UOC (MP) failed to take a clear stand on the issues of the Russian invasion and "separatism", and while calling for reconciliation, they stubbornly overlooked the crucial inciting role of the Russian side in the war in Donbas (Voinalovych, 2018, pp. 149–150). The leadership of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP), mimicking the Russian authorities, claims that Russia is not a party to the conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Donbas, and thus they interpret the events as a civil and fratricidal war. It went so far that at some point a number of priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP) contributed to disruption of army mobilization (Baliuk & Doroshko, 2020, p. 9), and refused to perform a funeral rite for a Ukrainian soldier who died in the anti-terrorist operation in eastern Ukraine ("Zvernennia uchasnykiv", 2018).

3. Orthodoxy in Ukraine in the post-Revolution of Dignity period: the balance of change

Russia's aggression against Ukraine was perceived by the ROC rather ambiguously and initially it did not find the support expected in the Kremlin. This situation seems only natural, as the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict created significant risks for the interests of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine, including the possibility of banning the UOC (MP) on Ukrainian territory, which was called for by a certain part of Ukrainian society (Kostiuk, 2018).

In practice, however, the restrictive initiatives were reduced to amendments to the Ukraine law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" in December 2018. It contained a requirement that the name of the UOC (MP) should reflect its connection with the ROC ("Pro vnesennia", 2018). However, based on the decisions of the Ukrainian courts, the implementation of the law in practice was blocked ("Verkhovnyi Sud", 2019). Additionally, the state leadership led by President Petro Poroshenko (2014–2019) tried to maintain a dialogue with Metropolitan Onufriy on the whole range of issues, including the involvement the UOC (MP) in the negotiation process for the release of Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia (Kostiuk, 2018).

Analyzing the situation around UOC (MP) after the Revolution of Dignity, it should be emphasized that the quantitative parameters have not changed significantly. The official statistics on key church indicators on 1 January 2015 and 1 January 2020 are almost identical. In particular, the number of religious

organizations and monks decreased only slightly, while the number of priests, "Sunday schools", and monasteries of UOC (MP) slightly increased[2].

Undoubtedly, such a situation can be considered a significant achievement on the part of the UOC (MP). In the conditions of the long-term Ukrainian-Russian war in Donbas, less than 4.5% of the total number of religious communities (541) left the UOC (MP) from February 2014 to February 2020 ("Khto, de i skilky", 2020), while in the occupied Crimea the number of Orthodox communities belonging to UOC-KP decreased by a factor of eight (from 49 to 6) ("Ukraina rozpovila", 2020).

Another important indicator of a church is the percentage of citizens who identify themselves as its members. It should be noted that since 2014, despite the significant advantage of UOC (MP) over UOC-KP in the number of religious communities, the former was second to the latter in the number of members. Despite this, the situation does not seem to be a threat to UOC (MP). According to sociological polls conducted systematically by the Razumkov Center, the number of Orthodox Christians who claim to be in a UOC (MP) congregation decreased by only a small amount, from 24.8% to 21.7%, during the period from 2014 to 2020. It should also be noted that in 2020, compared to 2019, there was even an increase in this indicator ("Osoblyvosti", 2020, p. 16).

The UOC (MP) managed not to lose its bishops to the newly created OCU. According to the present information, 10 or 12 bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP) supported the appeal to Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to grant *Tomos* to Ukrainian Orthodoxy in April 2018 (Chervonenko, 2018; Kuznetsova 2020). Finally, only two of them took part in the unification council which was another step towards autocephaly.

The UOC (MP) managed to preserve complete control over the key Ukrainian Orthodox shrines: Kyiv-Pechersk, Pochaiiv and Sviatogirsk Lavras. There were no serious consequences for the Lavra representatives, even though Ukrainian society still considers them a bulwark of 'Russian world' ideas (Ruchko, 2018, p. 92), and despite the evidence presented that in 2014 the Holy Mountains Lavra of the Holy Dormition was hiding hostile militants and weapons used against the Ukrainian military in the war in Donbas (Kuznetsova 2021; "Sviatohirska

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[2] As of 1 January 2015, the UOC (MP) was in charge of 12,556 religious organizations, 10,180 priests, 3,978 "Sunday schools", 207 monasteries and 4,869 monks. As of 1 January 2020 the UOC (MP) was in charge of 12,410 religious organizations, 10,532 priests, 4,068 "Sunday schools", 215 monasteries and 4,722 monks. For further information see (Nakaz Ministerstva, 2014; Nakaz Ministerstva, 2020).

lavra", 2018). Even the direct confession of former Defense Minister of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic Igor Girkin (known by the alias Igor Strelkov) that during his stay in Donbas "his personal protection consisted of spiritual sons, monks and hieromonks of the Holy Mountains Lavra" ("Teroryst Hirkin", 2018), did not change much. The Ukrainian state leadership, law enforcement agencies and the leadership of other Orthodox churches did their best to protect the current "hosts" of the shrines in order to avoid destabilization in the country.

