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In historic decision, Ukrainian church severs ties with Russia

The split is being called the "worst crisis" for the Orthodox Church in centuries, but it's more about politics than religion.

By Frank Viviano

National Geographic (12.10.2018) - <https://on.natgeo.com/2CoUZvG> - The largest bloc in the 260-million-strong congregation of Orthodox Christianity is no longer a single religious body governed from Moscow. The implications of this decision, announced by

ecclesiastical authorities Thursday evening, are far-reaching, dislodging a cornerstone of the Orthodox Church that was established more than three centuries ago.

In a statement expected for several weeks, a synod convened by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I—designated “the first among equals” in the global hierarchy of Orthodox Christian prelates—acknowledged the right to independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which has been overseen by religious officials in Moscow since 1686.

The synod formally recognized the legitimacy of the separatist Kiev Patriarchate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, established in the ruins of the Soviet Union 26 years ago and long treated as a pariah. The group also affirmed the priestly status and authority of the Kiev Patriarchate’s militant founder and leader, 94-year-old Patriarch Filaret. In addition, the religious leaders revoked the 1686 act of union between the Russian and Ukrainian congregations.

Together, Russian and Ukrainian Christians number more than the combined total of all other Orthodox congregations worldwide. Ukrainians currently account for one-fourth of the Moscow Patriarchate’s 136 million faithful and one-third of its 18,000 parishes. The split poses the “worst crisis” in the thousand-year annals of the Orthodox Church, according to informed observers.

The dispute also pits supporters of Russian President Vladimir Putin against his chief regional critic, President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine. Both are viewed as exploiting the church crisis in what amounts to a political vendetta, inflamed by Russia’s forcible annexation of the Crimea in 2014 and its ongoing military intervention in restless Eastern Ukraine.

Poroshenko called the synod’s decision “a victory of good over evil.” The Moscow Patriarchate, he said, “was a direct threat to the national security of Ukraine.”

In recent years, the Kiev Patriarchate’s ranks have grown to include an estimated 29 percent of the Ukrainian faithful, while those under Moscow’s wing comprise 13 percent. Another 26 percent describe themselves as “just Orthodox” or affiliated with smaller branches of the church.

In September, when it became clear that Ukrainian “autocephaly”—the canonical term for independence—was imminent, the Moscow Patriarchate retaliated by suspending liturgical prayers for Bartholomew, banning its priests from co-presiding with Constantinople bishops at religious services, and ending participation in assemblies, theological dialogues, and commissions chaired by Constantinople representatives.

The escalating dispute has prompted fears that violence may ensue. Russian websites have circulated unfounded reports of Ukrainian nationalists storming the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, a famous monastery. Some clerics in areas loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate, including the monastery, are said to have urged parishioners to “defend their churches.”

Yet despite its origin in tensions rooted deeply in Orthodox history, the stand-off has no liturgical or theological dimensions, almost all parties agree. In this the crisis closely resembles its counterparts elsewhere in the larger universe of mainstream religion: a precipitous decline in active membership, institutional fragmentation, and the subordination of spiritual concerns to politics.

Russia and Ukraine, the two nations at loggerheads over Orthodox religious authority, are also among the world’s most secularized. While identification with national churches remains very high in almost all Orthodox-majority nations—measuring 71 percent of the

total population in Russia and 77 percent in Ukraine—active religious practice is exceedingly low.

A 2016 public opinion survey conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed that only 15 percent of Russians and 20 percent of Ukrainians describe religion as “very important.” Just six percent of Russians and 12 percent of Ukrainians attend religious services weekly, and only 18 and 28 percent pray daily. By contrast, 52 percent of Americans regard religion as very important, 31 percent attend church every week, and 57 percent pray every day.

In short, popular identification with Orthodox churches is mostly about symbols of nationhood and has very little to do with religious beliefs.

Worldwide, Orthodoxy has also been plagued by declining numbers relative to global population. In 1910, 20 percent of the world’s Christians were Orthodox. Today, according to Pew, the figure is 12 percent. It’s against this backdrop that differences between religious officials in Moscow on the one hand, and Ukraine and the Constantinople Patriarchate on the other, have veered into full-blown crisis.

“The Patriarch of Constantinople has no jurisdiction over Ukraine under canonical law,” asserts Vladimir Legoyda, Director of Synodal Department for Church Relations with Society and the Media in Moscow. “Bartholomew cites the existence of historical documents proving that the accord in 1686 was meant to be temporary.” But no such documents have been produced, Legoyda maintains, adding that terminating the relationship after more than three centuries is “absurd.”

“It would be as if we said Alaska is still Russian because its sale to America occurred a long time ago under another regime.” (The sale was negotiated in 1867 by then U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward.)

Russian ecclesiastical officials bristle at frequent accusations that the Moscow Patriarchate is a pawn of Putin, invariably supporting his domestic policies and representing his interests abroad.

“We are not the church of the Russian state or any other state,” says Legoyda. “Our patriarch cares for the people of 16 countries. They are our canonical and pastoral responsibilities.”

DONBAS: Places of worship seized, sealed

A Baptist Church in Novoazovsk is the latest place of worship known to have been confiscated by the rebel Donetsk People's Republic. Rebels are known to have earlier seized a Mosque, a Baptist Church and Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Halls. Rebel officials claim many were abandoned, but communities deny this.

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (12.10.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2AaEBxs> - Rebel authorities of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic, an unrecognised entity in eastern Ukraine, have continued in 2018 to confiscate or seal places of worship to prevent religious communities from meeting. A Baptist Church in the southern seaside town of Novoazovsk, confiscated and

sealed against entry in September, is the latest known confiscation. Also seized in 2018 were a mosque in Donetsk and a Baptist Church in Makeyevka.

Pro-Russian rebels seized parts of Ukraine's Donetsk Region in April 2014 and proclaimed what they called the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). Heavy fighting ensued. The rebel administration currently controls nearly half of Ukraine's Donetsk Region.

Between 2014 and the end of 2017, the rebel authorities are known to have confiscated or sealed against entry other places of worship, including Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Halls, a Muslim prayer room, a Seventh-day Adventist church and a Protestant-run University (see below).

Members of religious communities of a variety of faiths told Forum 18 that they fear that meeting for worship in private homes could lead to raids and possible punishment.

Sergei Gavrish, the head of the Religion and Nationalities Department at the Culture Ministry in Donetsk, refused to discuss why the authorities have seized numerous places of worship. "Our Ministry has no involvement in this," he told Forum 18 on 11 October. "I don't know who does this."

The State Property Fund often seizes the places of worship on the pretext that they are unused and without an owner. Religious communities contest these claims. Officials of the Property Fund refused to discuss the seizures with Forum 18 (see below).

The Donetsk Mosque was closed on the pretext that it was spreading "extremist" literature. The State Security Ministry (SSM) in Donetsk refused to discuss the seizure with Forum 18, or whether any criminal cases are underway against two mosque members (see below).

On 26 September, the rebels' Donetsk Supreme Court banned Jehovah's Witnesses entirely. The ban on Jehovah's Witnesses followed several Supreme Court decisions declaring their literature and international website "extremist". The authorities "use the pretext of fighting extremism to persecute Jehovah's Witnesses for their peaceful worship", Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18 (see forthcoming F18News article).

The Supreme Court has also declared some Muslim literature "extremist" (see forthcoming F18News article).

As well as the accusation of "extremism", the General Prosecutor's Office accused Jehovah's Witnesses of not having local registration. However, Culture Ministry and Justice Ministry officials told Forum 18 that no religious communities currently have registration. An amendment to the Religion Law gives religious communities until 1 March 2019 to lodge registration applications (see forthcoming F18News article).

Pro-Russian rebels also seized control of parts of Ukraine's Luhansk Region in March 2014 and the following month proclaimed what they called the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR). Heavy fighting ensued. The rebel administration currently controls about a third of Ukraine's Luhansk Region. That rebel-held area adjoins the rebel-held area of Donetsk Region. In rebel-held Luhansk armed men – often officials or police – often raid religious communities, halt worship meetings and seize religious literature.

Novoazovsk: Baptist Church seized, sealed

In September 2018, officials in the southern seaside town of Novoazovsk seized and sealed the Baptist Church. "Members of this church are deprived of the opportunity to conduct worship meetings," fellow-Baptists lamented to Forum 18.

Oleg Sidorenko, first deputy head of Novoazovsk District Administration, said he did not know about the seizure of the Baptist Church and said he would find out. Asked why places of worship are being seized, including in Novoazovsk, Makeyevka, Donetsk and Gorlovka, he responded: "And in Kiev and Lvov." He then put the phone down.

Makeyevka: Baptist Church seized, sealed

On 6 July, officials seized the two-storey building of New Life Baptist Church in Makeyevka. "About midday, seven officials – including some with weapons – arrived and told us that our building no longer belongs to us," Pastor Aleksandr Moseychuk recounted on his Facebook page the same day. "Despite all our persuasion and discussions, they sealed the building."

The seal on the door was signed by a Justice Ministry official A. S. Bashkatov, according to a picture seen by Forum 18.

Asked by Forum 18 about the church seizure on 11 October, the official who answered the phone at Makeyevka Justice Department immediately put the phone down.

