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The omitted role of the Churches in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict *

ABSTRACT: The paper analyzes the effects of the recognition of autocephaly by the new Ukrainian Orthodox Church. It constitutes one of the crisis factors in relations between Ukraine and Russia in the ongoing clash in the Orthodox Churches between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church. The article reconstructs the positions of the various religious denominations present in Ukraine in contending for the representation of the interests of the Ukrainian people. It explores how the war is undermining the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and its Metropolia of Kiev. It also analyzes the role played in the crisis by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, a sui juris Church that aspires to play a supranational role.

SUMMARY: 1. Premise - 2. The recognition of the Autocephaly of the new Ukrainian Orthodox Church as a factor of crisis of relations between Ukraine and Russia - 3. The stages of the crisis - 4. The Kiev Metropolia of the Moscow Patriarchate and the War - 5. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the war.

1 - Premise

To try to understand what is happening in Ukraine and to reconstruct the position of the parties to the conflict it is essential to know the different aspects of the internal confrontation of Orthodoxy around the recognition of the self-cephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, a Church born recently (2019) from the unification of previous ecclesial structures that gave birth to a single Church. It was born and stands in contrast to the historical majority in Ukraine, constituted by the *Metropolia of Kiev of the Russian Orthodox Church belonging to the Patriarchate of Moscow*, from now on, (UPC-MP). On the question, to which we have dedicated our previous essay¹, a deep rift has taken place between the Ecumenical Patriarchate of

* Article not peer evaluated.

The Italian version will be published in *Diritto e religioni*.

¹ G. CIMBALO, *The evolution of relations between State and Churches in the New Ukraine*.



Constantinople and the Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church which has led to the rupture of ecclesial communion between the two most significant entities of Orthodoxy and the excommunication by the Moscow Patriarchate of that of Constantinople². On the other hand, Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, knows it is fine that accepting American demands to grant autocephaly to Ukrainians would have resulted in a break with Moscow, but the benefits of the economic and ecclesial relations he has with the Orthodox diaspora in North America and Australia, which are under his canonical jurisdiction, were decidedly vital to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its finances³,

In search of Autocephaly, in *Law and Religions*, 2, 2020, pp. 252-304.

² On October 15, 2018, the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, meeting in Minsk, declared "the juridical bond of the synodal letter of the year 1686", that is, the document with which the then Ecumenical Patriarch Dionysius IV had accepted the subordination of the Metropolia of Kiev to the Moscow Patriarchate, to have lapsed. Bartholomew, Moscow claims, violated the canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate. On the point see: **V. PARLATO**, *The autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Doctrinal interpretations and ecclesial structures in comparison*, in *State, Churches and confessional pluralism*, Telematic review (<https://www.statoechiese.it>), 7, 2019, p. 8 ff.; **I.V. PONKIN**, *Opinion on act (decision), adopted by the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople on 11 October 2018*, in *Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale*, cit., 2, 2019; **A. GARUTI**, *Religious freedom and ecumenism. La questione del «territorio canonico» in Russia*, Cantagalli, Siena, 2005. This means that the ministers of the Russian Orthodox Church will no longer celebrate any liturgy together with those of the Patriarchate of Constantinople – to which Moscow systematically refuses to attribute the qualification of "ecumenical" – and even the simple Russian faithful will have to refrain from participating in the sacraments administered in the Churches of the Byzantine Patriarchate, including those of Mount Athos.

³ Orthodox Christians in the United States, of whom the vast majority are affiliated with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, rank sixth on the list of America's richest religious communities. Cf. http://www.civg.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1590:fanar-vaticano-odipartimento-of-state-as-are-the-forces-behind-the-Tomos-of-the-Orthodox-Church-of-Ukraine&catid=2:uncategorized.

In addition, it should be taken into account that after much insistence the Ecumenical Patriarchate has obtained the appointment, as holder of the stauropegia (embassy) of the Patriarchate in Washington, of Elpidophoros (Lambranidis), the new Archbishop of America, who acted as an intermediary of the Patriarchate with the Ukrainian schismatics for many years. In 2008, when for the first time the question of the autocephaly of the "Kiev Patriarchate" was seriously raised, Elpidophoros suddenly received the highest recognition of the Ukrainian state - the Order of Prince Yaroslav the Wise, of the fifth degree.

Among the most determined supporters of the primacy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its right to grant autocephaly, Elpidophoros is the author, among other things, of a book on the Ukrainian Church. He is spoken of as the probable successor of Bartholomew. See: **K. SHEMLJUK**, *Phanar, Vatican or State Department what are the forces*



masses in crisis since the Eparchies of the various autocephalous Churches to manage migrants who have moved outside their canonical territory⁴.

In examining the Ukrainian question, it must be borne in mind that it is part of the institutional crisis of a large part of the Eastern European states already part of the Soviet bloc, which are majority Orthodox. This has consequences not only from the confessional point of view, but also and above all culturally, since their orderly structure and the traditional configuration of the State itself attribute great importance to the role of the autocephalous national Church in the legitimization of the State. and your right to manage the company. In these States the relationship between the two entities is regulated in an entirely "Byzantine" perspective of the relations between State and Church which are thus based on the symphony of powers (*simfonija vlastej*) or *consonantia*, or harmonic relationship between *Sacerdotium* and *Imperium* which finds its formulation in the *Praefatio* of the Sixth Novella of Justinian, addressed to Epiphanius, *most holy Archbishop of the imperial city and Ecumenical Patriarch*, in which it is stated that the greatest gifts made by God are the priesthood and the empire, the first in the service of divine things and the

behind the Tomos of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (in http://www.civg.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1590:fanar-vaticano-o-dipartimento-di-stato-qualisono-le-forze-dietro-il-Tomos-della-chiesa-ortodossa-dell-ukraine&catid=2:non-categorized). For a brief biography: <https://www.athina984.gr/it/2019/05/11/neos-arcivescovado-amerikis-o-metropolitits-proyisis-elpidoforos/>.

⁴ By a well-established custom, the Orthodox of the diaspora were regarded by the Patriarchate of Constantinople as subject to its jurisdiction. However, especially with the beginning of the great migration from East to West Europe and to the rest of the world of the emigration of populations of the Orthodox faith, the Autocephalous Churches have given life to their own Eparchies, choosing to manage directly their faithful and thus taking away space from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. On the consequences of this phenomenon **G. GRIGORIȚĂ**, *The Orthodox Diaspora current and prospective realities for the future. An analysis from the canonical point of view*, in *Il Diritto Ecclesiastico*, 3-4, 2019, pp. 495-526; **V.S. SOLOV'EV**, *The ecumenism to come. Russia and the Universal Church*, Ghibli, Milan, 2013.

These religious organizations tend to enter into agreements with governments and to enter, therefore, permanently and autonomously from the legal point of view, in the system of the host States and to receive directly, where they exist, the economic support provided for by the legislation for confessions religious, configuring themselves as entities with autonomous legal personality. The truth is that in a globalized world the old concept of canonical territory has now entered an irreversible crisis. Moreover, these religious formations, once their relationship with the State has been legalized, do not claim to establish a symphonic relationship with it, but operate in a context of institutional pluralism in the relationship with it, adapting to current legislation and not requiring changes the systemic structure of relations with the State.



second in the guidance of human things.

It follows that the Church must place herself at the service of the State, assuming a national and therefore autocephalous dimension, cover an identitarian function that becomes the foundation of the authority of the State with respect to what they consider to be its national dimension of reference, for purposes that relead the role of confessional organizations as an instrument of State policy. In this respect, Ukraine, at the time of its independence, was in an anomalous position: its majority Orthodox Church was an integral part of the Russian Orthodox Church, a Church that is considered to be universal and supranational but which in fact is a point of reference and is it stands in support of another state, the Russian one. From this state, as from any other state, a large part of the Ukrainian political community wanted to distance itself precisely to give identity and autonomy to Ukraine".