On the other hand, it should be brought light to that Russian aggression against Ukraine triggered fundamental qualitative changes in Ukrainian Orthodoxy. From the historical perspective, it is worth mentioning that at the beginning of his presidency Viktor Yushchenko (2005–2010) initiated negotiations with Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople in order to establish a local Ukrainian church and obtain autocephaly. They started to work on the plan and in July 2008 Bartholomew visited Kyiv. However, the visit ended with an unscheduled meeting of Patriarch Bartholomew with Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow, the head of the ROC at the time. As a result, the Ecumenical and Moscow Patriarchates revived ecclesiastical communication, which had been terminated in 1996. The ROC also announced its support for Bartholomew's initiative to convene a World Orthodox Council. For the Ukrainian side the main consequence of this meeting of patriarchs was that the issue of autocephaly for Ukrainian Orthodoxy was taken off the agenda for the time being (Kameniev, 2018; "Spodivaiemosia", 2018).

After the Revolution of Dignity, Ukrainian domestic policy underwent significant changes, and that has meant new perspectives of the case for autocephaly. The events of 2018 and the beginning of 2019 could be regarded as milestones in this respect. In April 2018 the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, had a meeting with Patriarch Bartholomew, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate (Phanar) received requests for autocephaly from the hierarchs of UOC-KP, UAOC and some bishops of UOC-MP. These requests were backed up by the President's address to the *Verkhovna Rada*. In early October 2018, the synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was held, where the decision to grant autocephaly to the Church in Ukraine was made and the Ecumenical Patriarchate started to act on it. The repeal of the Synodal Letter of 1686 was also announced which, given the circumstances of that time, granted the Moscow patriarch the right to ordain the Metropolitan of Kyiv. On 15 December 2018 Kyiv held the Unification Council in which all the hierarchs of the UOC-KP, UAOC, and two from the UOC (MP) took part. The council proclaimed the establishment of OCU and elected its head, namely Metropolitan Epiphanius. The conclusion of this process

took place on 6 January 2019 when Patriarch Bartholomew presented Metropolitan Epiphanius with a *Tomos* giving autocephaly ("Pravoslavna Tserkva", 2020).

Consequently, according to the decisions of the 4th and 6th Ecumenical Councils, which granted the Patriarch of Constantinople exceptional privileges, and under the practice existing since the 16th century when the Ecumenical Patriarchate granted autocephaly to local churches ("Vsya Pravda", 2021), a fifteenth local Orthodox Church, the OCU, came into existence.

Analyzing the reasons for its appearance, it is worth mentioning the Pan-Orthodox Council which took place in June 2016 on the island of Crete. As noted above, back in 2008 Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow expressed his support for Bartholomew in the organization of such a meeting. The Moscow Patriarchate was known to take an active part in forming the agenda of the council (Massavetas, 2018). However, on the eve of the opening of the council, they refused to participate in its work. Additionally, being influenced by the ROC, the representatives of the Antiochian, Bulgarian and Georgian churches also decided not to join (Kondratova, 2020; Soldatov, 2018; "Taiemnytsi", 2016). Therefore, experts and journalists have grounds to speculate that it was the ROC's destructive position towards the Pan-Orthodox Council that led directly to the Ecumenical Patriarch's decision to grant autocephaly to the OCU ("Spodivaiemosia", 2018).

In our opinion, this interpretation of events is false. The behavior of the Moscow Patriarchate and the steps they took in 2016 could have served as one of catalysts of the process connected to the acquisition of autocephaly by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, but it was certainly not its cause. We share the opinion of Stephanie Fencard, Director of the Vienna International Peace Institute, who emphasized a few days after the Unification Council that it was Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine which served as the main reason for the unification of Ukrainian Orthodoxy, and which, in our point of view, was one of the steps towards autocephaly ("Ahresiia RF", 2018).

The permanent Ecumenical Patriarchate representative to the World Council of Churches at Geneva, Archbishop Job (Getcha), was even more expressive on this issue when he commented on it in early November 2018. He was emphatic that the decision concerning Ukrainian autocephaly was primarily made because of the situation in Ukraine. The presence of the three separate orthodox churches on the territory of Ukraine for almost 30 years testified to the inefficiency of the administration of the Moscow Patriarchate over Ukrainian Orthodoxy, and it encouraged the Ecumenical Patriarchate to seek new formats to solve the problems of this kind of inner division. On the other hand, Archbishop Job suggests

that in the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict the situation has become even more complicated. In particular, he mentioned that on the eve of the Pan-Orthodox Council, the Ecumenical Patriarchate received an appeal from deputies of the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine stating that after Russian aggression began "Ukraine will never be a political or ecclesiastical colony of Russia". In Constantinople, such a document was regarded as the position of the majority of the Ukrainian people, represented by parliamentarians. Also, Archbishop Job reported that in recent years Ukrainian believers repeatedly appealed to Phanar, claiming that in the face of Russian aggression in the Donbas, they do not consider it possible to visit the temples of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine (Khomenko & Denysov, 2018; "Spodivaiemosia", 2018).