Pastor Moseychuk noted that each Sunday "people heard the living word of God, many of them repented of their sins and we have people preparing for baptism." He added that the church had also provided food and clothing for local people in need in the four years since fighting began.

"The church building has not been returned to its owner," fellow-Baptists lamented to Forum 18 on 9 October. "What's worse, the building has been placed on the list of ownerless property."

After the July seizure of their place of worship, church members in Makeyevka met in other churches' property. "However, churches renting their premises then began to suffer persecution," Baptists told Forum 18. Church members can now meet only in small groups in homes.

Donetsk: Second mosque seized, sealed

On 21 June 2018, one week after the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, SSM officers arrived at Al-Amal Mosque in Donetsk's Kalinin District, the Ministry noted on its website on 27 June. They searched the building, seizing prayer books and other literature. They also seized copies of the Ukrainian-language Umma newspaper.

Officers then sealed the building, Said Ismagilov, Mufti of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Ukraine UMMA, told Forum 18 from Kiev on 10 October. He said the building belongs to a private owner who sponsored its construction.

Ismagilov, the Donetsk-born former Imam of the Al-Amal Mosque, fled from the rebel-held area in September 2014 fearing arrest. Both in his time and since, men in camouflage were often present during the namaz prayers and inspected books present in the mosque, he noted.

Following the June 2018 raid, officers took the current Imam, Rinat Khabibudinov, and a congregation member from nearby Makeyevka for questioning. A criminal investigation

appears to have been launched against the two men for spreading "extremist" literature, Ismagilov added. The two had to sign pledges that they would not leave the city.

The SSM, describing the mosque community as a "pseudo-religious organisation of Islamic orientation", claimed it was linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and was distributing "extremist" literature.

Among the books officers seized the Ministry identified two: "Fortress of a Muslim", a collection of Muslim prayers which, as it noted, is banned in Russia; and "The Last Journey", a book published by the Ukrainian Muslim organisation Al-Raid and which has also been declared "extremist" in Russia.

The duty officer at the SSM in Donetsk refused to put Forum 18 through to anyone who would explain why officers forcibly closed the mosque in June, or whether criminal cases against mosque members are underway. "No one will give you the phone number of anyone here," he told Forum 18 on 12 October, "as we don't give such information by phone." He then put the phone down.

Another small Muslim prayer room in rented first floor premises elsewhere in the city had been closed in 2015 or 2016, also on alleged grounds of "extremism", Ismagilov added.

One other mosque still functions in Donetsk, the large Akhat Jami Mosque in the city's Oktyabrski District, which is affiliated to another Islamic group, the Spiritual Centre of Muslims of Ukraine.

Earlier place of worship seizures

The Donetsk rebel authorities seized various places of worship and religious institutions after they took control locally in 2014. One Pentecostal Church was among those seized, but was later returned to the community, a Pentecostal told Forum 18.

In July 2014, rebels seized Donetsk Christian University, a Protestant theological college with its own campus. They threatened those in the college with a summary field court if they failed to leave. Confiscations of places of worship continued in the following year. It was at about this time that a Muslim prayer room in Donetsk was forcibly closed (see above).

On 16 November 2016, armed men came to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Gorlovka. They told those present that the town administration had declared the two-storey building its property and that the church must vacate it immediately, the Church noted at the time. The men seized all the building contents as well, including equipment and the library, except for the pastor's personal possessions.

Officials – who had given no prior notice of the seizure – said the Church was unable to document its ownership of the building. Church members dispute this and say they provided the town administration with all necessary documentation.

"The Church was a beautiful building, and we received no compensation for it," an Adventist familiar with the situation told Forum 18 from the Ukrainian capital Kiev on 11 October 2018.

Forum 18 was unable on 11 and 12 October to reach Ivan Prikhodko, the head of Gorlovka administration since July 2016. Another administration official – who did not give his name – refused to give Forum 18 any information the same day. "We only talk to media which have accreditation."

Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall seizures

On 3 September 2017, local Jehovah's Witnesses found that their Kingdom Hall in Donetsk had been vandalised and desecrated, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

From that month, the authorities began seizing Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Halls, handing them to local administrations. Titles to the properties had often already been seized in anti-"extremism" raids on the Kingdom Halls earlier in 2017. Officials seized Kingdom Halls in Gorlovka, Donetsk, Telmanove, Yenakievo, Ulegorsk and Debaltsevo.

The Gorlovka Kingdom Hall seizure was typical. In an 8 September 2017 order, seen by Forum 18, the head of the State Property Fund Sergei Kaida declared that the building was abandoned and would be taken over by the Town Administration. Ten days later a State Property Fund Commission, accompanied by Town Administration officials, visited the building and confirmed the decision.

On 27 September 2017, the Gorlovka Jehovah's Witness community appealed to the Interior Ministry in Donetsk for their Kingdom Hall. In his 3 November 2017 reply, seen by Forum 18, deputy minister Major-General Igor Melnikov outlined the confiscation on the grounds that the building was allegedly unused.

In a 21 November 2017 response to the community seen by Forum 18, Kaida of the State Property Fund told the community leader that the Kingdom Hall was being seized for one year "as it had the signs of being without an owner". It claimed the State Property Fund's decision had been taken "in strict conformity" with laws governing ownerless property.

Olga Pushnova, a State Property Fund official who had prepared Kaida's November 2017 response to Gorlovka's Jehovah's Witness community, refused to discuss why its property had been seized. "I'm not working on that property," she told Forum 18 from Donetsk on 12 October. She then put the phone down.

The Debaltsevo Kingdom Hall seizure was similar. On 25 October 2017, the State Property Fund declared that the building was abandoned and should be managed by the town administration, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. On 22 November 2017, the police welded shut the entrance door.

Violence erupts in dispute over autocephaly

Russia Religion News (01.10.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2RIIjLe> - Raiders who yesterday seized the metropolitan's chamber in the UPTs Holy Trinity church in the west of Ukraine justified their action by the reluctance of parishioners to support "a united local church."

A video of the seizure, which was published by the Information and Enlightenment Department of the UPTs, shows how the raiders are reproaching believers for the fact that they will not transfer into a "normal church" and do not support the creation of a local church of Ukraine.

As was reported, on Friday [28 September] activists of the Right Sector (a radical nationalist organization that is forbidden in the RF) seized a part of the premises in the

church of the Holy Trinity in the village of Bogorodchany of Ivano-Frankovsk oblast and beat parishioners. Several persons received serious injury, the rector was driven into the street with kicks, and then the locks on the church were changed.

The Ivano-Frankovsk diocese of the UPTs urged representatives of the government to peacefully resolve the disputed matters of a property and other nature and to put an end to aggression against Orthodox Ukrainians. (tr. by PDS, posted 1 October 2018)

Eastern Ukraine: Armed Russia-backed militants attack Baptist house of prayer

RISU (27.09.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2NPRHZk> - A group of armed militants from the self-proclaimed 'Luhansk people's republic' [LPR] have seized an Evangelical Baptist House of Prayer in Brianka and driven out the believers, turning the whole place upside down. According to the Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Baptist Christians, these representatives of the Russian-backed 'republic' left only after it was made clear to them that the building was the private property of one of the believers.

Petro Dudnyk, Pastor of the Good News Evangelical Church in Sloviansk and a tireless volunteer from the beginning of the military conflict, reports that the Church in Brianka handed out water and food to hundreds of people in need during the most critical times during the past four years. He says that the Church has continued up till now to take in and provide refuge to all those in need, regardless of their religious affiliation and ethnic origin. Informs website of the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group.

This is not the first such armed raid and / or seizure of churches in areas until Kremlin-backed militant control. On 6 July this year, Alexander Moseychuk, Pastor of the New Life Church in Makiyivka reported that seven representatives of the so-called 'Donetsk people's republic' [DPR], some of them armed had burst into the church, announced that it no longer belonged to and announced that it was being taken over. There are around 120 believers whose church has been taken from them. Pastor Alexander also stressed that the New Life Church had helped over 700 people in need since the beginning of the war. According to the Institute for Religious Freedom, there were similar moves on 10 June in Donetsk, with the Church of the Holy Spirit in Donetsk, which is under the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, forcibly closed by people from the so-called 'DPR state property fund'. On 27 March 2018, men in military gear turned up at a Baptist place of worship in Stakhanov [within 'LPR'], forced their way into the premises and took out everything, including furniture and items used during services.

The situation varies somewhat in the two Kremlin-controlled 'republics', however both demonstrate the same basic intolerance for all faiths, except the Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate.

In 'DPR', for example, a new ruling, following from the so-called 'law on freedom of faith and religious organizations', in force since May 2018, prohibits the activities of any religious organization that has not undergone 're-registration' by 1 March 2019. Believers report that their churches or religious organizations have been told that if they don't re-register, they will face a ban on their religious activities and 'confiscation' of all their property.

Since an 'expert assessment' is required in order to obtain such 're-registration', it is likely that this will be used as an opportunity to ban some churches. As was to be expected after the past four years, the Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate will not have to go through any of this, and will instead have a simplified 'legalization' process.