Thus began a process of gradual agglomeration of different ecclesial experiences, all attributable to orthodoxy, which undergo processes of aggregation and integration of the different ecclesial structures hitherto existing that converge in 2019 in the constitution of a single ecclesiastical structure that pursues the achievement of autocephaly. To achieve it has only one way: to resort to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople which, after complex events, grants it⁵. The new Church can therefore claim primacy and privileged bond with the nation and with the State.

For the newborn Ukrainian Autocephalous Church it does not

⁵ The granting of autocephaly to the newborn Ukrainian Orthodox Church is on the other hand functional to the interests of the Ecumenical Patriarchate which sees its role as primacy undermined by the constant growth and expansion of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate which, also thanks to state support and the adoption of a modern institutional structure adopted after the collapse of the USSR, can meet the needs of the national Churches granting instead that autocephaly self-administration, a juridical form that while making the Church independent preserves a greater ecclesial bond with the Mother Church. Not only does the Ecumenical Patriarchate know well that by separating Ukraine from the canonical jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate it deprives it of at least 40% of the ecclesial structures, parishes and faithful and it therefore substantially weakens the force. Cf. **V. PARLATO**, *The Autocephaly*, cit.; **G. GRIGORIȚĂ**, *L'Orthodoxie entre autonomie et synodalité (les prescriptions des saints canons et les réalités ecclésiales actuelles)*, in V. PARLATO (ed.), *Catholicism and Orthodoxy to the Test. Interpretazioni dottrinali e strutture ecclesiali a confronto nella realtà sociale odierna*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2010, pp. 159-160; **J. OELDEMANN**, *Orthodoxe Kirchen in der Ukraine: zum Spannungsfeld zwischen Konstantinopel und Moskau*, in *Stimmen der Zeit*, 237, 4-2019), pp. 279-294; **C. HOVORUN**, *The Cause of Ukrainian autocephaly*, in E. CLARK, D. VOVK (edited by), *Religion during the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict*, Routledge, Londra - New York, 2020, pp. 180-191.



matter that the recognition of its existence and legitimacy produces a schism within the Orthodox world, inducing the different Patriarchates to take sides. The decisions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate are today supported by the Cypriot Patriarchate which has recognized the ecclesial communion with the new Church and so did that of Alexandria (which has jurisdiction over the Orthodox of the African continent), with the result of having its jurisdiction wrested from large part of the bishoprics of the newly formed Exarchate of Africa, created by the Russian Orthodox Church, to which many African episcopates have adhered. While many Patriarchates maintain a position of equidistance, some support for Plevy came from the Bulgarian Patriarchate, but to complicate the relationship with the Greek Patriarchate, its traditional supporter, the sudden decision of the new Ukrainian Patriarch Epiphanius intervened. to recognize the hated (by the Greek Orthodox) Calendarists, operating in Greece. These events have given incisiveness to the constant action of the Moscow Patriarchate which, supported by the Russian government, is consolidating relations with its international structures, granting the most important national Churches that refer to it the maximum autonomy and recognizing as self-administered some National Churches such as that of Belarus in the conviction that through this path the concession of autocephaly is avoided, which in fact loosens ecclesial communion, but above all severs the bonds of hierarchical obedience⁶.

For its part, the Ecumenical Patriarchate is faced with the problem of managing relations with some national Churches that insistently ask for autocephaly and this undermines the ties with the Churches of which they are currently part or with which they are in conflict, as is especially the case in the Balkan area⁷. What is happening shatters ecumenical dialogue not only between the different components of the Orthodox world within which a battle for primacy is being fought, but hinders the aspirations for ecumenical dialogue of the Catholic Church which has all the interest in not taking sides in the ongoing battle. Nevertheless, this situation is an obstacle to the diplomatic and mediating role between confessions and between States played by Vatican diplomacy and the Pontiff.

⁶ G. CIMBALO, *La Bielorussia alla ricerca della propria identità e il processo di confessionalizzazione dello Stato*, in *Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale*, cit., 39, 2018.

⁷ G. CIMBALO, *Autocefalia vo' cercando ch'è sì cara*, in *Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale*, cit., 19, 2020, pp. 24-61.



2 - The recognition of the Autocephalie of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as a factor in the crisis of relations between Ukraine and Russia

But returning to the Ukrainian situation, when the Patriarchate of Constantinople, on January 6, 2019 granted the Tomos of autocephaly to the new Ukrainian Orthodox Church, delivering it into the hands of Epiphanius (Dumenko Serhiy Petrovich), elected Patriarch of the Unified Orthodox Churches⁸, a deep fracture in Orthodoxy was definitively opened, which helped to add further reasons for confrontation between Ukraine and Russia. Even at the national level, the clash between the CPSU and the Ukrainian self-administered Orthodox Church, headed by the MOSCOW Patriarchate UPC-MP, has continued to grow, helping to fuel the political clash between the two states, which resulted in the ongoing conflict at the time of writing (5 February 2022).

The stages of this escalation are marked by the activity of the two confessors in contending for legitimacy to represent the May religious entity in the country, resorting to the political support of the State and its institutions, the first and second in trying to resist attempts to consider it a foreign Church. in the country, entirely dependent on the Church of a State - the Russian one - at war with the Ukrainian nation.

On January 30, 2019, the PCU received the official registration as a religious denomination⁹. The new legal entity has been named

⁸ On 15 December 2018 the so-called "Synod of Unity", held behind closed doors, chaired by the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Metropolitan Emmanuel of Gaul (Adamakis), guest of the President pro tempore of Ukraine Poroshenko, elected Metropolitan Primate DNC Epiphanius, professor and rector of the Orthodox Theological Academy of Kiev, former Metropolitan Pereyaslavsky and Bilotserkivskyi, Patriarchal Vicar Diocesan Bishop for the Rights of the UPC-KP. In the evening the Ecumenical Patriarch officially declared the results of the unification, congratulated the Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine on his election. and invited him to the liturgy and the ceremony of the Tomos. Thus began the process of transition to the CPSU of numerous Orthodox communities and parishes in Ukraine, which had previously declared unity with the Moscow Patriarchate. On the events that led to these events see, extensively: G. CIMBALO, *The evolution*, cit., *passim*.

⁹ The registration took place in accordance with the provisions of the Religious Freedom Act 1991, as last amended in 2018. See: Про свободу совісті та релігійні організації, (Відомості Верховної Ради УРСР (ВВР), 1991, No 25, ст.283), in <http://licodu.cois.it/?p=11317>. At the same time, the Parliament, by voting on an amendment to this law, tried to force the Metropolia of the Russian Patriarchate in Ukraine to change its name. The Ukrainian Supreme Court was also called to rule on the issue, which on December 11, 2019 authorized the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the



“Organizzazione religiosa”: Metropolia di Kiev della Chiesa Ortodossa dell’Ucraina, from now on (PCU). At the head of the Church was placed the Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine Epiphanius, enthroned in the Cathedral of Saint Sophia in Kiev on February 3, 2019¹⁰.

In a first phase, the clash took place at the level of relations in the pan-Orthodox sphere: the granting of autocephaly was followed by the condemnation of the Moscow Patriarchate of the work of Bartholomew Ecumenical Patriarch. Moscow disavows the canonical jurisdiction of Constantinople over Ukraine, while instead paying tribute to the representation of Ukrainian Orthodox in the hands of the Ukrainian self-administered Church of the Moscow Patriarchate¹¹.

