STUDIES AND ARTICLES

Eastern European Geopolitics and Ecclesial Autocephaly for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church: A Hard Way for Ukraine

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis of the complex interdependencies between the nature of regional conflicts, broader geopolitical projections and their implications for religious institutions in Ukraine, especially for the majority church in the country, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. After a general introduction, the first part analyzes certain Ukrainian and broader Eastern European geopolitical variables with

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[1] For a brief orientation on the term koinonia and its theological implications see: *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Ecumenical Perspectives on the 1991 Canberra Statement on Unity*, a study document requested by the Joint Working Group, eds. Günther GASSMANN and John A. RODANO, *Faith and Order Paper* No. 163 (Geneva:

the scope to demonstrate coercive mechanisms aimed to projecting power at regional levels. The first chapter of part I presents some general geopolitical facts related with the Ukrainian conflict. The second chapter deals with more specific geopolitical facts. It presents two examples of how big global actors play with geopolitical complexities.

The third chapter presents a recent incident between Russia and Ukraine, which shows that the struggle for controlling the region of the Black Sea is ongoing. The second part deals with the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its immediate ecclesial and geopolitical implications. The first chapter is aimed to provide evidence of interest for the problems we deal with in this article. The second chapter proves the important place and role played by religion in Ukraine. The third chapter explains the "Ukrainian issue" from an ecclesial perspective. The fourth chapter offers a short historical overview of six facts which determine the "Ukrainian issue" today. The fifth chapter presents the recent events related to the granting of autocephaly to the newly established Ukrainian Orthodox Church which unites together two already existing Orthodox Churches in Ukraine (the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kiev Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autonomous Orthodox Church.) Chapter six presents and analyzes the first reactions of some Orthodox Churches to this decision. This article is concluded with some remarks.

Keywords:
Ukrainian issue; Ukrainian Orthodox Church; Ukraine; Black Sea; Geopolitics; Autocephaly; world Orthodoxy; Eastern Orthodox Churches

Introduction

Geopolitical disputes often lead to forced permutations of identity, culture and religion. The influence of political games transposed into military aggressions often generates perishable frontiers, exposing the soft-power mechanisms of society and church to politicization risks. Consequently, these variables with geopolitical implications risk to negatively affect societal heritage values which in the past led to the foundation of the national state. In exchange for tolerance promoted by the Christian churches, political ambition and the force of offensive realism in international relations increased identity cleavages, deepening ethnic and cultural polarization.

This article presents an analysis of the complex interdependencies between the nature of regional conflicts, broader geopolitical projections and their implications for the religious institutions in Ukraine, especially

for the majority church in this country, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. One of the reasons we have chosen to write about this subject is the interdisciplinary nature of regional disputes, conjugating ecclesiastical knowledge with global politics. In this sense, each of the authors contributed to this research, focusing on the part in which he is specialized: geopolitics and religious-ecclesial life. One of us who worked on the chapters about geopolitics focused his research on the last years of the Black Sea region and its geopolitical implications. Another colleague wrote the part on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its autocephaly, worked for justice and peace in Ukraine with the Ukrainian Churches, especially with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate. He visited Ukraine several times and some of his statements made in this article are based on his direct experience in the country.

Such research cooperation between a specialist in international affairs and a church historian is in many ways natural because the reality shows us that these two sides of our research are interrelated: geopolitics often lead to identity formation or, in certain situations, to forced permutations of an already existing identity. The main purpose of this research is to understand constituents that may underlie relations of influence patterns, unclear religious reciprocity, coercive geopolitical games, and people's semantic perceptions over the issue of the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

We took the case of Ukraine, a Central/Eastern European country and former Soviet Union republic which faces an armed conflict, after the so-called "Euromaidan Revolution" which started in February 2014 in Kiev and led to the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and to an armed conflict in the Eastern part of the country. This armed conflict in the heart of Eastern Europe draws the attention of all sorts of analysts, as this conflict has a multitude of dimensions: geopolitical, historical, cultural, religious etc.

This study is divided into two parts. The first part deals with geopolitics mainly related with Ukraine and Eastern-Europe. The first chapter of this part presents some general geopolitical facts related with the Ukrainian conflict. Historical past determines many aspects of the complex relationship between Russia and Ukraine. The two countries have a lot in common: their history overlaps in many ways; they both speak Slavonic languages which are in fact very similar and Ukraine has a large Russian minority; both are majority Orthodox countries; both went through a

common communist period being part of the Soviet Union. After Ukraine declared its independence on July 16th 1990, it still depended almost entirely on Russia and did so until recently, being under Russian influence. Therefore, there is a long history of Russian oppression in Ukraine. This chapter presents just some of them. The second chapter of the first part deals with more specific geopolitical facts. It presents two examples of how big global actors play with geopolitical complexities. The first example is a secret note mailed to British Prime-Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1979 as preparation for the meeting with the German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. It reveals the complex geopolitics related with the Black Sea, the neighbouring countries and some of the global military and economic powers. The second example, based on Bill Clinton`s Digital Library, leaked the perpetual ambition of Russia to remain a big player, both in Europe and beyond. The third chapter presents and analyses a recent incident, namely the so-called "Kerch Strait incident" which reveals that the geopolitical struggles between Ukraine and Russia for controlling the Black Sea area is far from an end. It also emphasizes the potential of the possibly being another armed conflict between the two states.

The second part of this article deals with the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its immediate ecclesial and geopolitical implications. The first two chapters are aimed to provide evidence of the interest for the problems we deal with in this article. The evidence provided in the first chapter is a statistic which shows the high online interest for the work "tomos," namely the document issued by the Ecumenical Patriarchate to acknowledge the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The second chapter proves the high interest for religiosity in Ukraine. A table provides statistics for East and West Ukraine and analyses the different figures provided. The third chapter explains the "Ukrainian issue" from an ecclesial perspective. Until recently, there were three competitive Orthodox Churches in Ukraine, each of them claiming to be *the* Orthodox Church in Ukraine. It also explains briefly how the community of global Orthodoxy works and the principals on how autocephaly is granted. The fourth chapter offers a short historical overview of six facts which determine the "Ukrainian issue" today. These facts are: (1) Kiev is, historically speaking, the centre of Russian Orthodoxy; (2) the complex relationships between Constantinople and Moscow have a long history, going back to 1439; (3) since 1453 the Ecumenical Patriarchate has no state to support it, while the

Moscow Patriarchate had, with the exception of the communist period, a strong state to support it; (4) key historical events related with the Ukrainian issue is interpreted quite different by Constantinople and Moscow; (5) the struggle of Ukrainians for an autocephalous church has its own history; (6) The Moscow Patriarchate considers the former territory of the Soviet Union as being its canonical territory.