Both 'DPR' and 'LPR' are directly following Russia in repressive measures against the Jehovah's Witnesses. 'DPR' recently banned almost all Jehovah's Witness material, claiming it to be 'extremist', while in February 'LPR' banned the Jehovah's Witnesses and other 'non-traditional' faiths. This was after they passed several 'laws', including one aimed at hunting down and prohibiting so-called extremism in religious or political organizations, as well as in the media.

On 28 August 2017, they claimed that the Jehovah's Witnesses were helping Ukraine's Security Service [SBU] and "neo-Nazi groups". An investigative search had supposedly established not only that the Jehovah's Witnesses in Luhansk and Alchevsk were in breach of 'LPR law', but that they were probably "agents of influence of the Ukrainian Security Service.

The militants do not only target Christian churches. As reported, the only mosque remaining in occupied Donetsk was closed in late June, after an armed search and interrogation of the Imam and worshippers. The so-called 'DPR law' on countering extremist activities was cited as the grounds.

Churches under the Moscow Patriarchate have enjoyed special treatment from the beginning, with religious persecution of all other faiths becoming a grave problem from the beginning of the Russian-backed, manned and armed military conflict in April 2014.

A 2015 study by human rights groups entitled 'When God becomes the weapon' identified systematic and widespread religious persecution, and reported that religion was one of the key motivating factors and justification cited for criminal activities by unlawful paramilitary groups within the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics'

A major role had been played by unlawful armed groups who "under the banners of the Russian Orthodox Army and the Cossack Army, openly manifest their adherence to orthodoxy and have begun a 'crusade' across the Donbas region".

The supposed 'Russian World', which the militants see themselves as defending, has been endorsed by the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill (more details here).

It is quite likely that the situation will deteriorate further following the aggressive reaction shown by the Moscow Patriarchate and Russia to the decision by the Universal Patriarchate in Constantinople to grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Kyiv Patriarchate.

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew clarifies the situation of the Ukrainian Church

The Persecution of Christians (11.09.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2MkCkCx> - NEW YORK, NY: On Monday, September 3, 2018, before the entire Hierarchy of Metropolitans and Bishops of the Church of Constantinople, who were meeting in the Queen of Cities for the Synaxis

of the Hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne on the feast of Indiction, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew delivered an important address on the status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, clarifying and reiterating numerous key points concerning the unity of the Holy Orthodox Church and the role within it of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

This instructive address followed a two-and-a-half hour private discussion on Friday, August 31, between His Beatitude Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on matters of inter-Orthodox concern.

His All-Holiness gave an address full of theological wisdom and historical insight, speaking "as the guardian of the holy and sacred traditions of Orthodoxy, as well as of the dogmas alike of the Holy Seven Ecumenical Councils and other local councils, but also of the teachings of the Holy Fathers," noting that "the Ecumenical Patriarchate exists as 'the small flock' (Luke 12.32), which seeks neither worldly renown or secular power, passionately loves 'the word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ' (Rev. 1.2), enjoys canonical jurisdiction and all apostolic privileges in its responsibility for safeguarding the unity and communion of the local Churches but also for the overall journey of Orthodoxy in the contemporary world and history."

Turning his attention to the situation of the Ukrainian Church, His All-Holiness pointed out that "no matter how much some wish to embellish the situation in Ukraine, history proves them wrong and presents indisputable arguments demonstrating that the origin of difficulties and reactions in Ukraine are neither a recent phenomenon nor something created by the Ecumenical Patriarchate." His All-Holiness also reminded the assembled hierarchs of the unfortunate fact that "already from the early 14th century, when the see of the Kievan Metropolis was moved without the canonical permission of the Mother Church to Moscow, there have been tireless efforts on the part of our Kievan brothers for independence from ecclesiastical control by the Moscow center. Indeed, the obstinacy of the Patriarchate of Moscow was instrumental in occasionally creating repeated mergers and restorations of ecclesiastical eparchies, uncanonical elections of Bishops as well as schisms, which still afflict the pious Ukrainian people."

His All-Holiness also noted that "a study of the matter in the light of the sacred canons does not justify any intervention whatsoever by the Church of Russia." This is because "the Tome proclaiming Moscow as a Patriarchate does not include the region of today's Metropolis of Kiev in the jurisdiction of Moscow." It was only "in the year 1686, our predecessor, the late Patriarch Dionysios IV, following great political pressure from the harrowing circumstances and for peace in the local Church, was obliged to issue a letter granting Moscow the license to ordain the Metropolitan of Kiev on the inviolable condition that every Metropolitan of Kiev would commemorate the name of the Ecumenical Patriarch as his ecclesiastical superior and authority, but also to demonstrate the canonical jurisdiction of Constantinople over this Metropolis."

That is, said His All-Holiness, how the matter remains to this day: "As far as we know, no other act changing the canonical state of Kiev or revision of the condition to commemorate Constantinople has ever occurred; nor of course has there been any such change on the part of the Mother Church ceding Kiev completely to Russia." Consequently, "the uncanonical interventions of Moscow from time to time in the affairs of Kiev and the toleration on the part of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in previous years do not validate any ecclesiastical violation." His All-Holiness stated that the Sixth Canon of First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea was "precisely valid in this case, as the commentator Aristinos observes: 'Each patriarch should be satisfied with his own privileges and not snatch the privileges of another eparchy, which does not lie within or under the authority of his jurisdiction. For this is the conceit of worldly power.'"

Regarding the present situation, His All-Holiness pointed out that “the occasional deliberate efforts of the Church of Russia to resolve this matter failed. Thus, since Russia, as the one responsible for the current painful situation in Ukraine, is unable to solve the problem, the Ecumenical Patriarchate assumed the initiative of resolving the problem in accordance with the authority afforded to it by the Sacred Canons and the jurisdictional responsibility over the eparchy of Kiev, receiving a request to this end by the honorable Ukrainian Government, as well as recurring requests by ‘Patriarch’ Philaret of Kiev appealing for our adjudication of his case.”

These appeals to the Ecumenical Patriarchate were in accord with those Sacred Canons, as His All-Holiness pointed out that the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon “honored the exceptional privilege of ‘the right to appeal’ (ekkliton) of the Throne of Constantinople with the decrees of its 9th and 17th Canons. Numerous instances of the exercise of this right to appeal by Hierarchs and clergy of other jurisdictions have been recorded through the centuries in the historical journey of the Mother Church.”

His All-Holiness observed that “in times of greater or lesser historical challenge, our Patriarchate – faithful to its vocation and ministry – neither says nor does anything unrelated to the incarnate Word. Its mission is not comprised of imposing some new ecclesiological principles but preserving truths of faith, precious traditions and inspired patristic teachings established many centuries ago. The Mother Church does not create or shape its own church management; nor does it complete the Gospel, like the Grand Inquisitor of the renowned Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky. As the First Throne of Orthodoxy, the Ecumenical Patriarchate exercises a prophetic ministry, extending the mystery of the Catholic Church in Christ Jesus throughout the world in each era.”

In exercising that ministry, the Ecumenical Patriarchate must confront heresies. “The great temptation of the second millennium,” His All-Holiness stated, “which was also bequeathed to the millennium we have now entered, is the status of jurisdictions. The source of this problem is ethnophyletism, the propensity to expansionism and the disregard of the boundaries defined by the Patriarchal and Synodal Tomes. The Ecumenical Patriarchate bears the responsibility of setting matters in ecclesiastical and canonical order because it alone has the canonical privilege as well as the prayer and blessing of the Church and the Ecumenical Councils to carry out this supreme and exceptional duty as a nurturing Mother and birth-giver of Churches. If the Ecumenical Patriarchate denies its responsibility and removes itself from the inter-Orthodox scene, then the local Churches will proceed ‘as sheep without a shepherd’ (Matt. 9.36), expending their energy in ecclesiastical initiatives that conflate the humility of faith and the arrogance of power.”

The Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, expresses our gratitude to His All-Holiness for the wisdom and piety of this address, and for the clarification it offers on this controversial issue. We pray that all the hierarchs and faithful of the Holy Orthodox Church around the world will consider carefully and heed the words of His All-Holiness, and that Almighty God will bestow upon His Church a renewed unity and peace.

In the Service of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,

Anthony J. Limberakis, MD
Archon Aktouarios
National Commander

Razumkov Centre: 35% of Ukrainians support creation of the One Local Orthodox Church

RISU (07.09.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2oUCHe3> - 35% of Ukrainians support the creation of the One Local Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Ukraine, 19% do not support it, 33.5% said they were not interested, and 12% hesitated to answer.

This is evidenced by the results of a nationwide survey conducted by the Razumkov Center in cooperation with the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation from August 16 to 22, 2018, Hromadske reports.

The Center interviewed 2,019 respondents aged 18 and over in all regions of Ukraine, with the exception of Crimea and the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. According to surveyors, the theoretical sample error does not exceed 2.3%.

The report also reveals that the creation of the One Local Church is mostly supported by faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kyiv Patriarchate, 61% spoke in favor and 11% - against, while among the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), 27% are positive, and 42% do not support it.

In general, among those who consider themselves Orthodox, 41% support the creation of the Local Autocephalous Orthodox Church, 21% do not support it.