Events take a new course when on 20 May 2019 the presidential elections take place and Volodymyr Zelens'kyj is elected who decides to dissolve Parliament early and call new elections that his party wins with 44% of the votes. The new President at first seems to be able to pull the country out of the dispute between the Churches; he comes from a Jewish family and seems to be far from frequentations and intense relationships with religious confessions, cultivated instead by his predecessors¹². But

Moscow Patriarchate (UPC-MP) to retain its name by establishing that confession does not need to be taken a new name. See: Віталій Тараненко Чи треба УПЦ МП перейменуватися? Верховний суд ухвалив скандальне рішення на річницю Помісної церкви релігія (in <https://glavcom.ua/country/society/chi-treba-upc-mp-pereymenovuvatisiya-verhovniy-sud-uhvaliv-skandalne-rishennya-na-richnitsyu-pomisnoji-cerkvi-7145.html>). But see also: *Анотація Верховного суду України «Сентернза» щодо конфесії релігійних конфесій від 11 грудня 2019.*

¹⁰ To assess the consistency of the new Church, it must be taken into account that the Kiev Patriarchate had bequeathed 5,100 parishes to the new Church. Therefore, as of 2019, the episcopate of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is composed of 62 bishops, of which 46 rulers and 16 vicars, titular bishops and retired bishops distributed over 44 diocese and an honorary patriarch. The dioceses of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine were approved at the first meeting of the Holy Synod of the CPSU on February 5, 2019 in the Metropolitan House of Hagia Sophia in Kiev, in the Transfiguration Cathedral in Kiev, Cathedral of the Metropolitan of Pereyaslav and Vyshneve PCU Alexander (Drabinka). It should be noted that the change of jurisdiction of some communities took place even before the receipt of the Tomos on autocephaly and that subsequently 600 new parishes joined this Church - according to what the confession declares.

¹¹ It is recalled that the *Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)* was granted independence and self-government on the basis of the resolution of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church which took place on 25-27 October 1990. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is therefore an independent and self-governed Church with broad rights of autonomy.

¹² On the relations between successive Presidents at the helm of the country and religious confessions, see at length: **G. CIMBALO**, *The Evolution*, cit., *passim*.



this is not the case: the interfaith confrontation is deeply connected to the politics of the country and to that of the great powers.

The country covers a very large territory and is located in an intermediate geographical position between Europe and Russia, with which it has in common the ethnicity and language of a not insignificant part of the population and deep cultural ties. But that's not all: a large part of Ukraine is leaning towards Africa and, especially its western regions, are historically part of the Central Europe and therefore strongly feel the call of the European Union, especially since the countries that are part of it welcome not only the Ukrainian diaspora generated by the economic crisis following the collapse of the USSR, but also a robust share of seasonal migrants to Germany, whose remittances are one of the most significant revenues of hard currency in the country. The deprivation of Crimea in 2014 left deep traces by making patriotic sentiments prevail and breaking the unity of the nation; the persistence of the secession of the Russian-speaking districts of Donbas has turned into a trench war that does not find solution in the Minsk agreements that remain unapplied, fueling divisions in the society¹³.

The religious question thus becomes one of the relevant components of the political clash taking place in the political life of the country: the goal of the new Orthodox Church is not only to destroy the dominant presence of the Kiev Metropolia linked to the Moscow Patriarchate, but also and above all to forfeit the many assets, asking the State to reassign to the new autocephalous Church churches, cathedrals and monasteries, rich in works of art and properties of all kinds. In return, the new Church is ready to provide legitimacy to the State, stipulating that symphonic relationship on which Orthodox theology bases the life of the Church, its own existence and that of civil institutions.

3 - The stages of the crisis

In the first six months of Zelensky's presidency, the battle in Donbas drags

¹³ The first Minsk Protocol was drafted on the initiative of the *Normandy Quartet* and was signed on 5 September 2014. The Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine was used for implementation with the involvement of the Organization for Security in Europe (OSCE). After the collapse of the "ceasefire" in January-February 2015, discussions between the Four led to a new agreement, overseen by the OSCE which was followed by an armistice. The second Minsk Protocol was not applied by the parties and Russian intervention was carried out.



on in the form of trench warfare, while training by Western military advisers of the Ukrainian army intensifies. The newly formed Orthodox Church faces the resistance of the former Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate (UPC-KP) Filaret who, satisfied with the distribution of positions within the hierarchy of the CPSU into which this Church has merged, disavows the process of unification¹⁴. Once this opposition has returned, every effort is dedicated to the creation, on July 28, 2019 of the publishing.

Every energy and resource is dedicated to the territorial organization of the new Church and, in particular, to consolidate the structures of the Church in the Donbas so as to contribute to the recovery of government control over those territories. This is the meaning of the visit of Patriarch Epifany to Mariupol on 11 June 2019 and of the religious service celebrated for the members of the Azov battalion stationed in the city; he continues his pastoral visit along the front line, accompanied by an appointee of the Ecumenical Patriarchate charged with advising and assisting him, touching the areas of the region still under government control.

On October 29, the meeting of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is held, which begins by noting with satisfaction the recognition of Ukrainian autocephaly by the Greek Patriarchate and proceeds to the naming of the heads of many internal offices of the confession; this allows the new Church to effectively begin the work of rooting in the territory through assistance to the faithful and the coordination of new parishes that are induced to adhere to the new religious formation. Individual parish priests are contacted, emissaries go to the meetings of parishioners, specially convened, and the assemblies, called to vote, are induced to join the new Church.

The Synod proceeds in its work by listening to a detailed report on the visit completed by Patriarch Epifany from 16 to 24 October 2019 in the United States, at the invitation of His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in order to strengthen relations with Ukrainians abroad and secure their support, including by using and resuming the ranks of contacts held for the previous decades by Filaret. The mission in the United States is carried out under the patronage and under the watchful

¹⁴ UPC-KP, taking into account the age (94 years) of Bishop Filaret, as well as the services rendered to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine: the Synod of the CPSU created for him a religious organization under newspaper "My Church", the official organ of the Kyiv Metropolis of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, also distributed electronically, began publishing



eyes of Bartholomew's representative in the United States¹⁵.

In the following months, pastoral visits to other areas of the country continued and the legal dispute regarding the registration of parishes that pass from the UPC-MP to the PCU continued to develop, and yet this Fevers- reorganization and political activities are slowing down with the emergence of the Covid epidemic that has required the collaboration of all religious confessions with the State, gathered in *the Pan-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations* to overcome resistance to vaccination¹⁶.

On March 11, 2020, Ukraine introduces quarantine with the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No 211, which in the formulation of The Re-solution No 215 of March 16, 2020 establishes that the quarantine is operational throughout Ukraine (without exception for temporarily occupied or annexed territories) from 12 March 2020 from the year to 3 April 2020. Pursuant to art. Article 1 of the measure prohibits mass cultural, entertainment, sports, social, religious, advertising and other events in which more than ten people were expected to participate¹⁷.

Despite the President's recommendations, formulated in the April 28 meeting with the *Pan-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious*

¹⁵ The Primate was accompanied by a delegation composed of Archbishop Evstratiy of Chernihiv and Nizhyn, deputy head of the Department for External Relations of the Church, and Andriy Matsola, head of the Council of Patrons of the Metropolitan Fund of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. On October 16, 2019 at the international airport. John F. Kennedy of New York, His Beatitude was welcomed by the Archbishop of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of America, His Eminence Elpidophore.

On October 22 - reports the minutes of the Synod (Журнал №45) - a delegation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, led by His Beatitude Metropolitan Epiphanius in Washington, began the day with a meeting with representatives of the Atlantic Council. See *Журнали засідання Священного Синоду від 29 жовтня 2019, р. 3* (in <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/document-post/zhurnaly-zasidannya-svyashhennogo-synodu-vid-29-zhovtnya-2019-r/>).

¹⁶ The Pan-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (VRCsiRO) is an advisory body established in December 1996 at the State Committee of Ukraine for Affairs religious as an interreligious institution. The Council of Churches includes representatives of 16 Churches and religious organizations and inter-ecclesial organization, registered in Ukraine (Orthodox, Greek and Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical Churches, as well as Jewish and Muslim religious associations). In 2005, the secretariat of this body was established and advisory and cooperation agreements were concluded with the various ministries; the secretariat meets periodically with the President of Ukraine and the First Minister of Ukraine to manage the collaboration of the State with the Churches.

¹⁷ **G. CIMBALO**, *Relations between the State and religious confessions under the stress of Covid 19*, in *Il Diritto Ecclesiastico*, 1, 2020, pp.163-187.