The fifth chapter presents the recent events which led to the granting of autocephaly to the newly established Ukrainian Orthodox Church by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the first consequences of this decision from an ecclesial and geopolitical perspective. The new Orthodox Church is in fact the result of the merging between The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, The Kievan Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autonomous Orthodox Church, two non-canonical Orthodox bodies already existing in Ukraine.

A final remark which is absolutely necessary for the correct understanding of this study, as there are on-going developments on the "Ukrainian issue": we concluded it by mid-march 2019.

I. Ukrainian and East-European Geopolitics

I.1. Some (geo)political facts related with the Ukrainian conflict

The existence of "frozen conflicts" in the Wider Black Sea Area's north-eastern arc maintained for a long period, being the geopolitical buffer zone in dispute between the West and Russia. As a result, the situation of Ukrainian Orthodoxy appears to be likened to that of a collateral victim, and simultaneously as a mediator both in Ukrainian society and in relation to Russia. Russia's disputes with Ukraine have as a result several fonts of influence, interconnected with each other: the historical argument, the linguistic pattern, the attitude towards the elites, the relationship with minorities, and the exploitation of internal cleavages. From a historical perspective, Moscow's relationship with Kiev has always been a dominant one. Ukraine's attempts to get out of the Kremlin's influence have led to intimidation actions, russification processes in certain regions, pressure on elites and political opponents. Russia was successful in imposing a strategic communication pattern on Ukraine by using tools of influence, including linguistic proximity and common Christian confession.

The Russian language was promoted by soviets as superior to the Ukrainian language, which was associated with lower social status[1]. The linguistic similarities create a major exposure of the Ukrainians to messages coming from the Russian media, as many citizens of Ukraine are native speakers of Russian.

In the 1920s, a significant part of the Ukrainian elite was exterminated by shooting or sent with "one way tickets" to labour camps (gulags)[2]. The loss of the Ukrainian elite was later called the "Shattered Renaissance"[3]. This lengthy process provided a strong premise for ideological, economical, and political interdependence. As a result, both Russia and Ukraine share close cultural, ideological, and economic ties, but, the effect of artificial russification has not reached the expected impact with the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine. It started to deteriorate in 2012, and during the period of 2012 to 2015, the number of those holding very positive or positive opinions about Russians decreased from 80% to 30%.[4] By 2017, only 34% of Ukrainians had a positive attitude towards Russians[5].

I.2. A broader geopolitical perspective

We would like to present here two facts. The first one is an internal secret note addressed to Mrs. Margaret Thatcher on May 5, 1979, in the preparation of her meeting with the German Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. The note drew attention to the importance of strategic balancing in the Black Sea through Turkey's economic support and keeping NATO's control over the Bosporus straits and Dardanelles. British strategies highlighted the fact that for the Soviet Union the only point of access to the Mediterranean is the two straits, and a change in this regard will raise

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[1] Iryna SOLONENKO and Anastasiia GRYNKO, *Freedom of Expression in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine. External Aggression, Internal Challenges,* 2017, p. 6. For the entire text, see PEN-International. http://pen-international.org/app/uploads/archive/2017/09/PEN-International-Ukraine-Report.pdf

[2] See *Ukraine's Executed Renaissance and a Kickstarter for One of Its Modern Successors*. Euromaidan Press (blog). March 3, 2016. http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/03/04/ukraines-executed-renaissance-and-a-kickstarter-for-one-of-its-modern-successors/

[3] *'Executed Renaissance': Today 70 Years of Beginning of Extermination of Ukrainian Elite."* 2018. FrontNews. https://frontnews.eu/news/en/16406.

[4] See https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45877584

[5] See http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=550&page=1

problems for Europe's stability. Equally, a potential loss of NATO support from Turkey would suggest a usable aggressiveness of the Soviet Union against Greece.[6]

The second fact is related with the time of Bill Clinton's presidency. President Bill Clinton's Digital Library offers access to a series of declassified documents during his term in office, which are directly attributed to foreign policy actions of that time. Certain dialogues between former Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton are grounded in Russia's interest for Europe, reflecting ideas advanced by the Russian President on 19 November 1999. During the Russian-American bilateral meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, the two leaders have a relevant dialogue:

> "**President Yeltsin**: Bill, Bill. I got your note. It went into all these things in incredible detail. I read it and I was satisfied. I've not yet ceased to believe in you.
>
> I ask you one thing. Just give Europe to Russia. The U.S. is not in Europe. Europe should be the business of Europeans. Russia is half European and half Asian.
>
> **The President**: So, you want Asia too?
>
> **President Yeltsin**: Sure, sure, Bill. Eventually, we will have to agree on all of this.
>
> **The President**: I don't think the Europeans would like this very much.
>
> **President Yeltsin**: Not all. But I am European. I live in Moscow. Moscow is in Europe and I like it. You can take all the other states and provide security to them. I will take Europe and provide them security. Well, not I. Russia will"[7].

The series of historical events shows that Russia has always had a geostrategic interest towards Europe and the active measures applied aimed at regaining the sphere of influence lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The American and British diplomatic dialogue, as well as analytical markers, have been indicating for four decades a conflict symptom in the European Eastern neighbourhood, anticipating a long-

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[6] See http://fc95d419f4478b3b6e5f-3f71d0fe2b653c4f00f32175760e96e7.r87.cf1.rackcdn.com/D19E236B19944300801205EC89E5B656.pdf 95: 5.

[7] See https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57569, 562.

term Russian approach to increasing influence in the Black Sea. On the other hand, the remarks of President Yeltsin reveal the historical regional interests and Russia's attitude towards its western neighbours.

I.3. Political substitutes and regional geopolitical games

On 25th November 2018 the so-called "Kerch Strait incident" took place: the Russian Federal Security Service coast guard captured three Ukrainian Navy vessels attempting to pass from the Black Sea into the Sea of Azov. For those analysing security issues in the Wider Black Sea Area, this incident was predictable. In fact, the dilemma was not focused on the possibility of interruption of navigation in the Kerch Strait, located between the continental Russia and Crimea, but when this "buffer" will take place?

The naval crisis in the Kerch Strait exposes the ambiguous legal status of the Crimea: *de jure* in Ukraine, *de facto* in Russia. If the parties do not have the capacity to accommodate transient solutions, the Black Sea may be affected by more intense conflicting relations. At the same time, Russia's actions are part of a wider strategy to gain control over the Azov Sea and to block Ukrainian maritime traffic through the Kerch Strait.

Prior to the incident of Russian and Ukrainian warships, as early as February 2018, the Ukrainian media reported an intensification of Russian inspections of cargo ships (irrespective of their origin) navigating to the largest Ukrainian ports Mariopol and Berdyansk - both major export facilities for steel and grain. Hundreds of ships were detained by the Russian authorities, some up to a week, for no apparent reason. The hindering of maritime transport in Mariupol suggested the identification of alternative rail routes to Ukrainian ports in Odessa and Iujne, but at much higher costs.