40% of Greek Catholics expressed their support, while 19% were against the creation of the Local Autocephalous Orthodox Church. However, 42% of them were not interested in this question or were hesitant to answer.

The vast majority of those who do not adhere to any of the religions (84.5%) and those who consider themselves "just Christians" (74%), as well as more than half of those who said that they are "just Orthodox" (without adhering to any particular Orthodox Church) (56%) either replied that they were not interested in it or were hesitant to answer.

The share of those who support the creation of the Local Autocephalous Orthodox Church prevails over those who do not in the Western (respectively 60.5% and 12%) and Central (respectively 41% and 15%) regions. In the Eastern region, on the contrary, the part of those who do not support prevails (14% and 32% respectively), whereas in the Southern region their shares do not differ statistically significantly (16% and 18% respectively). In the Eastern and Southern regions, most people either are not interested in this problem or are undetermined (54% in the East and 66% in the South).

As reported, on September 1-3, in Istanbul, a general meeting of the episcopate of the Patriarchate of Constantinople took place. It discussed the issue of creating the One Local Ukrainian Church.

Constantinople's support for the independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church sparks Moscow's wrath

Patriarch Bartholomew appoints two Exarchs in Kyiv. For the Moscow Patriarchate, this is an "unprecedented gross incursion into the Moscow Patriarchate's canonical territory".

AsiaNews (08.09.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2O4UYA8> - Istanbul - The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople has appointed two exarchs*, Archbishop Daniel of Pamphilon (United

States) and Bishop Ilarion of Edmonton (Canada), in Kyiv in preparation "for the granting of autocephaly (independence) to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine," said a statement posted on the Patriarchate's website.

The statement from Constantinople immediately sparked an angry and bitter response from the Moscow Patriarchate. Vladimir Legoyda, head of the Synodal Department for Relations with Church, Society and Media, issued a press release accusing the Ecumenical Patriarchate of an "unprecedentedly gross incursion into the Moscow Patriarchate's canonical territory." Such "actions", he added, "cannot be left unanswered".

The Orthodox community in the Ukraine is split between those who follow the Moscow Patriarchate and those who adhere to the (schismatic) Kyiv Patriarchate. Pressures for the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox have increased as a result of the evolving relationship between Ukraine and Russia.

Last April, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko sent a request to Constantinople asking the Ecumenical Patriarchate to grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which could heal the schism.

At the end of August, Patriarch Kirill met with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Constantinople but nothing has come of the meeting so far.

At the Synaxis (meeting of patriarchs and bishops of the patriarchate) that followed, Bartholomew expressed his support for the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox.

* In the Orthodox Church, the exarch is a high-ranking prelate or the deputy of the patriarch.

Moscow church exaggerates account of holiday march

UOC/ Moscow Patriarchate sources say 250,000 participated in their procession but Ukrainian police sources cite 1/8 of that number

Russia Religion News/ Portal-Credo (27.07.2018) - Estimates of the number of participants in the procession of the cross of the UOC-MP in honor of the 1030th anniversary of the baptism of Kievan Rus, which proceeded on 27 July about the center of Kiev, from Vladimir Knoll to the Kiev caves lavra, differed extremely significantly. As a Portal-Credo.ru correspondent reports, the Ukrainian television channel Inter, citing an official representative of UOC-MP, published information about 250,000 participants in the march, but law enforcement agencies speak about 30,000.

According to the calculation of the Portal-Credo.ru correspondent, who attended the prayer service performed by the primate of the UOC-MP, Metropolitan Onufrey, at the monument to holy Prince Vladimir on Vladimir Knoll, from 30 to 50 thousand persons assembled there. At the same time, one cannot rule out that some of the worshippers were outside of the boundaries of the park and another portion joined the procession of the cross along its route. According to the head of the information and enlightenment department of the UOC-MP, Archbishop Kliment, when the head of the procession reached the lavra, its tail was still at Vladimir Knoll, a distance of more than three kilometers.

Representatives of the UOC-MP continue to insist that authorities of various regions of Ukraine raised obstacles to an organized arrival in Kiev of clergy and laity of this church for participating in the procession of the cross. At the same time, the Union of Orthodox Journalists, which is close to the Moscow patriarchate, circulated information that UkrZalianitsia even provided special vehicles for transporting pilgrims.

The procession of the cross was accompanied by sacred items: parts of relics of saints, the Equal-to-the-apostles Prince Vladimir, the holy martyr Clement of Rome, the great martyr George the Conqueror, the apostle Andrew the First-called, and the Zimnee Icon of the Mother of God. After the conclusion of the procession they were exhibited in the refectory church of the Kiev caves lavra, where they will be accessible for veneration all night on 28 July.

Despite predictions, no provocations or confrontations of any kind were observed during the procession of the cross. (tr. by PDS, posted 28 July 2018)

1030th anniversary of Christianization of Kievan Rus celebration by UOC/ Kyiv Patriarchate

HRWF (29.07.2018) – On 28 July, the UOC/ KP celebrated the anniversary of the Christianization of Ukraine which took place with the conversion of Prince Vladimir in 988. President Poroshenko participated in the ceremony with his wife. On the previous day, the UOC/MP had celebrated the same historical event under the name of "Baptism of Rus" in Kyiv and so had the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow.

Up to 150,000 take part in UOC - KP procession in Kyiv

Interfax Ukraine (28.07.2018) - From 65,000 to 150,000 believers have participated in a religious procession of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) dedicated to the 1030th anniversary of the Christianization of Kyivan Rus-Ukraine.

"About 65,000 people participated in the march as of 13.00. The situation is calm and controlled," First Deputy Interior Minister Serhiy Yarovy said the Interior Ministry's page on Facebook on Saturday.

According to him, bomb disposal experts and dog handlers checked the route along which the column of pilgrims moved in order to prevent terror attacks and provocations. The safety of citizens was ensured by the police, the National Guard and the State Emergency Service.

The head of the information department of the UOC-KP, Archbishop Yevstratiy (Zoria), said that up to 150,000 parishioners had taken part in the events.

"The biggest religious procession in Ukraine's history' - this is what Patriarch Filaret said in his speech after a prayer service on Saint Volodymyr Hill. According to various estimates, from 65,000 to 150,000 believers or more gathered in the center of Kyiv for a prayer service," Yevstratiy (Zoria) wrote on his Facebook page after the religious procession.

He noted that prior to this day "only the Maidan during the Revolution of Dignity brought together so many patriotic citizens who pray for the victory of truth and peace in Ukraine."

Ukrinform: About 65,000 people participate in religious procession in Kyiv

Ukrinform (28.07.2018) - As of 13.00, about 65,000 people took part in a religious procession of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP).



The procession was guarded by 2,500 law enforcers, the press service of the Internal Ministry of Ukraine reported.

"As of 13:00, about 65,000 people participated in the religious procession. The situation was calm and controlled," the deputy director of the Department of Communications of the Interior Ministry of Ukraine wrote on Facebook with reference to First Deputy Interior Minister Serhiy Yarovy.

The law enforcers continue to protect public order during the event.

As reported, on July 28, the ceremonial events on the occasion of the 1030th anniversary of the conversion of the Kyivan Rus-Ukraine to Christianity were held in Kyiv with the participation of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko.

President Poroshenko and his wife took part in the Cross Procession on the occasion of the 1030th anniversary of Christianization of Ukraine-Rus

RISU (28.07.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2vfaQaV> President Petro Poroshenko and his wife Maryna Poroshenko took part in the Cross Procession on the occasion of the 1030th anniversary of Christianization of Ukraine-Rus'.

Believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate, headed by Patriarch Filaret, and believers of the UAOC, headed by Metropolitan Macarius, passed to the garden square near the monument to St. Vladimir.

The Head of State together with his wife also took part in the prayer service for Ukraine and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church.

The festive event was attended by representatives of the Government, members of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches, well-known public figures, volunteers, representatives of culture, science and education.

UOC - MP holds religious procession in Kyiv

See videos: <https://bit.ly/2Oo00IH>

Ukrinform (27.07.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2Oo00IH> - A religious procession of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) has ended in Kyiv without any incidents. The pilgrims marched from Saint Volodymyr Hill to the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra monastery.

According to an Ukrinform correspondent, the column was led by a security police patrol. In particular, several police cars, as well as a car with the inscription "bomb disposal service," were used.

The column was also accompanied by police officers with dogs. Law enforcers constantly checked flower beds located along the route of the column. National Guard servicemen were deployed along the route of the procession.

On the way to the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, UOC-MP Head Onufriy laid flowers at the monument to Hero of the Heavenly Hundred Mikhail Zhiznevsky, who was killed on Hrushevskoho Street in Kyiv on January 22, 2014 during clashes between the security forces and EuroMaidan activists.

Earlier, the UOC-MP held a prayer service on Saint Volodymyr Hill. In addition to the clergy, the event was attended by Opposition Bloc MPs Yuriy Boyko, Vadim Novinsky, Nestor Shufrych, Oleksandr Vilkul, and independent MP Volodymyr Lytvyn.

President Petro Poroshenko did not attend the celebrations but will attend those to be organized by the UOC Kyiv Patriarchate on the next day.