Organizations, the Orthodox Easter celebrations are attended by thousands of faithful¹⁸. Monasteries, as places of community life, are particularly affected by the contagion, even if the religious authorities of the different Churches - this time in agreement - have tended to minimize the extent of the contagion. There is no doubt that the measures adopted by the Orthodox Church linked to Moscow, thanks to the "innovative" ritual methods introduced, has operated to limit the contagion by not denying the effects and danger of the infection, intervening well before that of the country's health authorities¹⁹.

On July 22, 2020, Patriarch Epifany was elected the new President of the Pan-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. According to the Council's rules of procedure, the President of the Council is rotated every six months in the order of the list of members of the Council²⁰. The new President immediately gave new vigour to the political activity of the organization which he was called upon to preside over by approving a new question to the President of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (the Parliament) Dmytro Razumkov, so that he resumed the dialogue between the VRTsiRO and the Parliament with a view to permanent cooperation between two bodies, which have not met for a year.

Discussing the fight against domestic violence, the members of the VRCsiRO analyze the project of the Institute for Religious Freedom, in which the Churches and religious organizations are represented, related to the adoption of a joint communication strategy aimed at preventing the phenomenon. The new President takes the opportunity to make a harsh attack on the ratification of the Istanbul Convention on the Protection of

¹⁸ Ольга Журавлева, Пасха в условиях карантина: Какой план у властей на проведение религиозного праздника (in https://zik.ua/ru/blogs/pasha_v_usloviyah_karantina_kakoy_plan_u_vlastey_na_provedenie_religioznogo_prazdnika_965612). On the restrictive measures adopted for the celebration of the Orthodox Easter the Jewish one and Ramadan, see: **V. KONDRATOVA**, Религия онлайн | Песах, Пасха, Рамадан. Как церкви и общины Украины уходят на карантин (in <https://www.liga.net/politics/articles/pesah-pasha-ra-madan-kak-tserkvi-i-obshchiny-v-ukraine-uhodyat-na-karantin>).

¹⁹ On the anti-covid measures adopted by the Russian Orthodox Church and on the ritual changes adopted see: **G. CIMBALO**, *Le relazioni*, cit., p. 197 ss.

²⁰ During the meeting, representatives of the different denominations also discussed the measures to be taken to support families who have lost loved ones in eastern Ukraine and to draw public attention to the problem of missing persons. The new president said "I met these families and saw how they need spiritual support" (*Новим головоючим Ради Церков обрано предстоителя ПЦУ митрополита Епіфанія*, in <https://df.news/2020/07/23/novym-holovuiuchym-rady-tserkov-obrano-predstoiatelia-ptsu-mytropolyta-epifaniia/>).



Women, stating that *national law is more than sufficient to combat violence against women and declares that he does not share the indication that it gives, to promote gender equality*. In his view, the Convention "*would use domestic violence only to introduce ideologically motivated rules based on unnatural interpretations of sex into national law*". These positions were shared by all members of the organism.

On the sidelines of the meetings related to the management of the epidemic, the discussion on the law of reform of the military chaplaincy that was actually approved on November 30, 2021 developed within the Pan-Ukrainian Council. It provides for the presence "in every military formation of the Parliament constituted in accordance with the laws of Ukraine" of a military chaplain. Although the law will come into force gradually over 5 years, the conditions are created for each department to be assigned a chaplain which will provide for the spiritual assistance of the troops and their families, curando the motivation of the soldiers belonging to the different military corps and strengthening their love of country. Resistance and controversy are already growing over the possibility of prelates belonging to the UPC-MP taking up this post in army units, on the basis that they belong to a confession whose headquarters reside in the country with which Ukraine is at war: Russia, considering the ongoing fighting in the Donbas as an external Russian aggression and not as a civil war.

The problematic relations between the different religious confessions and in particular those of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with the UPC-MP emerges in all evidence during the "open microphone" interview granted by Patriarch Epifany to Radio Svoboda on December 18, 2021, when apprehensions have grown since the end of the previous month, due to the Russian military maneuvers at the country's borders²¹. Interviewed by the presenter and in response to questions from the audience, the Patriarch exposes the positions of his Church: they are decidedly in favor of vaccination - he declares - contrary to what the old Filaret does his mentor, now disowned, in the name of acceptance of modernity that characterizes the new Church²².

Reaffirming the importance of the communion of his Church with the Ecumenical Patriarch, Epifany recalls the celebration of the common

²¹ I. KUZNETSOVA, «Російську імперію зла» Путін і Кирило не бачать без України – Епіфаній (in <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/intervyu-predstoyatel-ptsu-mytropolyt-epifaniy/31614610.html>).

²² G. CIMBALO, *Le relazioni*, cit., pp. 183-184.



liturgy with ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in the cathedral of Saint Sophia, on August 22, 2020, emphasizing its importance and, to reiterate the growth of consensus for the PCU, emphasizes that a few days before "a well-known theologian and man who did much to create the CPSU, Andriy Yurash, has been appointed ambassador to the Vatican"²³. Patriarch Epifany trusts that he will be a worthy representative of Ukraine in the Vatican and will do much to make possible a visit of the Pope to Ukraine noting that: "We, as PCU, have not yet received signals in this regard, but we know that there is a tradition: if the pope visits an Orthodox country, he certainly agrees with the Church that is dominant in this state".

But the key to solving Ukraine's problems lies in Moscow, in the hands of Putin, who conducts military maneuvers on the borders and is therefore that the Pope has expressed willingness to go to Moscow. A possible meeting will take place somewhere in neutral territory and emphasizes that "Patriarch Kirill has no autonomy and if there is no desire for Putin, this visit, of course, will not happen", regardless of the wishes of the Greek Catholic Church of Ukraine who asked for the intercession of the Pontiff.

Many are the listeners who ask: "When will we liberate Ukraine from the Church in Moscow?" To these listeners Epifany replies:

"We have no right to open another internal religious front. We live in a state of war. But let's see the efforts of the Russian Church to do so [...] We have an external front to fight the aggressor: with Russia, we have an internal front to fight this dangerous disease. And we as a Church have no right to open another religious front. We are patient for a while, for a while. [...] But the time will come when this veil will fall and everyone will unite around Kiev, and we will all be Ukrainian Orthodox in a local Orthodox Church to serve God. and serve exclusively the interests of the Ukrainian people".

On the initiative of the presenter, the problem of attributing to religious confessions churches and ecclesiastical goods of historical and artistic value whose property pertains to the State²⁴, assets of which the

²³ On December 14, 2021, the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelens'kyj appointed Andriy Yurash, a religious scholar and former head of the Department for Religions and Nationalities of the Ministry of Culture (2014-2020), ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Vatican. The relevant decree has been published on the Presidency's website. Cfr. *Андрій Юраш став послом України у Ватикані - указ*, in <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-andriy-yurash-posol-vatykan/31609215.html>.

²⁴ It is recalled that most of the buildings of worship are state-owned. The *Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations Act* (Law no. 987-XII of 23 April 1991 on the amended 1996), in <http://licodu.cois.it/?p=1476>., Article 17 establishes the modalities of the "use of state property, public bodies or citizens" usable by religious organizations



PCU re-avenges the exclusive use, as an autocephalous national Church, is addressed. To the question Epifany answers that in the Constitution there is room to approve a law to oblige the UPC-MP to define itself as the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Even if the ministry of culture's ordinance on renaming has been partially suspended, we must insist on this procedure so that the problem will be solved automatically. There will no longer be two national Churches competing for the representation of the Ukrainian Orthodox.

Finally, the problem is raised regarding the date of celebration of Christmas, allowed by a change in the legislation on the holidays of 2017 both on December 25 and January 6, respecting the Orthodox tradition. The patriarch does not exclude that his Church within ten years may not decide to adapt to the European use of the date of December 25.

During the recording of the program the Metropolitan listens to the song "Our Father - Bandera"²⁵ - "The boy of Donetsk", the presenter asks:

establishing that they have the right to use buildings and properties for their needs, provided to them on a contractual basis by the State, public organisations or citizens". In fact, "state-owned temple buildings and appurtenances must be transferred for free use or returned to the property of religious organizations by organizations, in whose budget such buildings and properties are included, based on the decisions of Kiev Oblast."