Hence, it was Russian aggression towards Ukraine that cardinally changed the situation in Ukrainian orthodoxy. In terms of canon law, UOC (MP) was considered the only canonical Church on the territory of Ukraine until the end of 2018/ beginning of 2019, then on its creation the OCU took over this status. Moreover, a letter from Patriarch Bartholomew from 6 October 2020 stated that according to Canon 8 of the Council of Nicaea (325 AD), the hierarchs of UOC (MP) who did not join the OCU no longer have the status of local ruling bishops, and are considered only titular ("Vselenskyi patriarch", 2020).

Granting the *Tomos* fueled the process of the OCU acquiring its place within the framework of world Orthodoxy. Following the Ecumenical Patriarchate, two years after its creation, it was recognized by the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Orthodox Church of Greece, and the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, and included in their diptychs. In response to such steps, the ROC severed eucharistic communion with those churches but it is important that no other church has since followed this example (Haizhevska 2021; Kondratova, 2020). Thisaccounts for the silent support and agreement on the course of events, if not as open support for Patriarch Bartholomew's decision on autocephaly for the OCU.

In addition, the OCU has witnessed positive quantitative changes worthy of attention. In particular, as of 1 January 2020 there are 7,097 religious organizations and 4,537 "ecclesiastics". These numbers serve as evidence of positive change, as according to official data on 1 January 2015 there were only 6,115 religious organizations and 3,940 "ecclesiastics" of the UOC (KP) and UAOC together (Nakaz Ministerstva, 2014; Nakaz Ministerstva, 2020).

Conclusions

During the time Vladimir Putin has held the posts of president or prime minister, close and mutually beneficial cooperation has been established between the Kremlin and the ROC leadership. On the one hand, state and state-dependent business structures actively support the ROC both in Russia and abroad while in turn, the Moscow Patriarchate acts as an instrument of the secular Russian leadership in the international arena. Until 2014, this model of Russian influence was actively practiced in Ukraine. After the Revolution of Dignity, however, the ROC leadership's ways of directly influencing Ukrainian citizens was severely limited. Under such circumstances, the UOC (MP) played an important role in Russia's information aggression against Ukraine. Despite the Russian statement about the "complete independence" of the UOC (MP) and its exclusively "spiritual connection" with the ROC, their statutory documents clearly and unambiguously indicate the subordination of the former to the latter. The position of the hierarchs of the UOC (MP) on a number of crucial issues, their readiness to retransmit rumors created by Kremlin political "technologists" to present the Russian-Ukrainian multifaceted conflict in a favorable light for Russia, serve as a practical manifestation of this dependence.

Russian aggression towards Ukraine had a very strong impact on Ukrainian orthodoxy. On the one hand, contrary to the expectations of a majority of Ukrainians, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict did not cause significant quantitative losses or restrictions on UOC (MP) as subordinated to Moscow. UOC (MP) managed to preserve practically the same number of religious organizations and monks as before the conflict, and there was also a slight increase in the number of priests, "Sunday schools" and monasteries. Of course, compared to the success of UOC-KP and UAOC, and later OCU, certain stagnant tendencies can be traced in UOC (MP). Nevertheless, for UOC (MP) such a situation is clearly far from critical.

Instead, Ukrainian Orthodoxy witnessed more significant qualitative changes. At the turn of 2018–2019, these changes were fundamental. With the blessing and support of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew the local OCU in Ukraine came into existence based on UOC-KP, UAOC and a small part of UOC (MP) and it received autocephalous status. In this way Ukrainian Orthodoxy underwent a radical metamorphosis. The hierarchs of UOC-KP and UAOC, who were not subordinated to the ROC and not previously recognized by world Orthodoxy, acquired canonical status. At the same time, according to the decisions

of the First Council of Nicaea, the hierarchs of the UOC (MP) who did not join the OCU are considered to have lost their status. Patriarch Bartholomew's decision to grant autocephaly provoked fierce opposition from the ROC. However, despite the negative reaction of the ROC, and breaking eucharistic communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, within two years the autocephaly of the OCU was recognized by three more churches, including the Patriarch of Alexandria, who is considered the second most important person in the Orthodox world.

It is difficult for Ukraine to overestimate the results of these changes for the time being. At the same time, in the long run, they may have a growing influence on world Orthodoxy. The significant influence of the ROC is based on state support and the fact that it is the largest Orthodox church in numbers. However, the emergence of the OCU poses a potential threat that it will lose such status in the future.

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