1030th anniversary of the 'Baptism of Rus' : the ROC and UOC/ Moscow Patriarchate narrative

Pictures: <https://bit.ly/2LKUYHu>

Heads, members of 10 local Orthodox Churches to celebrate 1030th anniversary of Baptism of Rus in Moscow

Moscow, July 27, Interfax - www.interfax-religion.com/ - Representatives of ten local Orthodox Churches from around the world will come to Moscow to attend celebrations marking the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus.

Delegations from the Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the Church of Antioch, the Church of Jerusalem, the Orthodox Church of Georgia, the Orthodox Church of Serbia, the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria, the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, the Orthodox Church of Albania, the Orthodox Church of Poland, and the Orthodox Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia are coming to the Russian capital, the Moscow Patriarchate told *Interfax-Religion*.

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia will meet Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria and All Africa and members of other church delegations on Friday.

"It is very significant that our brothers from all across the Orthodox world are now coming to Moscow and Kiev so that we together can express our unity on this date,

which is so important for the Russian Orthodox Church," the spokesman of the Russian patriarch, priest Alexander Volkov, told *Interfax-Religion*.

In turn, the deputy head of the Synodal Department for External Church Relations Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, described the Baptism of Rus as "an epoch-making event in Russian history."

"Everything that happened before is lost in the dark and is known to us only in fragments. A new people and a new civilization were born in the Dnieper baptistery, and this event was accompanied by such a strong creative surge that the newly born Orthodox Rus expanded later to new territories, and we received from God a 'sixth part of the Earth,' where different people now live, and new state borders are drawn, but with its own history, its own culture, and its global vision united for many centuries to come," the priest told *Interfax-Religion*.

"The Orthodox belief in Christ, the belief that St. Prince Vladimir chose, formed all of us, that is, the Russians, the Ukrainians, the Belarusians, the Moldovans, and all descendants of the Baptism of St. Vladimir, no matter what they call themselves now," the patriarch's spokesman said.

"The anniversary of our Baptism is an event of global significance," and it is not accidental that all of the Orthodox Churches in the world deemed it fitting to attend it, "share their joy with us, sending their hierarchs both to Kiev and to Moscow," the priest said.

The Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa Theodore will be Russia's main guest, Father Nikolay said, noting that he "is our long-standing and faithful friend, who wholeheartedly fell in love with the Russians after spending ten years of study and service in Odessa."

"Let's pray together, let's share our joy and troubles, let's think about how to build up the unity of our global Orthodox family," the priest said.

The patriarchs of the Alexandrian and Russian Orthodox Churches, accompanied by members of other delegations, will lead a vigil service on Friday evening.

The Day of the Baptism of Rus was declared a state memorial date in Russia in 2010 at the Archbishop Council's request.

Over 100,000 pilgrims to attend Kiev cross procession - Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Moscow, July 27, Interfax - The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is expecting even more believers to attend the Kiev cross procession marking the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus than attended last year.

"It is still early to make final assessments, but in any case, there will be more than 100,000 people. I have been on Vladimirska Gorka [Vladimir Hill] for more than an hour, waiting for a religious service, and there's a nonstop flow of people coming here from three streets," Ukrainian Orthodox Church spokesman Vasily Anisimov told *Interfax-Religion*.

He expressed hope that the festivities would not be marred by provocations. "God can never be cursed. Let's hope that everything will be alright," Anisimov said.

Dozens of buses from western Ukraine were stopped on the Zhitomir Highway leading to Kiev this morning because of they had supposedly been mined, he said.

There were reports of attempts to prevent believers from attending the cross procession in several Ukrainian regions on Thursday.

For instance, Ukrainian Security Service officers have stopped five buses in Zaporozhye for several hours under the pretext that they had been mined, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's press service said.

Cars full of armed people blocked another nine buses from Zaporozhye and Melitopol.

Attempts to keep people from the Kiev cross procession were also undertaken in the Zhitomir and Rovno regions, and obstacles were created for pilgrims from the Nezhin and Odessa dioceses.

Still, tens of thousands of people have come to Kiev, the church's press service said.

The attempts to block the highway have backfired, Archpriest Viktor Zemlianoy of the Rovno Diocese said. "Even more people than expected came because of this resistance," he said.

Kiev cross procession begins

Kiev, July 27, Interfax - A Ukrainian Orthodox Church cross procession marking the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus has begun in downtown Kiev.

After the prayer service on Vladimirskaya Gorka (Vladimir Hill), believers moved across European Square and along Grushevsky Street toward the Kiev Lavra of the Caves, an *Interfax* correspondent reported.

Clergymen carrying religious banners and icons are leading the column.

Law enforcement officers are providing security.

In attendance are the co-chairs of the *Opposition Bloc* faction in the Verkhovnaya Rada, Yury Boyko and Aleksander Vilkul, faction members Vadim Novinsky, Nestor Shufrich, Mikhail Dobkin, and Yury Pavlenko, and Vladimir Litvin, an independent MP.

The situation is calm in downtown Kiev. Due to the high humidity and temperature, some participants sometimes have felt dizzy in the crowd, but ambulances are on site providing aid.

About 250,000 attend cross procession in Kiev – organizers (1)

Moscow, July 27, Interfax - The cross procession held in Kiev on Friday afternoon to mark the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus brought together 250,000 believers from various Ukrainian regions and from other countries, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's press service said.

"Participants in today's cross procession moved in a mighty flow toward the center of the capital for three hours. It was a marvelously joyful event," church spokesperson Vasily Anisimov told *Interfax-Religion*.

A total of 100,000 people attended the celebration last year.

(1) HRWF Comment: No alternative reliable source confirms or denies these statistics. Noteworthy is the fact that the UOC/ Moscow Patriarchate in Kyiv and the ROC in Moscow name the event "the baptism of the Rus" and not "the christianization of the Kievan Rus".

1030th anniversary of the Kievan Rus Christianization on a background of high tensions

HRWF (27.07.2018) – The celebration of the 1030th anniversary of the Kievan Rus Christianization will take place this 27-28 July in a context of high tension. On the one hand, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Kyiv Patriarchate wants to secede from the Russian Orthodox Church and hopes the spiritual head of Eastern Orthodoxy, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople (Istanbul) will recognize its autocephaly. On the other hand, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church / Moscow Patriarchate has announced a procession in Kyiv on Friday in which 100,000 people would participate while the Kyiv Patriarchate has announced a similar religious procession with 100,000 participants on Saturday.

The police are on full alert.

100,000 people to participate in religious processions associated with Kievan Rus Christianization anniversary



[Yevstratyi Zorya/Facebook](#) - 5,000 police officers and 5,000 officers of the National Guard will provide the security

112 International (24.07.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2JZkGDd> - About 100,000 people, parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of both Kyiv and Moscow Patriarchates,

will participate in the sacred procession that will take place on July 27 and July 28 due to [the Kievan Rus Christianization](#). The security measures will be the same as the previous year. Andry Kryshchenko, the Head of the Kyiv National Police claimed this as [Interfax-Ukraine reported](#).

"The participation of up to 100, 000 people is indicated in the application. The application of the Moscow Patriarchate for the participation of up to 100,000 people in the sacred procession on Friday and the application of the Kyiv Patriarchate for the participation of up to 100,000 people in the sacred procession on Saturday," he said.

About 5,000 law enforcers will provide the order at the streets.

Moreover, Deputy Interior Minister Serhy Yarove claimed that 5,000 officers of the National Guard will be attracted to the support of the Kyiv police these days.

As it was reported earlier, [sacred processions and solemn prayers will be held in the capital dedicated to the celebration of 1030](#) th anniversary of Kievan Rus Christianization. This is why the traffic will be restricted in downtown.

Last year's [religious procession started in Ternopil and Donetsk regions](#), brought the two groups of believers to enter Kyiv on July 26, meet on July 27 in Kiev at St. Vladimir's Hill, and together with the Orthodox Kyiv citizens and pilgrims proceed to Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. The expected number was 30 000 participants, however, there were [more than 4,500 pilgrims at Volodymyrska Hirka a year ago](#) and around [6 000 people took part in celebration of Baptism of Rus](#) last year. [Law enforcers expected a high number of provocations](#) by pro-Russian activists or Kremlin-backed militants, tightening preventive measures, however, there were no serious violations reported.

OSCE is informed how Ukrainian authorities impede to the procession with cross organized by the UOC

Interfax (25.07.2018) - <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=14385> - The OSCE officials registered all the facts of impeding the Ukrainian Orthodox Church believers in participating in the procession with cross on the Day of the 1030th Anniversary of Russia's Baptism, the UOC Information and Education Department reported on Wednesday.

Archbishop Kliment of Nezhin and Priluki reported the facts of violating believers' rights at his meeting with officials of a special OSCE monitoring commission in Kiev.

The archbishop told the officials about problems experienced by the believers who wanted to come to Kiev for participating in the procession with cross on July 27.

Earlier the UOC representatives reported that Ukrainian officials block the participation of believers in the procession with cross organized by the canonical Church. In various regions of Ukraine they prevent the UOC believers from going to the procession with crossing and put carriers under pressure.