Religious organizations also own buildings, objects of worship, property, industrial, social and charitable facilities, transportation, money and other goods necessary to support their activities; these are assets acquired or created at the expense of own funds, donated by individuals, organizations or transferred by the State, as well as acquired for other reasons provided for by law; confessions may also possess property located outside Ukraine (Art. 18).

State-owned building and temple property may be provided for alternative use to two or more religious communities subject to their mutual consent. In the absence of such consent, the state authority will determine the procedure for the use of the temple building and the appurtenances, entering into separate contracts with each community. It goes without saying that the temple building and other goods of historical, artistic or cultural importance must be handed over to religious organizations and used by them in accordance with the rules valid for the protection and use of historical and cultural monuments. (art. 16).

²⁵ It is a song dedicated to Stepan Andreevich Bandera, a fighter for the Independence of Ukraine in the twentieth century whose figure arouses much discussion and controversy. Nationalist, he collaborated from time to time according to convenience with nazis and the Red Army. The song began to spread in the media in March 2019 performed by priests led by Father Anatoly Zinkevich, who died on February 13, 2019. Bandera was one of the founders of the radical wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).

In September 2019, Paul Mandzyuk published on the site the lyrics of the song "Ukrainian songs" and a "songbook" under the brand name "a song of rebellion". On January 22, 2020, the vocal ensemble of the clergy "Pentarchy" sang this song in Bandera's



"How is the Church connected to politics? Does the Church help in the formation of the Ukrainian nation?"

The Patriarch replies:

"It is clear that in the formation of the Ukrainian nation the Church does everything that depends on it. As I have already said, without a strong local Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian state will never fully exist, there will not be a single strong Ukrainian state. Therefore, the Church is one of the components of the future existence of the Ukrainian state. Without the Church, the Ukrainian state will not hold. Because the spiritual foundation is also very, very important".

Meanwhile, the legal clash related to the contention that arises from the passage of parishes from the Church of homosexual obedience to the new Orthodox Church is intensifying, which obtains an orientation generally favorable by the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court. Patriarch Epifany said in about 600 parishes that would join the new Church and commented:

"We do not want to be a State Church. Let's see what the current model is in Russia. We do not want to be a "department for religions" like the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russian state. We do not want to be a State Church, but we are a State Church, that is, a Church that supports the State, independence, sovereignty of Ukraine, because without a State Strong Ukrainian there will be no strong Ukrainian Church. Therefore, the government, within the framework established by law, should support the development of the CPSU, because it is the Church that seeks to strengthen the Ukrainian state. This Church will always lend a hand to the Ukrainian state, because it wants Ukraine to be united. If we do not support the Ukrainian government, there will be no Ukraine. And then? - Putin will come here. Let's see what is happening in Crimea and Donbas: there is no freedom at all. Of course, we don't want to allow that"²⁶.

Just 15 days after this interview, the political situation precipitates and Russia opens hostilities and on February 22, Patriarch Epifany addresses Kirill Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church to bring back to his homeland the bodies of Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine, responsible for a large-scale aggression by Russia against Ukraine, stating that for four

birthplace. On 1 January 2021, on the occasion of a solemn event dedicated to the 112th anniversary of his birth, the song was performed by the clergy of the OCU of Ivano Frankissk. The song became the anthem of Ukrainian nationalists.

²⁶ Митрополит Епіфаній: Ми не прагнемо бути державною церквою, як РПЦ, "РБК-Україна", Київ, Четвер 06 січня 2022 (in <https://www.rbc.ua/ukr/news/-1641392494.html>).



days, millions of people have been suffering, military and civilians are dying.

"Unfortunately, from your previous public statements it is already clear that maintaining the commitment of Putin and the Russian leadership is much more important to you than taking care of the people in Ukraine, some of whom before the war considered you their pastor. But I still have hope that at least for your fellow citizens, most of whom are Orthodox Christians, your flock, you will have the spiritual strength to show humanity and care"²⁷.

Considering that he said "more than 3,000 Russian soldiers were killed and their bodies were in Ukraine", he says that Ukraine has asked the Red Cross to help return the bodies of the victims to their families, but that no response has been received from Russia. And he concludes:

"Therefore, I turn to you, as head of the Russian Orthodox Church - show at least to your fellow citizens and to the flock of mercy. If you cannot raise your voice against aggression - at least help to take away the bodies of Russian soldiers whose lives have ceased" - and he concludes - "May the Lord give you the spiritual strength to do so, especially today, the Sunday of the memory of the Last Judgment!"

In parallel, the PCU begins a pressing controversy with Patriarch Onofry of the UPC-MP, accused of collusion with the enemy, and incites the clergy and faithful of the UPC-MP to join the PCU, obtaining as the first result that a number, according to him increasing, of priests and members of the clergy of the UPC-MP. declare that they want to delete from the diptychs any reference to Patriarch Kirill for not having protected his flock which also identified in him its pastor and cites the example of the Region of Sumy²⁸.

4 - The Kiev Metropolia of the Moscow Patriarchate and the War

The self-administered Ukrainian Orthodox Church, headed by the Patriarchate of Moscow, UPC-MP has been put in great difficulty since the outbreak of the war and is in danger of not surviving. This Church, rebuilt

²⁷ *Ibidem.*

²⁸ Кілька священників УПЦ (МП) на Сумщині припиняють згадувати російського патріарха Кирила в молитвах (in <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-upc-mp-sumshchyna-prypyniaie-zhaduvaty-kyryla/31728760.html>); УАОС, Священники УПЦ вимагають виходу з московського патріархату (in <https://patriarchia.org.ua/svyashhenyky-upcz-vymagayut-vyhodu-z-moskovs-kogo-patriarhatu-video/>).



after 1945, with the return to Ukraine of territories previously subject to Serbian and Polish jurisdiction was placed under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, rebuilt at the behest of Stalin in 1943²⁹.

With the incorporation of Ukraine into the Russian Federation after the end of the Second World War the Orthodox Church was reborn in the country as the Kiev Metropolia, Ukrainian Orthodox Church, belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate (Ukrainian: Українська Православна Церква). It was granted independence and self-government on the basis of the resolution of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church which took place on October 25-27, 1990. This is therefore an independent and self-governed Church with broad rights of autonomy. In its activity and pastoral work it is guided by the resolution of the Holy Synod of Bishops of 1990 of the Russian Orthodox Church relating to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church; resorting to the application of Chapter IX of its Statute, the Moscow Patriarchate in 1991, granted the status of self-administration taking note of the new needs that would have could have resulted from a possible independence of Ukraine, which was in fact proclaimed on 24 August of the 1991³⁰.

²⁹ The Russian Orthodox Church owes its rebirth to the policy of "patriotic" mobilization of the Russian people for the support of the war effort and as an instrument of management then of the populations and territories that the USSR. However, the case of Ukraine is different because originally the Russian Orthodox Church was born here, on the heads of the Dnieper and therefore this Church considers itself, rightly, constitutive component of the Patriarchate. It should be remembered that from Kiev the birth of the Russian nation began and that still in this city after 988 the Ecclesiastical Province was established, under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. With the gradual expansion of the state to all of Russia and as a result of the Tartaric invasion the Metropolitan of Kiev had to move first to Vladimir and then to Moscow in 1325. The Patriarch exercised his authority over the Church uninterruptedly until January 25, 1721 when the Patriarchate was abolished by Peter the Great and replaced by the Holy Synod of government appointment composed of 10 and, in some periods, from 12 members among which was always included the Metropolitan of Moscow; the Holy Synod was presided over by an imperial procurator. This body was dissolved in 1917 with the October Revolution and the patriarchal structure was restored on January 22, 1918 the decree was issued on the separation of Church and State. *Декрет о свободе совести, церковных и религиозных обществах*, (20 января (2 февраля) 1918 г.), in <http://licodu.cois.it/?p=1414>. The Government of the USSR let the clergy die out by consumption and in 1925 the Patriarch died without any successor. Cf. A.M. AMMANN S. J., *Storia della Chiesa russa e dei paesi limitrofi*, U.T.E.T., Turin, 1948.