Russia has applied its communication strategy very agilely, has progressively multiplied maritime barriers by avoiding the attention of international media; then presented the maritime incident as a provocation of Kiev, announcing that three Ukrainian ships were trying to enter the Russian territorial waters, and during that time a number of Western media trusts took over only the Russian version of the event. One cannot rule out the possibility that President Poroshenko had a direct interest in provoking and simulating an emergency crisis for this year's presidential

elections in Ukraine; but if this hypothesis were to be confirmed, then President Poroshenko was not able to calculate the risks associated with this crisis. On the other hand, President Poroshenko's interest in blocking the domestic political effort of his counter-candidates would be motivated by his small electoral score of only 8.3%, being only on the 5th position in the preferences of the voters at that time.

The reality of the evolutions between the two sides is also very different; Russia had deprived Ukraine of its internal waters, Russian border ships attacked three Ukrainian military vessels, culminating in their seizure, wounding six sailors and arresting 24 other crew members.

The use of the Kerch Strait and the Azov Sea is governed by a bilateral treaty between Russia and Ukraine that remains in place. The document stipulates that the Azov Sea and Kerch Strait are shared territorial waters of the Russian Federation and Ukraine, but in practice the Kremlin claims predominant maritime control[8].

Ukrainian officials claim that the aggression occurred in the more remote international waters south of Kerch, on the narrow corridor between the Crimean Peninsula (annexed by Moscow in 2014) and mainland Russia. In this area, the Kremlin built a bridge for which it paid about 4 billion dollars, thus linking the mainland Russia to the Crimea.

Needless to say, that the Kiev authorities are concerned by the manoeuvres of Russia. Since Ukraine is surrounded by Russian military forces, it can be attacked from any point of the compass – from north to Kharkov, in the south from Crimea, by western occupation troops in Transnistria, or directly from the east.

II. The recent proclamation of the Autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its immediate ecclesial and geopolitical implications

II.1. A perception of the online interest on Ukrainian Orthodox Church Autocephaly

This chapter is aimed to emphasize the interest concerning the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Autocephaly. Based on data aggregation obtained with

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[8] See http://kremlin.ru/supplement/1795

several Google analytical tools, we classified the level of interest and certain semantic association of users in predominantly Orthodox countries for the subject of Autocephaly in Ukraine.

The *"Tomos"* keyword, associated with the *Eastern Orthodox Church*, has reached the maximum of Google searches between January 6 and 12, 2019. Google Trends indicates that the most commonly used keywords by online searchers were *"autocephaly"* with 100% in Georgia, 88% in Ukraine, 54% in Belarus, 35% in Russia and 30% in Azerbaijan.

Data obtained through the open source investigation are hypothesized due to Georgia's political trauma, following the Russian war of 2008, and it is more likely that the country is empathizing with Ukraine's regional political problems and identifies itself much more with the idea of foreign policy independence and non-alignment to Moscow. Predominantly in the Eastern European and Baltic areas, the association of perception and users' interest turned to the idea of *religious institutional autonomy*, while the belief of transformation through association with the key word *"church building"* was found in interest 100% among Google users in Poland, 92% in Serbia and 76% in the US. The symbol of *institutional inheritance*, we tend to believe that belongs to the key-word *"patriarchate"* which, linked together with the word *"Tomos"*, was found to be associated in the Balkans with 100% among Montenegrin users, 38% in Cyprus, 27% in Serbia and 23% in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
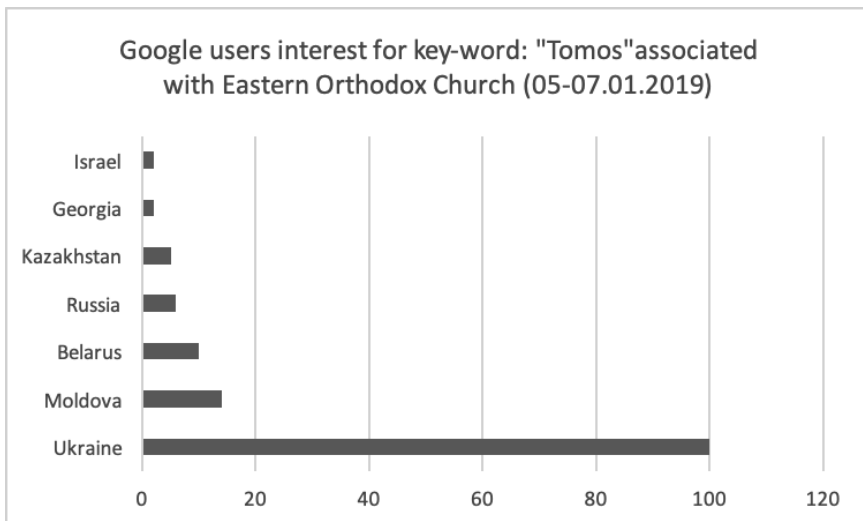
Google users interest for key-word: "Tomos" associated with Eastern Orthodox Church (05-07.01.2019)

A poll conducted by the Razumkov Center in February 2019, shows that while 71% of respondents do not trust the President of Ukraine, 67% of respondents trust voluntary organizations, 62% trust the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 61% trust the State Emergency Service, and the same amount declares their trust in the church. In such circumstances, the church becomes a substitute for internal political stakes, through the desperate need for a brand association of Ukrainian leadership with the religious institution[9].

II.2. Place and role of religion in Ukraine

Another national survey conducted in March 2018 by the same institute with the support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Office in Ukraine monitored the role and place of religion in Ukraine. Thus, 71% of citizens believe that the role of religion is to "strengthen people's morality and spirituality" (most often in the West (90%), least often – in the East (58%)); 64% see it as "an important way to revive national identity and culture" (most often in the West of the country (82%), least often – in the East (48%)), 52% – as "an element of a democratic society" (most often in the West (70%), least often – in the East (40%).

Place and role of religion in Ukraine (March 2018)		
	Western Ukraine respondents	Eastern Ukraine respondents
Strengthen people's morality and spirituality	90%	58%
An important way to revive national identity and culture	82%	48%
An element of a democratic society	70%	40%
Church is trustworthy	83%	48%
Level of religiousness	91%	63%

Although the church is seen as a key actor within the Ukrainian state, there are differences of perception among the population in the east and west of the country.

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[9] See https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/poll-ukrainians-trust-volunteers-army-rescuers-church-the-most.html

The study reveals that the church is more credible among the social-political institutions in Ukraine. Over the last eight years, the church's confidence rate has fallen from 73% to 60%, with a lower religiosity rate of 63% in eastern Ukraine, compared to the western part of the country, where we find orthodox parishioners in a percentage of 91%. The South and East of Ukraine are characterized by inconsistent religious self-identification, which indicates some difficulty in appreciating the collective consciousness of the regions. The eastern part of Ukraine considers that the moral standard of the Church is dropping.