Pro-Russian clerics fomenting tensions ahead of Kievan Rus Baptism anniversary

UNIAN (26.07.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2NMMjBL> - In general, a new Russian narrative is being pushed into Ukraine's agenda - "religious war and the genocide of Orthodox believers."

Following the fake news on Ukraine allegedly trying to "bribe Patriarch Bartholomew," spun by Russian propaganda and its collaborators in Ukraine, certain representatives of

the Moscow Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine decided to add fuel to the fire with yet another fake report.

On Wednesday, representative of the Moscow Patriarchate, Protopriest Nikolai Danylevych, said that Kyiv allegedly intended "to create during celebrations of the Baptism of Kievan Rus a picture of mass support" for the idea of autocephaly.

According to Danylevych, "free shuttle buses are being provided, whole railway cars are being booked, and many people are coming [to Kyiv] who have no relation to the Church," according to Information Resistance, a Ukraine-based OSINT NGO.

Developing his manipulative idea, Danylevich asserts that these attempts "will not help" Kyiv to influence the position of Patriarch Bartholomew, which is strange because they shouldn't – the Constantinople has been positively consistent on the Ukraine issue, thus apparently irritating Moscow.

In general, a new Russian narrative is being pushed into Ukraine's agenda - "religious war and the genocide of Orthodox believers."

Experts note that this is reminiscent of the events of 2014, when the slogan was "to protect Russian-speakers in Ukraine", and today it sounds like "protecting the Orthodox believers in Ukraine."

In this regard, a reasonable question arises: are the Russians launching the initiative only within a new round of information war or, as it was 2014, preparing public opinion for larger-scale provocations and more aggression against Ukraine under the guise of "saviors from the DPP-LPR"?"

In fact, no one wants to save those "Russian-speakers" anymore, most of whom Moscow left to the mercy of fate in Donbas. At the same time, voicing a new call, this time "To our God, our Orthodox faith and our Tsar" Moscow once again expects to recruit new 'useful idiots'," IR wrote.

As Donbas blogger Aleksandr Chernov recently reported, in the occupied part of Donetsk region, self-styled Russian-controlled "authorities" are actively collecting groups of locals to be sent to Kyiv to "support" opponents of Ukrainian Orthodox Church independence from Moscow. These people will participate in "events" organized by the so-called "UOC-MP" on the day of the Baptism of Kievan Rus.

According to information available, it is about deploying a nearly 200-strong group of men.

At the same time, participation is funded, at RUB 20,000 per person. It is noteworthy that the funds are taken from local business.

As UNIAN reported earlier, Ukrainian MP Vadym Novinsky, an ardent supporter of the Moscow Patriarchate from the entourage of disgraced ex-president Viktor Yanukovich, is also contributing to artificially raising the temperature of public tensions ahead of the Baptism celebrations.

In a recent interview with LB.ua he claimed he would personally defend the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra against supporters of Ukrainian church's independence, hinting at possible violence that the Russian propaganda claims will ensue if the Constantinople grants autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Mass baptism of 500 Protestants in the Dnipro river



Ukrainian Evangelical Protestants take part in a mass baptism in the Dnipro River in Kyiv on July 22.

Ukrainian Evangelical Protestant churches held a large-scale baptism in the Dniper river waters of about 500 people to mark the 1030th anniversary of the Christianization of the Kyivan Rus (<https://bit.ly/2LE1fF6>)

All faiths outside the Moscow Patriarchate under fire in Russia-back Donbas 'republics'

KHPG (23.07.2018) - <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1530976690> - At least two churches in the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk people's republic' [DPR] have been forcibly closed, and the premises themselves seized by the Kremlin-backed militants. Judging by new rules on 're-registration', many other religious communities are likely to find themselves outlawed in the near future.

Alexander Moseychuk, Pastor of the New Life Church in Makiyivka [reports](#) that on 6 July, seven 'DPR' representatives, some of them armed, burst into the church and announced that it no longer belongs to them. Father Alexander notes that their Church has helped over 700 people during the four years since the beginning of the war. Around 120 believers can be expected to arrive at the gates of the Church on Sunday and will find it sealed. He asks if this augurs the beginning of persecution.

The Institute for Religious Freedom [IRF] earlier [reported](#) that the Church of the Holy Spirit in Donetsk, which is under the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, was forcibly closed on 10 June by representatives of the so-called 'DPR state property fund'. No explanation was provided.

These may not be the only churches which have already been closed and, effectively, plundered by representatives of the Kremlin-backed 'republic'. Nor are only Christian believers targeted. [As reported](#), the only mosque remaining in occupied Donetsk was closed in late June, after an armed search and interrogation of the Imam and worshippers. The measures taken were ominously reminiscent of those used since 2014

by the Russian occupation regime in Crimea. In Donetsk, the so-called 'DPR law' on countering extremist activities was cited as the grounds. IRF notes that this document, like in Russia, is often used against 'dissident' believers or religious organizations.

The present situation can only get much worse, given a new DPR rule prohibiting the activities of any religious organization which has not undergone 're-registration' by 1 March 2019. This, IRF explains, is in accordance with the so-called 'DPR law' on freedom of faith and religious organizations, passed back in April and in force from May 2018.

Local believers report that churches and religious organization have been told that if they don't 're-register', they face a ban on their religious activities and 'confiscation' of all church property.

This is not just some bureaucratic requirement. In order to obtain re-registration, each religious organization will have to undergo an 'expert assessment'. The latter will likely be used to provide 'DPR' with a pretext for refusing to re-register, and therefore banning, various churches and other religious groups.

Typically, one religious denomination is not required to undergo the above-mentioned procedure, namely the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which will have a simplified 'legalization' process.

Churches under the Moscow Patriarchate have enjoyed special treatment from the beginning, with religious persecution of all other faiths becoming a grave problem from the beginning of the Russian-backed, manned and armed military conflict in April 2014.

A 2015 study by human rights groups entitled '[When God becomes the weapon](#)' identified systematic and widespread religious persecution, and reported that religion was one of the key motivating factors and justification cited for criminal activities by unlawful paramilitary groups within the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics'. A major role had been played by unlawful armed groups who "*under the banners of the Russian Orthodox Army and the Cossack Army, openly manifest their adherence to orthodoxy and have begun a 'crusade' across the Donbas region*".

While conflicts have arisen between differing armed formations, especially in 'LPR', this adherence to a specific form of Orthodoxy and political ideas around this is largely shared by all pro-Russian militants.

According to the 'DPR' '[constitution](#)', issued on May 16, 2014 "*the leading and dominant faith is the Orthodox faith ... as professed by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). The historical heritage and role of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) are recognized and respected, including as a main pillar of the Russian World doctrine*".

The clause was later removed from the 'constitution', but the favouritism has remained. So too has the conviction of many militants from Russia that they are fighting a 'crusade' in Ukraine, in defence of a supposed 'Russian World' which has been endorsed by the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill ([more details here](#)).

The situation in 'LPR' appears to be even worse, with IRF reporting that religious organizations are being forced to 're-register' by the beginning of August 2018.

[As reported](#) in February 2018, several 'laws' [were adopted](#), including one aimed at hunting down and prohibiting so-called extremism in religious or political organizations, as well as in the media. The so-called 'LPR law' on freedom of faith and religious organizations banned all religious groups of five or more people which are not directly linked with one of the 'traditional faiths'. Although it was not specified which faiths could

be considered 'traditional', it was clear that 'LPR' was thus following Russia in [banning](#) the Jehovah's Witnesses ([more details here](#))

There have also been attacks on Evangelical Churches. On 27 March 2018, men in military gear [turned up](#) at a Baptist place of worship in Stakhanov [within occupied 'LPR'], forced their way into the premises and took out everything, including furniture and items used during services.

IRF points out that in [the latest report](#) from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), responsibility for religious persecution in both occupied Donbas and Crimea is placed firmly on the Russian Federation.

Orthodox Church leaders duel over Ukraine, meet with Pope Francis

The Bishop of Rome's support is being called upon by two sides of Eastern Orthodoxy over the creation of a new independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church

National Catholic Register (27.06.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2NOvu9t> — Within the span of a week, Pope Francis met with the spiritual head of Eastern Orthodoxy, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, and the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate of Moscow.

Both Constantinople and Moscow are locked in a battle over the creation of a new and independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which could shift the balance of power in Eastern Orthodoxy and impact the course of Orthodox-Catholic ecumenical dialogue.

Pope Francis' [May 30 statements](#) to the Russian Orthodox delegation, published by the Vatican Press Office, have now broken the papal silence in the game of patriarchal thrones between Constantinople and Moscow. While observers disagree whether or not the Pope took clear sides in the dispute, they say the message to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) was stay out of the conflict.