³⁰ The 1990 Act of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to which we refer and the Statute on the Government of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are published on the website *Religious Freedom and Human Rights* (Licodu, Ukraine, Statutes) together with the Statutes of the Mentioned Churches and the *Tomos* of recognition of the autocephaly of



This particular structure meant that the Metropolia of Kiev did not ask for autocephaly, believing that its wide autonomy could ensure that the new nation, born after the collapse of the USSR, had the same support that the Churches traditionally accord to the State and considering possible a symphonic relationship with the new institutional structure. This choice was followed by 30 years of controversy and complex political events that we have punctually reconstructed in another place³¹, of which the war in progress is the unfortunate epilogue.

Pressed by the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, the Moscow Church of Obedience is in great difficulty, all the more so if we look at the Homily of the Patriarch of Moscow, delivered in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour by Patriarch Kirill in Moscow on February 27, 2022 at the end of the Divine Liturgy on the occasion of the centenary of the beginning of the persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church by the Bolshevik power³².

After recalling the Church's attempts at the time to reject the accusations of resistance and reluctance to help the suffering, the accusations aimed at undermining its authority and creating the conditions for persecution, the Patriarch establishes a parallel with the current situation and invokes the protection of the holy hierarch Tikhon, the Patriarch at the time, to preserve "*our Church from various prove, schisms and divisions*", claiming that today we have "*need unity, unity with our brothers and sisters in Ukraine*". The Patriarch therefore claims to have prayed and invites everyone to pray "*for his Blessed Primate and, of course, for the entire Episcopate and for all the Orthodox people of Ukraine*"³³.

He hopes that

"the current political situation in Ukraine, a brother country and close to us, will not allow the forces of evil, which have always fought the unity of Rus' and that of the Russian Church, to have the upper hand. " God forbid that a terrible line is drawn between Russia and Ukraine, reddened by the blood of our brothers. We must pray for the return to peace, for the re-establishment of fraternal relations among our peoples. Our only Orthodox Church, represented in Ukraine by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church presided over by His Beatitude Onofry is the pledge of this fraternity".

the last born of 2018.

³¹ G. CIMBALO, *The evolution*, cit., *passim*.

³² *Homélie du patriarche de Moscou, prononcée le 27 février 2022 en la cathédrale du Christ Sauveur* (in <https://orthodoxie.com/homelie-du-patriarche-de-moscou-prononcee-le-27-fevrier-2022-en-la-cathedrale-du-christ-sauveur%ef%bf%bc/>).

³³ *Ibidem*.



However, Patriarch Kirill's main concern is that

"the Lord keeps our Church united. May the Lord protect from fratricidal war the peoples who are part of a single space, that of the Russian Orthodox Church" And concludes: "May the Lord preserve the land from Rus'. When I say "Rus'", I use the ancient expression of the "Chronicle of Past Times": "The origin of the land of Rus'".

A land that today includes Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, other tribes and other peoples.

"Let us pray that the Lord will protect the land of Rus' from external enemies, from internal unrest, that the unity of our Church will be strengthened, that, by the grace of God, let trials, attacks and provocations be withdrawn and so that the Orthodox of Ukraine may enjoy peace and tranquility.

The content of this homily appeared as an evident support for the Russian armed intervention, justified by references to attacks on the Church. of Muscovite obedience on the part of the Autocephalous Church and Ukrainian political authorities and as an objective support for aggression, so much so that the Metropolitan Onofry made a much more conciliatory appeal, aware of the fact that in the face of a war of Russian aggression on the country and of invasion and death and destruction must be called conciliation and peace.

It is therefore that the Onofry of the UPC-MP addressed the faithful and citizens of Ukraine³⁴ with a brief and incisive speech:

"There were problems. Unfortunately, Russia has launched military operations against Ukraine, and at this fateful moment I urge you not to panic, to be brave and to show love for your homeland and for each other. I urge you, first of all, to intensify the penitential prayer for Ukraine, for our army and our people, I ask you to forget the mutual quarrels and misunderstandings and to unite with love to God and to our homeland.

In this tragic moment, we express our special love and support to our soldiers who stand guard, protect and defend our land and our people. May God bless them and keep them!

Defending the sovereignty and integrity of Ukraine, we also call on the President of Russia to stop the fratricidal war immediately. The Ukrainian and Russian peoples came out of the baptismal font of the Dnieper and the

³⁴ Appel du métropolitain de Kiev et de toute l'Ukraine Onuphre aux fidèles et aux citoyens ukrainiens (in <https://orthodoxie.com/appele-du-metropolitain-de-kiev-et-de-toute-lukraine-onuphre-aux-fideles-et-aux-citoyens-ukrainiens>).



war between these peoples is a repetition of the sin of Cain, whom he killed with envy your brother.

Such a war has no justification for either God or man. I invite everyone to common sense, which teaches us to solve our earthly problems in mutual dialogue and mutual understanding, and I sincerely hope that God will forgive us our sins and that God's peace will reign on our earth and in the whole world!"

The Metropolitan's position was followed by an accurate appeal by the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on 28 February 2022 addressed to the entire Ukrainian people³⁵.

After taking note of the fighting taking place throughout the country that produces deaths, ruins and the flight of the population, the Synod denounces the feared recourse to nuclear weapons that calls into question the existence of humanity. After inviting them to be courageous and to pray, he thanks the defenders of the homeland for their spirit of sacrifice and their altruism, assuring them of the support of the Church in communion with the Metropolitan, deployed alongside the people and the fighters, ensures to engage with all the structures of the Church to provide support, help and assistance and protection from bombing.

The Synod appeals to Patriarch Kirill to become a mediator of peace, asking the

"leadership of the Russian Federation to immediately stop the hostilities that already threaten to turn into a world war". He asks the two Presidents "to do everything possible to put an end to the sin of armed confrontation between our two fraternal peoples and to start the negotiation process".

Finally, the Synod declares that it is aware that the war has already dealt a severe blow to relations between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples and that if bloodshed were not stopped, the abyss between the two peoples would remain forever.

Metropolitan Onofry and the Synod of the UPC-MP are well aware of the difficulties that relations with Moscow, the attitude of the Patriarch and his relations with the Soviet ruler create for the credibility of patriotism of the clergy of the confession, they grasp the embarrassment of the faithful, induced by the circumstances to approach the autocephalous Church given that on the doctrinal level there are no differences between the two confessions and they know that the survival is at stake. the very

³⁵ *Déclaration du Saint-Synode de l'Église orthodoxe ukrainienne du 28 février 2022* (in <https://orthodoxie.com/declaration-du-saint-synode-de-leglise-orthodoxe-ukrainienne-du-28-fevrier-2022>).



living of the ecclesial structure. This is the reason for the anger against Patriarch Kirill and the already reported exclusion from the mention in the diptychs already reported which, not surprisingly, is put in place in the areas occupied by Russian troops and subjected to the action of war. There is no doubt that the clergy and the very hierarchy of the Kiev Metropolia of the Russian Orthodox Church they will come out strongly reduced by the events of war and that the objective pursued by the autocephalous Church since its foundation has received from the war events a formidable and perhaps definitive and decisive support.

Putin and Kirill may win the war, but they will certainly lose the Ukraine, except for those parts that Russia will eventually be able to annex. From the ecclesial point of view, the very supranational configuration of the Moscow Patriarchate will be strongly compromised, even if this will not necessarily mean a rebirth of the centrality of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Probably the financial support of the Russian State will allow the Moscow Patriarchate to gain consensus from fractions of episcopates of national Orthodox Churches, thus increasing the fragmentation of Orthodoxy and inter-ecclesial conflicts throughout advantage of other confessions.