Only 49% of respondents believe that Church has a positive role in modern Ukrainian society[10].

Historical and religious determinism complement each other and create regional patterns that have dramatically influenced fluid boundaries. Thus, we find differences in behaviour and values from one region to another within a state, which is the cumulative result of historical and cultural processes. Eastern and Western Ukraine are found somewhat in different horizons of perception and space values. Therefore, we can add that, by expressing itself, regional cultures and history produce distinct social realities; cultures produce and sustain social organizations, from families to nations.

According to Ilie Bădescu and Dan Dungaciu, the "frontier pheno-menon" expresses "the totality of the processes through which there is a historical expansion, be it a nation, or a civilization, or a religion or ide-ology, and ultimately an empire"[11]. By appealing to the perception that the authors give to the frontier phenomenon we can claim that religions, ideologies, civilizations and cultures have borders.

From a different view, assessing the prerequisites for inter-church conflict, Ukrainians note most often that "conflicts between Churches are purely political" – this is the opinion of 31% of Ukrainian respondents (although this percentage is notably smaller than in 2017, when 37% of respondents thought so); such factor as divergences over assets and properties, as well as conflicts caused by church hierarchs craving power, took second and third place (28% and 25%, respectively). The level of

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[10] See http://razumkov.org.ua/en/sociology/press-releases/international-conference-rec-onciliation-strategies-the-role-of-churches-in-ukraine The Society's Expectations of Church and Interchurch Relations (public opinion survey)

[11] Ilie BĂDESCU, Dan DUNGACIU, *Sociologia şi geopolitica frontierei*, Craiova, 1995, p. 18.

support for the statement on hierarchs' ambitions has gone significantly down compared to 2000 (from 39% in 2000 to 25% in 2018), support for the property statement is somewhat higher than in 2000 – 28% vs. 23%, respectively, but lower than the 2010 percentage (35%)[12].

II.3. The "Ukrainian issue" from an ecclesial perspective

The goal of this chapter is to explain what the "Ukrainian issue" means from an ecclesial perspective. Then, we intend to explain what autocephaly means from an Orthodox perspective, how autocephaly is granted and how the communion of the Eastern Orthodox Churches functions.

According to the most recent census conducted in Ukraine, 63,4 % of the total population is Orthodox[13]. Religious life plays an important role in Ukraine, as observer states that, for many reasons, Ukraine came out of communism more religious than Russia. The main issue related with the majority confession in Ukraine is that Orthodoxy is far from being united. There are three Orthodox churches which claim to have jurisdiction over all Ukraine. Some smaller split groups just complicate the entire picture of Orthodoxy in this country. So, the main issue in Ukraine is that there are several competitive Orthodox churches, each of them claiming complete jurisdiction over the territory of Ukraine.

The three Orthodox churches in Ukraine are:

Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) is part of the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate. UOC-MP has complete autonomy from Moscow and is the biggest Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Until recently, it was considered as the only one canonical Orthodox Church in Ukraine[14].

Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Kiev Patriarchate (UOC-KP) was established in 1992, but it considers itself as the legitimate successor of the "metropolis of Kiev and all Rus" established by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1686. Metropolitan Filaret, who was a member of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church gathered a synod in Kiev in 1992 and asked Moscow for autocephaly. He was refused and therefore he unilaterally

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[12] See http://razumkov.org.ua/en/sociology/press-releases/international-conference-reconciliation-strategies-the-role-of-churches-in-ukraine

[13] See http://ukrcensus.gov.ua/

[14] See https://church.ua/en

declared the autocephaly of his church. This self-taken decision was not recognized by the other Orthodox Churches, UOC-KP being considered an uncanonical body by all Orthodox Churches.

Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) was established in 1990 and trace its roots back to 1921, when Ukraine was for a short period an independent state, before becoming a republic of the Soviet Union. It is not recognized as canonical by the other Orthodox Churches.

The three Orthodox churches in Ukraine competed with each other and created a lot of tensions in the Ukrainian society. This is the main reason why the Greek-Catholic (Uniate) Church in Ukraine was quite successful, after it was re-established in the post-communist period. The division between the three Orthodox Churches is not necessarily ethnical. There are Ukrainians belonging to ROC-MP, as the Romanian minority belongs to the same Church, for reasons we`ll explain later. In the time of pro-Russian presidents of Ukraine, the government of Ukraine used to support UOC-MP, as in the time of the actual president Poroshenko, UOC-KP was clearly privileged. At the beginning of Poroshenko's presidency, his support for UOC-KP was symbolical. For instance, he chose to attend on several occasions public services of this church. Later his support was increasingly more concrete, until he openly supported the creation of an autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The three Orthodox Churches used to have some negotiations for re-establishing unity. They also cooperated as members of the All Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations which is a platform created by the Ukrainian state to consult and cooperate with all religious communities in the country[15]. All three Orthodox Churches are members, as according to some statements one of the authors of this study heard in Ukraine, they had no other choice for interacting with the Ukrainian government. With other words a religious community who is not a member of this organization is not a partner according to the Ukrainian state. In this way, All Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations bring together all Orthodox Churches, Baptists, Adventists, Roman and Greek-Catholic Churches etc., in a country where ecumenical cooperation requires a lot of improvement.

Autocephaly means etymologically "self-headed". In an Orthodox context, it means that a Church is autonomous when its head (it can be a Patriarch, a Metropolitan or an Archbishop) does not need to report to

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[15] See https://risu.org.ua/en/index/reference/major_religions/33306/

any other hierarch of a higher status[16]. How is autocephaly granted in the Eastern Orthodox tradition? This is quite a complicated issue also. In the first centuries, autocephaly was granted by ecumenical (general) synods. The first ever church which got autocephaly was Church of Cyprus through canon eight of the third ecumenical synod, Ephesus, 431. Previously it was under the Church of Antioch[17]. In the modern period, autocephaly became a controversial issue. There were no clear or generally accepted rules and regulations who and how autocephaly is granted. Regarding the question who grants autocephaly, the Ecumenical Patriarchate claims for itself this role within Orthodoxy, while the Moscow Patriarchate considers that an Orthodox with already granted autocephaly has the right to grant autocephaly to a part of it, under certain circumstances[18]. There are also no clearly agreed conditions and procedures for granting autocephaly. A generally accepted principle is that an independent country with majority Orthodox population and well-established ecclesial-hierarchical structures should get autocephaly. The creation of modern states with a majority Orthodox population in the modern period, after the decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire, led to several requests for ecclesial autocephaly. However, the Ecumenical Patriarchate was unhappy with this development and was reluctant in recognizing autocephaly.