Metropolitan Hilarion, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Church Relations, has loudly and repeatedly accused the UGCC of supporting the efforts of the Ukrainian government, which is fighting Russian-backed separatists, to create a unified self-governing (or autocephalous) Ukrainian Orthodox Church, independent of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The Ukrainian government has petitioned Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I to create an autocephalous (self-governing) Ukrainian Orthodox Church out of two separate Orthodox Churches currently without canonical recognition in Eastern Orthodoxy, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate, which would also incorporate any Ukrainian Orthodox clergy and communities under the Moscow Patriarchate that would voluntarily join. The government plans to have this Kiev-based Ukrainian Orthodox Church exist alongside the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

Metropolitan Hilarion has denounced Constantinople's possible issuance of a *tomos*, a formal recognition of a unified, autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church, as legitimizing "[Ukrainian schismatics](#)." Metropolitan Hilarion also has condemned the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church repeatedly for allegedly supporting this plan. In [an interview with Interfax](#), a Russian news agency, Patriarch Kirill's spokesman alleged the UGCC was

plotting to bring the Ukrainian Orthodox, through this new Ukrainian Orthodox Church, into the “Unia” — a term referring to the Eastern Catholic Churches, which have communion with the Bishop of Rome, that is regarded as perjorative by those Catholic Churches.

The Pope’s Remarks

Pope Francis appeared to address those charges directly in his remarks to Metropolitan Hilarion at the Vatican, saying that “the Catholic Church will never allow an attitude of division to arise from her people.”

“We will never allow ourselves to do this; I do not want it,” he said. “In Moscow — in Russia — there is only one Patriarchate: yours. We will not have another one.”

The Holy Father added, “When some Catholic faithful, be they laypeople, priests or bishops, raise the banner of Uniatism, which does not work anymore, and is over, then it causes me pain. The Churches that are united in Rome must be respected, but Uniatism as a path of unity is not valid today.”

The Pope stated that “the Catholic Churches must not get involved in internal matters of the Russian Orthodox Church, nor in political issues. This is my attitude and the attitude of the Holy See today. And those who meddle do not obey the Holy See.”

Instead, the Holy Father emphasized the need for ecumenical unity to begin through “journeying” together “walking in love, in prayer,” instead of waiting for doctrinal agreement first.

“We must continue to study theology, to clarify the points, but in the meantime, let us walk together,” he said. Francis said “I found a brother” in Patriarch Kirill, and he added that he prayed for Catholic-Orthodox unity every morning before a relic of St. Seraphim of Sarov.

Russian media quickly seized upon Pope Francis’ words as both a rebuke to Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the UGCC in Kiev, and the Ukrainian government. TASS Russian news agency, for example, [reported](#) that Pope Francis spoke “in favor of unity of the Russian Orthodox Church in the wake of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko’s plans to institute an independent local [national] Ukrainian Orthodox Church.”

What’s at Stake

But Anatoliy Babynskiy, a fellow of the Institute of Religion and Society at the Ukrainian Catholic University of Lviv, told the Register that a close reading of Pope Francis’ words shows the Holy Father steering clear of a “game of thrones” involving Constantinople, Moscow and Kiev.

Many analysts, including Babynskiy, contend that the Russian Orthodox are poised to see a serious loss of membership.

In Ukraine, a country of 45 million people, approximately 70% identify as Orthodox. A majority of Ukrainian Orthodox have flocked to the non-canonical churches, and given the ongoing Russian-backed fighting in the country, a large contingent of Orthodox bishops, clergy and congregations are expected to leave the Moscow Patriarchate to join the new Ukrainian Orthodox Church once Bartholomew I gives his formal recognition.

Babynskyi said the move will create a 15th member of the Eastern Orthodox communion and make the new independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church one of the biggest churches in Eastern Orthodoxy. The Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine would be reduced to 10%-15% of Ukraine's population, down from 20%-25%, and the Ecumenical Patriarch, whose traditional leadership of global Orthodoxy has been challenged by Patriarch Kirill, is poised to gain a new ally.

Babynskyi pointed out that Pope Francis, who is close with Patriarch Bartholomew, said nothing about Ukraine, denying Metropolitan Hilarion the active support he came looking for. And the Catholic Church has not recognized the Russian annexation of Crimea, where those Catholic congregations remain part of their Ukrainian episcopal jurisdictions.

Ukrainian Catholics' Concerns

Pope Francis has drawn some criticism from Ukrainian Catholics for using the term "uniatism" — a method of proselytism once used to restore portions of Eastern Orthodox Churches to communion with Rome.

"The Moscow Patriarchate constantly accuses our Church of participating in uniatism, and it is a calumny," said Father Andriy Chirovsky, a Ukrainian Greek Catholic priest and the founder and first director of the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies in Toronto.

Father Chirovsky told the Register both the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches have rejected "uniatism" in the [1993 Balamand declaration](#). But he said the Russian Orthodox do not use the term theologically, but pejoratively, to delegitimize and isolate the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

He stressed that the Ukrainian Greek Catholics support the pastoral healing of the divisions between Ukrainian Orthodox. But he said they are also wary of too close an alliance between the church and state, or heresies that elevate nationalism over the Gospel — concerns that they believe are alleviated by communion with the Bishop of Rome, the successor of St. Peter the Apostle.

Father Cyril Hovorun, acting director of the Huffington Ecumenical Institute at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, who also has represented the Russian Orthodox Church in ecumenical dialogues, told the Register that the Ukrainian Greek Catholics have been unfairly blamed by the Moscow Patriarchate for a pastoral problem created by its closeness to the Russian government and silence on the Russian-backed war in Ukraine.

Father Hovorun said the Russian Church and Russian government's concerns about retaining control of the Orthodox Church in Kiev go beyond historical ties. The Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine is also seen by the Russian government as the remaining Russian institution that can exert influence on Ukrainian society. Both the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church, he said, are putting significant pressure on Bartholomew I to abandon his plans to recognize an autocephalous Ukrainian Church.

"The Russian Church and the Russian government, I think, have hopes that through the Pope they could exercise pressure on Bartholomew to stop this process," he said.

Competing Claims

The visits of the Orthodox leaders in Rome come amid Patriarch Bartholomew's and Metropolitan Hilarion's intense, in-person lobbying of the heads of the other 14 Eastern Orthodox churches and their synods.

Bartholomew is advancing the case for recognizing a self-governing Ukrainian Church among the Orthodox Churches, while the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian government oppose the change. Kiev is considered the spiritual birthplace of the Russian Church since 988, when Vladimir I and the Kievan Rus embraced Christianity in a mass baptism. While the ecumenical patriarch considers Constantinople to be the mother church of Kiev, the Moscow Patriarchate claims it has a better claim for primacy over the region, arguing jurisdiction over Ukraine was transferred from Constantinople in 1686.

The two non-canonical Orthodox Churches in Ukraine that would unite into a unified, national Orthodox church (and be joined by some Orthodox bishops, priests and communities currently under the Moscow Patriarchate) are on the verge of fulfilling a plan that began 25 years ago after the fall of the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church began in 1921, after Ukraine first gained independence from Russian rule, while the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate formed in 1992 after splitting with the Russian Orthodox Church. Since the Russian annexation of Ukrainian territory in 2014, [support for the Kyivan Patriarchate has increased](#), with nearly 25% of Ukrainian Orthodox claiming membership, according to the Ruzumkov Center.

Aristotle Papanikolaou, a co-founding director of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University, told the Register that Patriarch Bartholomew would not simply issue the equivalent of a "papal decree" and recognize a new autocephalous Ukrainian Church. Eastern Orthodoxy requires the ecumenical patriarch to have a certain consensus of the currently 14 autocephalous Orthodox Churches in order to create the new autocephalous Ukrainian Church.

"He can act unilaterally, but what will ensue is a debate whether he can act unilaterally, and then there is a question of which of the other Churches will recognize that act," he said.

Papanikolaou said he did not read Pope Francis' statements as taking sides between Moscow and Constantinople, but rather aimed at the Ukrainian Greek Catholics to stay out of the conflict.

Rome's Careful Stance

Father Ronald Roberson, the associate director of the [Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs](#) at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told the Register that Pope Francis seemed to mainly reiterate the Vatican's careful stance toward the Russian Orthodox Church. Father Roberson pointed out that when the Vatican re-established Latin Church dioceses in Russia, it did so in a way that avoided treading on the Russian Orthodox Church's spiritual territory in Russia.

The formation of an official Ukrainian Orthodox Church is "a really delicate situation," according to Father Roberson. Some have even speculated the decision could lead to a serious rift or schism in Eastern Orthodoxy.

Pope Francis could be deeply concerned the Catholic Church does not get blamed as a spoiler. Father Roberson said if Constantinople recognizes an autocephalous church in Ukraine, "Moscow's reaction is going to be very, very strong."

He said, "It's going to be treacherous waters, and Catholics are going to have to tread very, very lightly."

Eastern Orthodox Churches

Each of these autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Churches are all recognized by the other and considered equal to each other. But Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I is held to be "first among equals."

Church of Constantinople (or Ecumenical Patriarchate), led by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa, led by Patriarch Theodore II

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East, led by Patriarch John X

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, led by Theophilus III

Russian Orthodox Church, led by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia

Serbian Orthodox Church, led by Patriarch Irinej

Bulgarian Orthodox Church, led by Patriarch Neophyte of all Bulgaria

Romanian Orthodox Church, led by Patriarch Daniel

Georgian Orthodox Church, led by Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia

Church of Greece, led by Ieronymos II, archbishop of Athens and all Greece

Church of Cyprus, led by Chrysostomos II, archbishop of Nova Justiniana and all Cyprus

Orthodox Church of Albania, led by Archbishop Anastasios of Albania

Orthodox Church of the Czech lands and Slovakia, led by Archbishop Rastislav of Prešov

Orthodox Church of Poland, led by Metropolitan Sawa of Warsaw and all Poland.