Patriarch Bartholomew does not seem to care, who learned the news of the outbreak of the war, after expressing his dismay and reproach for the war, inviting all the Orthodox and all the Churches to prayer, at the news of the consolidation of the Ukrainian resistance has issued significant statements in support of the new Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its personal work.

Nikos Papachristou³⁶ reports on the Patriarchate's website reporting the interview given to the CNN Turk television network, by the Ecumenical Patriarch, who began by observing: "*The whole world is against Russia. We are entering a new period of the Cold War. The distance between Russia and the Western world is widening*" even if no one would like it, the prelate suggests.

That said, the Patriarch underlines his good relations with Ukrainian President Zelens'kyj and adds:

"He came twice to the Patriarchate and invited me to Ukraine, at the celebrations that took place last year. August for the 30 years of independence of Ukraine. I accepted his invitation and went, it was very nice. I saw a nation extremely happy and proud of its independence. The fact

³⁶ Ecumenical Patriarch: *The whole world is against Russia* (in <https://orthodoxtimes.com/ecumenical-patriarch-the-whole-world-is-against-russia/>).



that they managed to break away from the Soviet Union and found their own independent country is an honor for them".

The Patriarch cannot hold back his satisfaction with his work:

"We have given an independent country an independent Church. In the current circumstances, our Patriarchate acted very early and we have done an excellent job. We shocked our Russian brothers, but it had to happen. Ukraine deserved it".

The Patriarch's satisfaction grows when he strongly claims to have the right to grant autocephaly, and that he has done so with Ukraine. And he points out that some Ukrainian priests do not want to commemorate the Moscow homeland Kirill because they see in him the religious leader of the enemy country.

"They are gradually moving away from the Church linked to the Moscow Patriarchate and are joining the new Autocephalous Church" and adds: "We are not very happy with this, because it is the result of war. We would like the Russian Church not to show such hostility towards me and to accept our canonical decision".

And, reflecting on what has happened, he comments on how among himself that unfortunately, they have not accepted his primacy, he has personally become their goal. Perhaps, realizing how much pride and how much display of power, there is in his considerations concludes: *"As a religious institution, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has always been in favor of peace and unity, and continues to do so"*³⁷.

5 - The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the war

But the analysis of the religious landscape of Ukraine and the reconstruction of the role played by the Churches in the development of the country's crisis that resulted in the ongoing war events cannot be understood without taking into account all the different forces which have influenced the evolution of interfaith relations, without, therefore, examining the role played by another substantial religious formation: the *Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, from now on, (UGCC), (in Ukrainian Українська Греко-Католиць-ка Церква (УГКЦ), a Church *Sui Juris* Catholic Eastern of Byzantine rite, in full communion with Rome.

This confession has the Eparchy of Mukachevo based in Uzhhorod

³⁷ *Ibidem.*



which belongs to the ancient Ruthenian Church and is organized throughout the territory of Ukraine into 4 ecclesiastical provinces, 11 Eparchies or Archeparks and 5 Exarchates. The ecclesiastical provinces are those of Kiev, Ivano-Frankivs'k, Lviv, Ternopil'-Zboriv, the Eparchies and Archeparchies those Kiev, Kolonyia, Chernivtsi, Lviv, Sokal'-Žovkva, Ternopil'-Zboriv, Bučač, Kam"janec'-Podil's'kyj, as well as the Archiepiscopal Exarchates of Donetsk, of Kharkiv, Luc'k, Odessa, Crimea. As can be seen, most of the presence of this confession is concentrated in the western areas of the country, contiguous to Polish territory, so much so that only on August 21, 2005 its headquarters were transferred from Lviv to Kiev, with consequent modification of the title primatial. The current titular is Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk. In addition, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has numerous archeparchies, apostolic exarchates and eparchies, including outside Ukraine, in Europe and America, including one in Italy, in Rome. On the whole this Church is the largest among the Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite and therefore has great importance in the structure of the Catholic Church and aspires to give life to its own Patriarchate³⁸. Aware of this, the Ukrainian Orthodox have long tried to hinder the rebirth of this Church, starting with the thaw in relations between the USSR and the Vatican, following the Cuban crisis. To tenaciously oppose this rebirth was precisely Filaret, then an eminent member of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. His abandonment of the Moscow Patriarchate helped to facilitate the revival of the UGCC, but this growth did not prevent that, with the explosion of the debate among the various Ukrainian religious components should reach the United Catholics pressing requests to merge into a national self-evident Orthodox Church. These requests were decisively rejected by Catholics and the Holy See's instruction to Ukrainian Greek Catholics was to keep wisely away from confrontation. interreligious that tore apart the world garden-dosso. The result was - as the Metropolitan reports in the aforementioned interview - that relations were bilateral, but separate, with the Kiev Patriarchate and the Metropolia Orthodox of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

Moved by more general concerns, the Pontiff, aware of the growing clash within Orthodoxy between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and

³⁸ On the development programs of the Church, see the interview given by the Major Archbishop of Kiev-Halych and Metropolitan Archeparch Sviatoslav Shevchuk. **S KOSHKINA, O. BAZAR**, Блаженніший Святослав: Драматичні події ставлять дуже радикальні питання: або ти – справжній християнин, або ти – (out in https://lb.ua/news/2021/03/31/481224_blazhennishiy_svyatoslav_dra-matichni.html).



that of Moscow, completed for his part a long process of confrontation with the Patriarchate of Moscow and met in Cuba February 12, 2016, at the VIP lounge of the José Martí airport, the Patriarch of the Ortho-Russian dosage Kirill. On that occasion he signed a declaration in 30, points previously prepared.

The two leaders addressed to the world a common appeal for an end to the persecution of Christians in the Middle East and to end the wars in that region; they made vows for the restoration of the unity of the Christians of the two Churches. Common positions on atheism, secularism, consumerism, migrants, refugees, family and marriage, relations between men and women, abortion and euthanasia followed.

At the center of the concerns of the two religious leaders, however, were an- that the issues related to pan-Orthodox relations in view of the meeting of all the Orthodox Churches scheduled in Crete after a few months and in relation to the many geopolitical issues that concerned the crisis areas, working both to restore the unity of Christians in framework for the renewal of the Christian faith in Russia and Eastern Europe.

Only points 22-27 of the declaration returned to deal with theological topics, touching on the principle of uniatism developed in the Balamand Declaration³⁹ and the issues most directly related to the Catholic Churches. In this context, the question of the schism between the Catholic and Orthodox communities in Ukraine was addressed in point 27, with attention to the role of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The appeal closes by urging Catholics and Orthodox to "work together fraternally in proclaiming the Good News of salvation" and to "give common witness to the Spirit of truth in these difficult times"⁴⁰.

It is well known that on that occasion the rivalries between the orthodox leaders, the long-standing tensions within Ukrainian orthodoxy and the ambitions of Russian President Vladimir Putin who intended to impose Russia's influence on the world stage were discussed, a position also highlighted by the recent Russian acquisition of Crimea. To some observers it seemed that there was an excessive understanding on the part of the Pope for Russia's foreign policy and that he criticized the West. This infuriated some prelates, including Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the major

³⁹ *L'uniatismo metodo di unione del passato e la ricerca attuale della piena comunione*, Balamand (Libano), 23 giugno 1993, in *Enchiridion Oecumenicum*, 3. *Dialoghi internazionali*, 1985-1994, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 1995, pp. 805-815.

⁴⁰ On the development programs of the Church see the interview given by the major archbishop of Kiev-Halych and archeparch metropolita Sviatoslav Shevchuk. S. KOSHKINA, O. BAZAR, Блаженніший Святослав, cit.



archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, some of the most eminent members of the Uniate Catholic clergy, who said they felt "betrayed by the Vatican", regarding the declaration concerning Ukraine.

It is to quell these discontent that Pope Francis summoned to Rome on July 5-6, 2019 the head of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church His Beatitude Sviatoslav (Shevchuk), the entire Synod, the Metropolitans of the UGCC, to hold with the Vatican Curia. a joint working meeting on the difficult situation and delicate in which Ukraine found itself and develop a shared strategy on what was most appropriate to do.