For example, the Orthodox church in Bulgaria declared unilaterally ecclesial independency from Constantinople and was recognized as such only in 1945, after decades of schism. The Romanian Orthodox Church declared independence in 1865 and was recognized as such only in 1885. One has to recognize that the past does not deliver us many examples of peaceful granting of autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The recent Synod of the Orthodox Churches held in Crete in 2016[19], where the Russian Orthodox Church, the Patriarchate of Antioch, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Georgian Orthodox Church did not

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[16] John H. ERICKSON, *The Challenge of Our Past Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History,* N.Y, 1991.

[17] See http://www.orthodoxa.org/GB/orthodoxy/canonlaw/canons3econcileGB.htm

[18] Charles WEGENER SANDERSON, *Autocephaly as a Function of Institutional Stability and Organizational Change in the Eastern Orthodox Church*, University of Maryland, 2005, p. 144.

[19] Iuliu-Marius MORARIU, "Eastern Orthodox Churches and Ecumenism according to the Holy Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete (2016)", in: *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 74:4, (2018), pp. 124-135.

attend, adopted a document on autocephaly and the way in which this could be granted[20].

Another important principle related with the way in which the Eastern Orthodox Churches are organized is the one of "diptychs". The Eastern Orthodox Churches are a community of autocephalous Orthodox Churches which are in full communion with each other, sharing the same beliefs (doctrine), ethics, canon law, liturgical tradition and spirituality. However, there is a strict order of the Eastern Orthodox Churches specified in the so-called "diptychs". The basis of the diptychs is the structure of the "Pentarchy" developed in the first centuries. The members of the Pentarchy were Roma, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. After communion with Rome was definitely broken in 1054, the remaining four centres continued their communion. The criteria of selecting centres for the Pentarchy were their apostolic origin and the ecclesial and political role they played in the Roman world. Later, other autocephalous Orthodox Churches were added to the diptychs, so that today there are 14 autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Churches in the world.

It is worth to mention here that, generally speaking, the attitude of western scholars and journalists regarding the Russian Orthodox Church is not positive at all. The Russian Orthodox Church is associated with Vladimir Putin and the policy of the Russian Federation and perceived as an instrument to promote Russian interests both in Russia, in the former Soviet Union and beyond. In the context of the "Ukrainian issue", many Western European and North-American authors state that the idea of a unique Orthodox Church in the space of the former Soviet Union which is strongly affirmed by the Moscow Patriarchate, tries to transform the Church into a platform for capitalizing Russia's geopolitical interests. For example, Marcel van Herpen writes that Russian leadership used in Ukraine the same techniques as Pope John Paul II did in Poland. As the Polish pope supported Poland's Solidarity movement and thus contributing to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, likewise the Russians now strengthen Russian imperial priorities through the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine and in some other former Soviet Union Republics[21].

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[20] See https://www.holycouncil.org//autonomy?_101_INSTANCE_VA0WE2pZ4Y0I_languageId=en_US

[21] Marcel H. Van Herpen, *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

II.4. A brief historical review of a few facts which play a role on the "Ukrainian issue"

It is not our intention to offer here a complete historical review of the complex and complicated relationship between the Russian and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. However, a few historical and recent facts need to be briefly mentioned, in order to understand the ecclesial complex problems in Ukraine and its connections and implications for geopolitics. *The first fact* is that Kiev was the first political and religious centre of the so-called "Rus", as the Russians are known in their early history. Tsar Vladimir the Great, the political head of the "Kievan Rus" chose, after long reflections, to convert to Orthodoxy and to get baptism from the Orthodox Church of the Byzantine Empire who was at that time the world power of the Mediterranean world. In 988, Tsar Vladimir the Great was baptized in the Byzantine Empire and, after he returned home, he baptized his family and all of his people in the Dnieper river in Kiev. A metropolitanate of Kiev has been established in order to organize the life of the newly established Orthodox Church. Most of the metropolitans of the early period of this Church were sent from Constantinople and were of Greek origin.

The invasion of the Mongols in the 13th Century destroyed Kiev and other centres of the Russian state. The Rus reorganized their state in the north, having Moscow as a capital. In 1325 the metropolitan of Kiev moved to Moscow and contributed in this way the consolidating of the Grand Duchy of Moscow. However, the metropolitans residing *de facto* in Moscow kept the title of metropolitans of Kiev. The former state of the "Kievan Rus" entered progressively under Lithuanian influence, but Kiev was considered the spiritual centre of the Orthodox Rus. Therefore, it is not surprising that the actual Patriarch of Moscow, Kirill, declared at 31st January 2019 that to the Russians Kiev is "the mother of all Russian cities"[22].

The second fact is that relationships between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate are, since centuries, quite complex. A starting point was 1439, when in the Synod from Ferrara-Florence[23], the delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople accepted a union

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[22] See https://tass.com/society/1042662

[23] Deno J. Geonaloplos, "The Council of Florence (1438-1439) and the Problem of Union between the Byzantine and Latin Churches", in: *Church History* 24 (1955), pp. 324-346.

with Rome, mainly in the hope to get support from Western Europe for defending Constantinople from the Turks.

The Russian Orthodox Church rejected this union and considered that the Ecumenical Patriarchate betrayed Orthodoxy. Metropolitan Isidor of Kiev who was a Greek and appointed by Constantinople, who attended the synod and signed the union was accused of heresy in Moscow, imprisoned and later expelled[24]. In 1448, a synod of the clerics in Moscow rejected again the union with Rome accepted officially in Constantinople and elected a new metropolitan named Jonah without consulting Constantinople. He was the last metropolitan who used as an official title "metropolitan of Kiev and all Rus". From 1448 on, Russian Orthodox Church considered itself an autocephalous church.

The third fact is that since 1453 the Ecumenical Patriarchate does not have a state to support it, while the Russian Orthodox Church, with the exception of the communist period, was backed by a supportive and strong state. In 1453, Constantinople fell to the Turks. This marked the end of the Byzantine Empire.

The life of the Ecumenical Patriarchate changed radically, as it was forced to live under a Muslim state. The sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed II the Conqueror (1451-1481), who was an erudite and very skillful politician, took a surprising, but wise decision: to allow Christians to organize their religious life within the Ottoman Empire. This decision was part of Sultan Mehmed II` Realpolitik, as up to 30% of the population of his Empire was Christian and a good percentage of them were very skilled, practically having monopolies over several economic and technical domains of his empire. The sultan decided to divide Christian nations into "*millets*" (Turkish word for "nations") and make their religious leaders heads of this millets.

Therefore, the Patriarchate of Constantinople became the head of *Rum Millet* (Turkish name for the Greek-speaking Orthodox)[25]. This new title and responsibility of the Patriarch of Constantinople, better known under the Greek name of "*ethnarch*" (political leader of an ethnic group), made him in fact the political leader of the Greeks living under the Ottoman Empire. The Patriarch was therefore responsible for any uprising or turmoil caused by the Greeks. When in 1517 the Ottoman Empire conquered, Egypt, Syria

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[24] Sergey DEZHNYUK, *Council of Florence: The Unrealized Union*, N.Y., 2017, pp. 74-75.
[25] Timothy E. GREGORY, *A History of Byzantium*, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 344.

and Palestine and the Apostolic Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem became part of the Ottoman Empire, the respective patriarchs did not receive the title of "ethnarchs", but the Patriarch of Constantinople exercised his political role also upon their believers. This political role implied a certain protection and dominance also upon religious matters.