The Orthodox Church in America has partial recognition of the autocephaly granted by the Russian Orthodox Church, but lacks full recognition by most Eastern Orthodox Churches, since its autocephalous status lacks confirmation by the ecumenical patriarch.

Impact on Catholics in Ukraine

Father Chirovsky believed Patriarch Bartholomew may not wait for consensus among the Orthodox Churches to resolve the canonical limbo for Ukrainian Orthodox, but go ahead anyway, since "he has been known to act alone [establishing autocephalous churches] in Estonia and Bulgaria, for example."

If the ecumenical patriarch goes through with this plan, the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church will effectively remove the Moscow Patriarchate's claims to be the original Church of the Kievan Rus, but also the "Third Rome" deserving the leadership

mantle of the Orthodox world over “New Rome” Constantinople. He said the Russian Orthodox have claimed Constantinople fell away from true Orthodoxy when it temporarily re-established communion with the Bishop of Rome at the Council of Florence in 1438 and that God punished them with the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

But the establishment of this autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church could also further other developments for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, which also sees Constantinople as its mother church. Father Chirovsky speculated a new Ukrainian Orthodox Church, with a Kievan-based patriarchate, could signal its willingness to Constantinople to allow the UGCC to establish formally its own patriarchate in Kiev. The Vatican has refused to recognize formally a Ukrainian Greek Catholic patriarchate in Kiev, without the consent of Constantinople, since 2003.

Another promising possibility, Father Chirovsky said, would be the revival of Ukrainian Catholic-Orthodox theological discussions about whether the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church could have both communion with Rome and communion with Constantinople at the same time. Both the Vatican and Ecumenical Patriarchate have encouraged the exploration of this possibility since the late 1990s.

The Russian Orthodox Church has not spoken out against the Russian Federation fighting in Ukraine or the forcible annexation of Crimea, which led to 1.5 million persons displaced and more than 10,000 dead.

Autocephaly for the Ukraine Orthodox Patriarchy a step closer?

Odessablog (17.04.2018) - <https://bit.ly/1Xqs2k2> - (...) It has come to light that following Easter, President Poroshenko made a personal appeal to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (and the Synod) during a seven hour meeting to free the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarch from its chains to that of the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarch.

Naturally the UOC KP is absolutely unanimous in its support for autocephaly, and as is to be expected, the ROC MP is very much against.

President Poroshenko it is claimed, has stated that he hopes that the “local autocephalous church in Ukraine may appear before the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus” – namely this year.

A reader will recognise no doubt that following what has been a complete policy disaster by The Kremlin when it comes to keeping Ukraine in its orbit, that it has in fact very few effective political, economic, or social levers and influence channels with which to attempt to control or influence the Ukrainian constituency, or “political Kyiv”. The Church however remains one such avenue for so long as the Kyiv Patriarchy is perceived to be what is in effect subservient to the Moscow Patriarchy.

It is not only a matter of the Kremlin infiltration and any pre-existing allegiances of the clergy, nor any such national security issues that may therefore be relevant within the Moscow Patriarchy. Undoubtedly The Kremlin would not be particularly keen to see the Kyiv Patriarchy officially be set free from the shadow of Moscow as it would be perceived as far more than a symbolic or bureaucratic exercise by the faithful.

Nor is it simply a matter of perception or acceptance by the Orthodox followers, or a battle to shepherd those tens of millions of Ukrainian souls toward godly enlightenment – Kremlin leaning war-clerics with subversive holy hand grenades aside.

There is the matter of some serious earthy riches too. Thousands of churches, thousands of very valuable religious icons, church income, church expenditures, church finances – and its ability to raise finance, tens of thousands of loyal clergy *etc.*

Naturally should autocephaly be granted, that will not mean the end of the ROC MP in Ukraine. A newly attained autocephaly for the UOC KP does not turn it into a State church at the expense of another Orthodox schism – at least not immediately and not under State direction. The believers will undoubtedly remain free to choose whether their souls are tendered by the UOC KP or ROC MP. It is they that will ultimately remain or migrate.

The issue of the earthly treasures however, may be a little more difficult to resolve. How to deal with a congregation, or clergy, or both that move across, but with a church (as in the building) and its inventory belonging to a different patriarchy? Are ungodly legal battles awaiting over earthly riches? What will happen to antiques and ancient icons if autocephaly is to occur and the Moscow Patriarchy decides to bring all that can be moved across the border to be moved prior to such a decision?

While the Kingdom of God may bring enlightenment and serenity (or not), the kingdoms of men (and a particularly irked Kremlin/Moscow Patriarchy) is far less likely to be forgiving or tolerant – not that pandering to The Kremlin has ever done Ukraine any good, so to do so now would be complete folly.

All very interesting, and perhaps not entirely unsurprising this seven hour meeting between Head of State and Head of Church occurs now that the electioneering for the office of president in 2019 has openly, albeit unofficially, started.

The question is whether Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (and the Synod) will bestow gifts of autocephaly to the UOC KP in a timely electoral manner for President Poroshenko.

A reader will have noted that President Poroshenko, whatever his pluses and minuses, is not especially good at predicting timelines when it involves external actors. He was really some way off with his predictions for the introduction of the Schengen Visa-free (albeit it did indeed arrive eventually), and he seems extremely ambitious with regard to EU membership timelines too.

Nevertheless, this appeal is something to watch that will have repercussions across the Ukrainian constituency should it come to pass. It will also be interesting, should it come to pass prior to Verkhovna Rada elections in October 2019, as to which clergyman a politician will seek to recruit for their reelection campaign (and their Facebook and Instagram accounts will be replete with photographs of politicians with their “chosen” clergy as those elections draw near).

President and the Ukrainian churches officially ask Ecumenical Patriarch to grant the Tomos of autocephaly

Religious Information Service of Ukraine (17.04.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2qFkNx3> - Today, the President of Ukraine met with the heads of all parliamentary factions to discuss the

church-state question. Petro Poroshenko said that he had decided to ask the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to grant the Tomos of autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The president asked that parliamentarians supported his request.



Poroshenko said that he had already handed over the appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarch and hopes that Constantinople will make a positive decision on the Ukrainian question at the nearest Council

"I believe this decision will be made to the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus-Ukraine," he said. Ukraine will celebrate the anniversary this summer.

Petro Poroshenko also said that all the bishop of the Kyivan Patriarchate had signed a similar appeal to Patriarch Bartholomew. Representatives of other churches supported this idea.

"I met with the Metropolitan of the UAOC Makariy and he informed me that the Hierarchical Council of the UAOC today also supported the appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarch and the President," he said.

The President also stressed that the formation of a new United Local Orthodox Church in Ukraine is a historical event for Ukraine.

"Ukraine, as an independent state, is not just entitled but obliged to create such a Church and demonstrate the same unity regarding this issue, as all the Churches have shown," said Poroshenko.

He also noted that the United Local Orthodox Church would not become a state Church.

Ukrainian secret service personnel report Russian use of church for aggression

S.B.U. investigates anti-Ukrainian activity by representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate in the Donbass

Russia Religion News (01.04.2018) –

<https://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/180330b.html> - In the Donbass, Russia actively uses priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow patriarchate (UPTsMP) in activity directed against Ukraine.

Over the course of four years of war in the Donbass, religious and liturgical facilities of the UPTs have been used by special services of the Russian federation for conducting intelligence operations and representatives of the clergy of this confession participate in terrorist activity and they support the militants.

This was described by colonels of the S.B.U. Valery Udovichenko and Yulia Laputina during a round table "Russian aggression against Ukraine: historical parallels and contemporary dimension," the news agency Vchasno reports.

The representatives of the Service of Security of Ukraine (S.B.U.) brought examples of how bishops of the UPTsMP in the Donbass voluntarily became servants of the Kremlin regime.

Thus, in 2014, in Donetsk oblast, monks of the Holy Dormition Sviatogorsk lavra placed on the back side of an icon of the Mother of God a new prayer of pro-Russian contents and distributed in during the Pascha holidays.

Also in 2014 Igor Girkin, one of the leaders of the so-called D.P.R., along with other militants, took refuge in one of the churches of the UPTsMP in Slaviansk, in which a terrorist also created his own battalion and blessed weapons.

"In effect the churches of the UPTsMP became centers on which all relied in their activity against Ukraine," Valery Udovichenko emphasized.

Now the S.B.U. is conducting an investigation of the activity of the UPTsMP throughout the territory of Ukraine.

"The investigation is being conducted by means of academic expert analyses, identification of documents, and testimony of people who saw or were participants of events conducted by the UPTsMP," Colonel Yulia Laputina explained. Questioning of witnesses and a collection of evidence were conducted and church literature was studied to find the existence of manipulative texts."

Julia emphasized that it was in the church sphere that the Russian invasion into Crimea and the Donbass was preceded by a long period of covert aggression and the spread of manipulative technology. (tr. by PDS, posted 31 March 2018)