The intent of the Pontiff was to prevent the involvement of the Church in internal political affairs and to inform about the results of the colloquies with Kirill, also in relation to relations with the Metropolia of Kiev of the Russian Orthodox Church that has always been hostile towards the UGCC. What is certain - as shown by the events related to the debate between the different Orthodox denominations aimed at giving life to a unified Orthodox Church capable of obtaining autocephaly - is that the UGCC and its ecclesial structures, its pastors managed in most of them not to get involved in this process, despite the pressing invitations from the Orthodox ecclesiastical world and the growing political and social tensions that accompanied the granting of autocephaly⁴¹.

On the other hand, the UGCC is located in an area of the country in the west and looks with sympathy at relations with the countries of the European Union. It is committed to requesting permits for the opening of its own Churches, requests always opposed by the Orthodox belonging to both the UPC-MP and the CPSU, Churches with which it maintains "sporadic relations and no dialogue aimed at unification"⁴², seeks to have

⁴¹ *L'uniatismo metodo di unione*, cit., pp. 805-815.

⁴² The stages promoting closer relations between the Churches pass through the *Orthodox Catholic Declaration* of 1965 which followed the 1964 meeting signed by Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople and Jerusalem, which was followed by a number of meetings, visits and symbolic events involving Catholics and Orthodox leaders. The meeting in Cuba made it possible to add to the relations already woven by Vatican diplomacy the direct one with the Russian Orthodox Church to which many Orthodox Churches referred and refer of Eastern Europe. The first time a Pope visited a country with a predominant Orthodox presence in Eastern Europe was John Paul II's visit to Romania, which is home to a prestigious Patriarchate and to which a large number of faithful belong.

The possibility of a meeting of Patriarch Kirill, elected in 2009, with Pope Benedict XVI was speculated before his resignation in February 2013. It was, however, a new meeting because Pope Benedict XVI had met Kirill in Rome when he was still President of the Department of External Relations of the Church for the Moscow Patriarchate.



its own ecclesial organizations recognized. He has looked carefully at the election of Zelens'kyj and is confident of an easing of political tensions.

In the interview of December 25, 2019 Radio Svoboda the primate of the UGCC responded to the hypothesis of the Pope's trip to Ukraine, made by the Autocephalous Orthodox Church and made urgent by the progressive deterioration of the political situation of the country, even if he did not hide the difficulties deriving from the fact that the pope's coming could have been used by the Orthodox Churches in conflict to accredit and legitimize themselves as exclusive representatives of Orthodoxy in Ukraine⁴³.

The interviewer's attention then shifted to the internal debate at VRCsiRO to note the convergence between representatives of all religious denominations on the problems of gender, education, and the treatment of gays and lesbians. In this regard, the Primate of the UGCC reiterated that he wanted Ukrainian society to be aware of the values and critical vision of life, especially when it comes to sexuality and the human person. Although the Church respects everyone's convictions, there are certain eternal truths, he concluded.

Finally, the problem of military chaplains was addressed, about which the primate declared that:

"Since the beginning of these painful moments of the war in the east of Ukraine, our priests have been close to our military. Today we also have two ways of having priests in the exercise. There are full-time chaplains who are

⁴³ **A. DE OTO**, *Il fattore religioso nella lotta russo-ucraina. L'analisi del prof. De Oto* (in <https://formiche.net/2022/02/fattore-religioso-russia-ucraina-de-oto/?fbclid=IwAR1J97-AWwAA49h4ONWFowjBCruB1gY6pIQ2-up4Ck0NdPZ41Y YVcpfym O6w>) has attributed a fundamental role to this confession in directing the Ukrainian crisis, fueling interreligious conflict towards the Kiev Monopoly of the Moscow Patriarchate, blatantly ignoring the central role in the interreligious conflict, also present in Ukraine, between the aforementioned Metropolia and the Church Orthodox Autocephalous Ukraine, which produced the schism between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church.

The indication is at least misleading, since it helps to give a glimpse of a clash between the Catholic Church and the Patriarchate of Moscow, when instead it is the latter that is opposed to the initiatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, supported and financed by the United States. The result is a misleading reading that makes the Catholic Church one of the parties to the conflict.

Let us remember, for those who do not have it clear, that the Greek Catholic Church of Ukraine, UGCC, (in Ukrainian Українська Греко-Католицька Церква (УГКЦ)), is a *Sui Juris Church*, Eastern Catholic, of Byzantine rite, in full communion with Rome, which does not operate only in Ukraine, but all over the world. It is the largest among the 23 Eastern Rite Catholic Churches and declares about six million faithful, of whom only a little more than half reside in the country.



present today, according to some mechanisms of the Ministry of Defense. And again, we have a large number of volunteer chaplains who, despite the dangers to their health and life, are still close to the Ukrainian army”.

Continuing in his statements Sviatoslav Shevchuk, while deploying in support of the intervention of the army in the Donbas, where however his confession has only eleven churches, (and five in Crimea) the Primate of the UGCC reiterated that the task of chaplains is also to assist the families and even the wives of the military and all those who suffered the war, to have the opportunity to heal their wounds⁴⁴.

However, with the beginning of the new year the attention of the UGCC as of all the other confessions has focused on the fight against the epidemic while - as we have said - the debate within the VRCsiRO focuses precisely on the preparation of the law on the military chaplaincy and focused the debate on the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. In November 2021, with the beginning of Russian military maneuvers on the border, the focus returns to the political issues of the country's accession to NATO and the European Union. The political situation precipitates and the war becomes imminent: on February 8, the UGCC Magistrate, Sviatoslav Shevchuk, breaks the delay and invites the Pope to Ukraine, arguing that the visit could also take place in the current circumstances and help the Country to achieve peace, removing the threats of Russia, The Metropolitan declares that such a visit would be a very important gesture in the eyes of all humanity:

“In Ukraine there is consensus not only among Catholics, but also among Orthodox and even non-believers that Pope Francis is the most important moral authority in the world today. People say that if the Pope comes to Ukraine, the war will end. They perceive the gesture of the papal visit as an envoy of peace”,

⁴⁴ «We are not seeking any recognition from the Roman Catholic Church. We are a local Church in our own right. When we speak of patriarchal dignity, it is not a question of the title, not of the "cap", but of the mechanisms of organization of ecclesial life. And in the last meeting we had with the Holy Father, in July of this year, we just talked about the mechanisms of organization of our Church. [...] the life of our Church goes beyond any local territory. We are a reality that lives all over the world. That is why we need patriarchal mechanisms to build and preserve the internal unity of those structures, and that do not restrain and do not disperse. We have it reiterated to Pope Francis in a hearing with the bishops of the Synod of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in the Vatican, 2 September 2019. And so we received full support and understanding from the Roman Apostolic Capital», **I. KUZNETSOVA**, Нам треба ментально звільнитися від «руки Москви» – глава УГКЦ Святослав (in <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/30342549.html>).



reads the statement issued by the UGCC⁴⁵.

The invasion is a shock for all the Churches, which are therefore obliged to face the crisis. They all condemned this aggression, each with its own statement. There was also a strong stance by the "Pan-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Communities" which, including Jews and Muslims who called on NATO to declare Ukraine's heaven *no-fly zone*: the Pontiff for his part on February 25 sadly went to the Russian Embassy to express concern and ask for the cessation of hostilities⁴⁶. Everyone defends as much as he can the integrity of Ukraine and its people.

Internally, the Decision of the Russian Prime Minister had the merit of finally com-agreeing on all religious confessions, alas too late and amid so much suffering.

⁴⁵ "When Vatican Secretary of State Parolin came to our working session, we asked him directly: what was needed for the Pope to come? He said there are several conditions. The first is the invitation of the Catholic Church. The second is an invitation from the Ukrainian government. We have a new president. I hope he invites the Pope. Third. His Eminence Cardinal Parolin affirmed that the other Christian Churches should not oppose that visit" (*ibidem*).

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.