The relationship of the Patriarchate of Constantinople with the other Orthodox nations which were either part of the Ottoman Empire (Balkan Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbians, Albanians) or under its influence (like the Romanian nation living in three states which later constituted Romania: Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania) was different. The Patriarch of Constantinople did not exercise his role as ethnarch, but was considered nominally, the spiritual head of the Orthodox in the sense that their leading hierarchs (in most cases metropolitans) were ordained by the Patriarchs of Constantinople or by their representatives.

The Russian Orthodox Church represented a totally different reality, as Russia was the only majority Orthodox country totally independent and opponent to the Ottoman Empire. The first Patriarch of Constantinople under the Turks, Gennadios Scholarios, recognized the autocephaly of the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1589, the Russian Orthodox Church was lifted by Constantinople to the rank of a patriarchate.

The fourth fact is that key historical events related to the "Ukrainian issue" is interpreted quite differently by Constantinople and Moscow. In 1686, Ecumenical Patriarch Dionysius IV reopened the Metropolitanate of Kiev and delegated the Patriarch of Constantinople to ordain him. This gesture of the Ecumenical Patriarch is perceived by the Russians as a subordination of the Kiev Metropolitanate to the Moscow Patriarchate. The Ecumenical Patriarchate perceive this very same gesture as a delegation entrusted to the Patriarchate of Moscow which could be suspended. Certain that in the Soviet time, the metropolitanate of Kiev was part of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The fifth fact is that the struggle for a Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church is not new. After 1917, as a result of the overthrow of the Tsarist regime, the Ukrainians focused on the ultimate goal of the revolution, the recovery of national identity of Ukraine from Russian control[26]. However, Russia's long standing influence blocked the process

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[26] Serhii SHELUKHYN, *'Vo istynu voskrese!'*, Nova rada (Kiev), no. 11 (11–24 April 1917).

to a national and political independence[27]. Russification of theological schools and monasteries in Ukraine was meant to stop any "ukrainization" process, leading to dilution of national identity of Ukrainians and social capacity weakening[28].

The sixth fact is that the Russian Orthodox Church consider the former territory of the Soviet Union as being its canonical territory, in spite of the fact that Belarus, Ukraine and The Republic of Moldavia (all majority Orthodox countries) are independent. As already mentioned, a well-established Orthodox Church from an independent country may raise the request to be autocephalous. The Moscow Patriarchate showed sensitivity to the three above mentioned countries and organized in each of them the so-called "exarchates": an autonomous Holy Synod is organized in each of these countries; the president of the Synod is a metropolitan who has the rank of a patriarch; only once per year the Holy Synods of these countries attend a meeting of the Great Synod in Moscow, as a sign of spiritual unity. One can state that at least theoretically the exarchates of Belarus, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldavia are autonomous (but not autocephalous).

It is worth to mention that Ukraine is the biggest exarchate of this kind. Keeping the Orthodox Church in Ukraine within the structures of the Moscow Patriarchate means for Ukrainian politicians a form of maintaining control. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Pavlo Klimkin, explained the nature of the division as the following:

> "It is Russia's desire to preserve control over Ukraine as a former colony that has belonged to it in the past. [...] The Russian Orthodox Church is exactly the opposite: it has long been a component part of the state apparatus and today is an active promoter of the imperial concept called the «Russian world»"[29].

[27] Ivan VLASOVSKYI, *Narys istorii Ukrainskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvy*, vol. III, New York: Bound Brook, NJ, 1957. Ayla Jean YACKLEY, *Turkey offers citizenship to Orthodox Archbishops* (https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-50289820100721);

[28] B. R. BOCIURKIEW, "The Rise of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, 1919–22", in: G.A. HOSKING (eds.) *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine. Studies in Russia and East Europe,* Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1991, p. 229 (https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21566-9_14.

[29] Pavlo KLIMKIN, *Ukraine and Christian Values in Europe*, Contributors.ro, 06.03.2019 (http://www.contributors.ro/editorial/ucraina-%C8%99i-valorile-cre%C8%99tine-din-europa/)

II.5. Recent events related with autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate convened in a regular session from 9th to 11th October 2018 announced that autonomy will be granted to the Church of Ukraine[30]. On October 15th 2018 a "unification synod" took place. Their representatives participated from the UOC-KP, UAOC and two bishops of UOC-MP. Who were later excluded from their church. UOC-KP and UAOC declared their merging into the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. They elected as primate Metropolitan Epiphanius I. The reaction of the Russian Orthodox Church was prompt. In the same day, it announced the decision to break communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In this way, it started what was already called the "2018 Moscow-Constantinople schism".

On January 5th, 2019, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I signed the "tomos" which granted autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. President Poroshenko attended the ceremonies. The text of the tomos states that the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

> "unanimously determines and declares that the entire Orthodox Church contained within the boundaries of the politically constituted and wholly independent State of Ukraine, with its sacred Metropolitan, Archdiocesan and Episcopal sees, its monasteries and parishes, as well as all the ecclesiastical institutions therein, operating under the Founder of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, our Godman Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, shall hereafter exist as canonically a u t o c e p h a l o u s, independent and self-administered, having and recognizing as its First Hierarch in all church matters, its presiding canonical Primate, who shall bear the title «His Beatitude Metropolitan of Kyiv and all of Ukraine», without any lawful addition or deletion to this title without permission from the Church of Constantinople"[31].

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[30] See https://www.patriarchate.org/-/communiq-1 Announcement 11/10/2018.

[31] Seehttps://www.patriarchate.org/-/patriarchikos-kai-synodikos-tomos-choregeseos-autokephalou-ekklesiastikou-kathestotos-eis-ten-en-oukraniai-orthodoxon-ekklesian?redirect=https%3A-%2F%2Fwww.patriarchate.org%2Fsearch%3Fp_p_id%3D3%26p_p_lifecycle%3D0%26p_p_state%3Dmaximized%26p_p_mode%3Dview%26_3_keywords%3Dtomos%2Bof%2Bautocephaly%26_3_struts_action%3D%252Fsearch%252Fsearch%26_3_redirect%3D%252Fsearch%253Fp_p_id%253D3%2526p_p_lifecycle%253D0%2526p_p_state%253Dmaximized%2526p_p_mode%253Dview%2526_3_groupId%253D0&inheritRedirect=true

It seems that the main reason for declaring autocephaly for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is the existence of Ukraine as an independent state.

The tomos also asks the other Orthodox Churches to recognize the autocephaly of the new church. More interesting is that the church does not have any jurisdiction over Ukrainian diaspora. In this way, the Ecumenical Patriarchate tries to consolidate its position on another controversial issue which is the jurisdiction over Orthodox diaspora. The Ecumenical Patriarchate claims jurisdiction over all Orthodox diaspora and is followed in this matter only by a few Orthodox Churches. Most of them organized parish structures for their people outside their traditional canonical territories:

> "recommend that all Orthodox Churches throughout the world acknowledge and commemorate it by the name «Most Holy Church of Ukraine» with its see in the historic city of Kyiv, without being henceforth entitled to establish bishops or found extraterritorial altars in regions already lawfully dependent on the Ecumenical Throne, which bears canonical competence over the Diaspora, but instead restricting its proper jurisdiction within the territories of the State of Ukraine"[32].

The newly established church is placed at the end of the diptychs:

> "His Beatitude the presiding Metropolitan of Kyiv and all of Ukraine is required to commemorate, in accordance with the ancient traditions of our holy Fathers, the Ecumenical Patriarch, Their Beatitudes, the Patriarchs and other Primates of the local Autocephalous Churches, in the sequence of the Diptychs, ac-

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[32] https://www.patriarchate.org/-/patriarchikos-kai-synodikos-tomos-cho-regeseos-autokephalou-ekklesiastikou-kathestotos-eis-ten-en-oukra-niai-orthodoxon-ekklesian?redirect=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.patriarchate.org%2Fsearch%3Fp_p_id%3D3%26p_p_lifecycle%3D0%26p_p_state%3Dmaximized%26p_p_mode%3Dview%26_3_keywords%3Dtomos%2Bof%2Bautocephaly%26_3_struts_action%3D%252Fsearch%252Fsearch%26_3_redirect%3D%252Fsearch%253Fp_p_id%253D3%2526p_p_lifecycle%253D0%2526p_p_state%253Dmaximized%2526p_p_mode%253Dview%2526_3_groupId%253D0&inheritRedirect=true.

cording to canonical order, assuming his proper place after the Primate of the Church in the Czech Lands and Slovakia both in the sacred Diptychs and church assemblies**"**[33].

Another important detail is that the new church does not have the right to produce its own Holy Myron, which is considered as a sign of autocephaly, but it has to receive it from Constantinople:

> "The First Hierarch, after being installed, must also immediately dispatch the necessary Irenic Letters concerning his establishment both to the Ecumenical Patriarch and the other Primates, just as he is also entitled to receive the same from these, while commencing his irenic journey as customary from the First-Throne Church of Constantinople, wherefrom it will likewise receive the Holy Myron as affirmation of its spiritual unity with the latter"[34].

II.6. First reactions of other Eastern Orthodox Churches on the issuing of the "Tomos"

It is certainly meaningful to briefly present here the preliminary reactions of the autonomous and autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Churches. These reactions show the level of disagreement among the Orthodox

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[33] https://www.patriarchate.org/-/patriarchikos-kai-synodikos-tomos-choregeseos-autokephalou-ekklesiastikou-kathestotos-eis-ten-en-oukraniai-orthodoxon-ekklesian?redirect=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.patriarchate.org%2Fsearch%3Fp_p_id%3D3%26p_p_lifecycle%3D0%26p_p_state%3Dmaximized%26p_p_mode%3Dview%26_3_keywords%3Dtomos%2Bof%2Bautocephaly%26_3_struts_action%3D%252Fsearch%252Fsearch%26_3_redirect%3D%252Fsearch%253Fp_p_id%253D3%2526p_p_lifecycle%253D0%2526p_p_state%253Dmaximized%2526p_p_mode%253Dview%2526_3_groupId%253D0&inheritRedirect=true.

[34] https://www.patriarchate.org/-/patriarchikos-kai-synodikos-tomos-choregeseos-autokephalou-ekklesiastikou-kathestotos-eis-ten-en-oukraniai-orthodoxon-ekklesian?redirect=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.patriarchate.org%2Fsearch%3Fp_p_id%3D3%26p_p_lifecycle%3D0%26p_p_state%3Dmaximized%26p_p_mode%3Dview%26_3_keywords%3Dtomos%2Bof%2Bautocephaly%26_3_struts_action%3D%252Fsearch%252Fsearch%26_3_redirect%3D%252Fsearch%253Fp_p_id%253D3%2526p_p_lifecycle%253D0%2526p_p_state%253Dmaximized%2526p_p_mode%253Dview%2526_3_groupId%253D0&inheritRedirect=true.

Churches on the Ukrainian issue. We chose to present other reactions in a chronological order.

Already on October 20th 2018, the Patriarchate of Antioch together with the Patriarchate of Serbia issued a joint statement in Belgrade in which they disapproved the intention of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church[35].

On February 2, 2019, Archbishop Abel (Poplavsky) of Lublin-Chełm, a member of the Holy Synod of the Autonomous Polish Orthodox Church, announced that his Church will not change its decision not to recognize the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Beforehand he stated that "The Orthodox Church cannot approve of these schismatics, who seem to have been found in canonical communion"[36].

On February 18, 2019, the Holy Synod of the Church of Cyprus stated that the goal of granting "tomos" to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, declared by the Patriarch of Constantinople, has not yet been reached[37].

On February 21, 2019, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church recommended that the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate continue the dialogue on the ecclesial situation in Ukraine, recommending even the call of a Pan-Orthodox to discuss the issue, as it was called to solve the schism within the Bulgarian Orthodox Church[38].

On March 4-6, 2019, the meeting of the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church did not issue a final decision on the Ukrainian ecclesial situation[39].

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[35] See http://www.spc.rs/eng/joint_statement_serbian_and_antiochian_orthodox_patri-archates

[36] See (http://news.church.ua/2019/01/20/arxijerej-polskoji-cerkvi-te-shho-stalosya-v-ukrajini-velika-tragediya-dlya-vsesvitnogo-pravoslavya/) *Bishop of the Polish Church: What Happened in Ukraine is a Great Tragedy for World Orthodoxy*, January 20, 2019.

[37] See (http://vzcz.church.ua/2019/02/19/komyunike-zasidannya-svyashhennogo-sinodu-kiprskoji-cerkvi-po-ukrajinskomu-cerkovnomu-pitannyu/). *Communicative Meeting of the Holy Synod of the Cyprus Church on the Ukrainian Church Issues*, Department of External Church Relations of the UOC, February 19, 2019

[38] Aurelian IFTIMIU, *Holy Synod Examines Ukrainian Ecclesiastical Issue at First 2019 Working Session*, Romanian Patriarchate Press Release, 21.02.2019 (https://basilica.ro/en/holy-synod-examines-ukrainian-ecclesiastical-issue-at-first-2019-working-session/).

[39] See (https://www.romfea.news/archbishop-ieronymos-%CF%84he-state-the-church-and-especially-the-priests-will-make-the-final-decision/). *The working sessions of the Standing Holy Synod continued today*, Romfea.news, March 6, 2019.

There is, so far, no reaction from the Patriarchates of Alexandria and Jerusalem to the issuing of the tomos of autocephaly for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. This does not necessarily mean, as most of the observers might think, that these Patriarchates whose hierarchy is Greek, tacitly agrees with the action of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Those who carefully observe the development of the relationships between Orthodox Churches may see how these patriarchates increasingly improve its relationships with the Moscow Patriarchate. The reasons are multiple. One of them might be the capacity of the Russian Orthodox Church to provide more aid and protection to these Patriarchates in the context of the decreasing of the traditional support provided by Greece, due to the economic crisis and of growing instability in the Middle East. The Russian influence increased in the region significantly in the last years. Material and political support provided by Russia to Alexandria and Jerusalem go back to the Ottoman period when Russia, as the only majority Orthodox state completely independent from the Ottoman Empire (and the Romanian kingdoms of Wallachia and Moldavia which have had a semi-independent status), were the only ones able to able to do so.

The joint statement of the Patriarchate of Antioch and of the Serbian Orthodox Church is not a surprise. Traditionally good relations with the Russian Orthodox Church with Arab Christians go back to the 19th Century. The political and war alliance of Syria and Russia to defeat ISIS in Syria refreshed these relations and brought them to another level. Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church are strongly tied with Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church. The Serbian Orthodox Church took the side of the Russian Orthodox Church also because it is confronted with a similar challenge in Macedonia. As the Russian Orthodox Church claims jurisdiction over the entire territory of the former Soviet Union, so the Serbian Orthodox Church claims jurisdiction over the entire territory of former Yugoslavia. However, Macedonia established an Orthodox Church which is not recognized by the other Orthodox Churches, in spite of all efforts, even being supported by the Macedonian government. It is certain that the new developments in Ukraine give hope to the Macedonian Orthodox Church to receive the same treatment from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Serbian Orthodox Church might see in the "Ukrainian issue" a dangerous precedent for Macedonia.

The position of Church of Cyprus and Church of Greece are surprising indeed and gives us a sense of the sensitivity of the issue.

The balanced position of the Romanian Orthodox Church goes in line with its traditional position and role within World Orthodoxy. As the only Orthodox Church of Latin origin, the Romanian Orthodox Church is known for maintaining a balance between Greek speaking Orthodox Churches (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Patriarchate of Alexandria; Patriarchate of Jerusalem; Church of Cyprus and Church of Greece) and the Slavonic Orthodox Churches (Russian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Polish, Czech and Slovak Orthodox Churches). The Romanian Orthodox Church is the only Orthodox Church, apart from the Moscow Patriarchate, with direct interests in Ukraine. There is a significant Romanian minority living in Ukraine which choose, long time ago to belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate.

This decision had many reasons, one of them being the fact that the Ukrainians living in the regions where there is a significant presence of a Romanian population chose to belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Kievan Patriarchate. In this way, Romanians could worship in their own language. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate allowed them to use their own native language, and not the Church-Slavonic, as they realized that in this way the fidelity of the Romanian community is secured.

There are recent records that the Ukrainian authorities recently took coercive measures in Romanian communities to make them adhere to the newly created Ukrainian Orthodox Church and to worship in Ukrainian. This is probably the reason why the statement of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church reads:

> "it is necessary to obtain written assurances from Ukrainian ecclesiastical and state authorities that the ethnic and linguistic identity of these Romanians will be respected, and that these Romanian Orthodox will have the possibility to organise themselves within a Romanian Orthodox Vicariate and to be able to cultivate spiritual relations with the Romanian Patriarchate, in order to be supported by sending liturgical and theological books in their mother tongue, that is, in the Romanian language"[40].

[40] Aurelian Iftimiu, *Holy Synod Examines…*

Even if Ukraine treats the Romanian community unfair for decades, Romania will continue to be a key supporter of Ukraine in its European course.

Concluding remarks

We presented, so far, a series of historical backgrounds, facts and analysis' related with geopolitics and ecclesial matters in Ukraine and in the region. It is clear that apart from some very important ecclesial reasons for seeking autocephaly, the efforts of some Ukrainians, strongly supported by the Ukrainian state and by President Poroshenko to get autocephaly for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is driven by the geopolitical need to break any ties with Moscow.

Post-Tomos information campaigns are promoted by the Moscow Patriarchate through various specific media narratives, and states the idea that Kiev will use the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church to assimilate ethnic minorities by imposing the Ukrainian language as the sole language for performing religious services or claiming that the new Ukrainian church will confiscate the patrimony belonging to the church subordinated to Moscow. So far, there are reports of such actions taken by the Ukrainian government, who are carefully reported through media and perhaps instrumentalized by OUC-MP.

It seems that the big winner of the declared autocephaly was President Poroshenko who shifted recently to second place in the election polls, rising from fifth place among favourite presidential candidates in November 2018. However, the future will tell us whether these actions will really help him to win the presidential elections.

There are also records that the newly established Ukrainian Orthodox Church gained attributes of Ukrainian statehood, as President Poroshenko has repeatedly stated. The current context makes us conclude that the Church will be severely dependent on secular authorities. Although the motivation for autocephaly is justified by the current conflict with Russia, history has shown that not everything that politicians desire draws positive consequences for the church.

On the other hand, it seems that for President Putin, the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is a loss of a strategic piece on the

chessboard of Russian imperialism. One can equally say that for the actual Ukrainian strategists and their allies, everything which makes Ukraine less dependent on Russia, including ecclesial independency, is something to be promoted. As *The Guardian* states, Petro Poroshenko "has backed autocephaly as part of a push back against Russian influence in Ukraine"[41].

The decision of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to try to solve the "Ukrainian issues" by recognizing the autocephaly of a newly created Ukrainian Orthodox Church was qualified by some observers as being an unwise decision. At least for the time being it created more disunity than unity within global Orthodoxy. The relationships between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate which were anyway far from being ideal, due to many complex rivalries, are worse than ever. As the short presentation of the position of the Eastern Orthodox Churches shows, global Orthodoxy is really divided on the "Ukrainian issues". Only the future will show whether the decision on Ukraine of the Ecumenical Patriarch was a prophetic one or not. For the time being, it seems to be a divisive one.

Some analysts say that the actual 2018 schism between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate is similar to the 2016 schism between the same ecclesial centres caused by a disagreement on the Orthodox jurisdiction over Estonia. Even though there are similarities between the two "issues" (Estonian and Ukrainian), the discussion around Ukraine is quite particular. This has to do with the size of the country and the Orthodox population involved with historical and ecclesial complexity of the issue. It seems that the Moscow Patriarchate is not ready at all to give up on Ukraine.

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[41] See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/05/ukraine-new-orthodox-church-gains-independence-from-moscow