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The Importance of the Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine for the Confessional Policy of the Russian Federation in Central and Eastern Europe

Abstract

The subject of the article is an analysis of the impact of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's autocephaly process on Ukraine's relations with the Russian Federation. Orthodoxy, understood as both a religious institution and a denomination, has been a constant and most important component of Russia's identity since the very beginning of its existence. It remains the dominant religion in the Russian Federation, despite the religious diversity resulting from the multi-ethnic nature of the state. The aim of the article is to analyze the role of the Orthodox Church in the internal and foreign policy of the Russian Federation. In Russian-Ukrainian relations, it played an important role in supporting activities such as the annexation of Crimea or support for pro-Russian separatists in the Donbas. The position of the Russian Orthodox Church in contemporary Russia is also associated with a specific type (model) of the policy pursued by that state, referred to as "confessional policy (diplomacy)", integrally connected with the issues of religious security of the country. The analysis of the content of the program documents of the state institutions of the Russian Federation and internal organizations of the Russian Orthodox Church allows to distinguish the so-called *differentia specifica*, characterizing the community of assumptions and the identity of actions undertaken by state and church institutions in Russia. Church institutions are perceived as the so-called the "national" church of the Russian Federation. This results in the Church becoming entangled in various parapolitical affiliations, which in turn has specific implications in the political and interfaith sphere. The authors, on the basis of the conducted analysis, conclude that the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is essential for the country's independence from Russia – it strengthens the Ukrainian national identity and limits Russian influence in this country.

Keywords: Autocephaly, Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Russian Orthodox Church, confessional policy, Eastern Europe.

Znaczenie autokefalii Prawosławnego Kościoła Ukrainy dla polityki wyznaniowej Federacji Rosyjskiej w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej

Abstrakt

Tematem artykułu jest analiza wpływu procesu autokefalii Prawosławnego Kościoła Ukrainy na stosunki Ukrainy z Federacją Rosyjską. Prawosławie, rozumiane zarówno jako instytucja religijna, jak i wyznanie, jest stałym i najważniejszym elementem tożsamości Rosji od samego początku jej istnienia. Pozostaje religią dominującą w Federacji Rosyjskiej, pomimo zróżnicowania religijnego wynikającego z wieloetnicznego charakteru państwa. Celem badawczym artykułu jest analiza roli Cerkwi w polityce wewnętrznej i zagranicznej Federacji Rosyjskiej. W stosunkach rosyjsko-ukraińskich odgrywał ważną rolę we wspieraniu takich działań, jak aneksja Krymu czy wspieranie prorosyjskich separatystów w Donbasie. Pozycja Rosyjskiej Cerkwi Prawosławnej we współczesnej Rosji wiąże się także ze specyficznym typem (modelem) prowadzonej przez to państwo polityki, określanej mianem „polityki wyznaniowej (dyplomacji)”, integralnie związanej z kwestiami bezpieczeństwa religijnego państwa. Analiza treści dokumentów programowych instytucji państwowych Federacji Rosyjskiej i organizacji wewnętrznych Rosyjskiej Cerkwi Prawosławnej pozwala na wyodrębnienie tzw. *différentia specifica*, charakteryzującej wspólnotę założeń i tożsamość działań podejmowanych zarówno przez państwo, jak i Cerkiew. Instytucje kościelne postrzegane są jako tzw. Kościół „narodowy” Federacji Rosyjskiej. Powoduje to uwikłanie Kościoła w różne afiliacje parapolityczne, co z kolei ma określone implikacje w sferze politycznej i międzywyznaniowej. Na podstawie przeprowadzonej analizy autorzy dochodzą do wniosku, że autokefalia Prawosławnego Kościoła Ukrainy jest niezbędna dla niezależności tego kraju od Rosji – wzmacnia narodową tożsamość Ukrainy i ogranicza rosyjskie wpływy w tym kraju.

Słowa kluczowe: autokefalia, Prawosławny Kościół Ukrainy, Rosyjska Cerkiew Prawosławna, polityka wyznaniowa, Europa Wschodnia.

After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Russian Federation unequivocally declared its will to act as an ‘arbiter’ and ‘guarantor of stability’ in the post-Soviet area.¹ The specific understanding of these international roles included, inter alia, making use of the available instruments enabling control over the entire territory, which used to function as a uniform state organism. Obviously, the choice of instruments depended on the priorities of the Russian political decision-makers in their relations with the states that emerged as a result of the collapse of the USSR. In Eastern Europe, the religious factor became one of such priorities.

This article is a continuation and extension of research on the strategy of neo-imperial expansionism of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet area to include extremely important issues regarding the identity of Russians related to religion as a factor which determined that identity. It should be borne in mind that from the very beginning of Russia’s existence, Orthodoxy has been one of the most important components of its identity, not only understood as ‘the faith of the fathers’, but also a specific form of national declaration and cultural affiliation, despite the multi-ethnic

¹ Marcin Orzechowski. 2013. *Strategie polityczne Federacji Rosyjskiej wobec państw obszaru Europy Wschodniej w latach 1990–2005*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 125–126.

nature of the state.² The Orthodox Church continues to symbolise the common past, binding present-day Russia with great traditions that confirm its cultural and civilisational identity. President Vladimir Putin, in line with the concept of the ‘Russian world’, repeatedly referred to the ‘Russian-speaking civilisation community’, which was to become the foundation of the spiritual and civilisation community, for which the term ‘russkiy mir’ (Russian world) is used. It is most often defined as a Russian-centred community of Russian-speaking people³, identifying with the Orthodox religion and culture⁴, and referring to common values, irrespective of their citizenship and ethnic origin.⁵ The core of this Russian world is to be the Russian-Ukrainian-Belarusian community, with its fundamental area being the Russian-speaking population of post-Soviet countries, and in the broadest sense, people living in various parts of the world who meet the above-mentioned criteria.⁶

In this context, the Orthodox religion plays a significant role; firstly, as a result of the influence of historical conditions and the role that the state-subordinate religion played in the history of Russia. Secondly, taking into account the ‘reactivation of the nationalist element’ in this country, one cannot overlook the interdependence of the revival of Orthodoxy in contemporary Russia and the dynamically developing Russian nationalism. As described by T. Olejarz, “once again the Orthodox Church becomes an instrument, symbol and external expression of Russia’s national and even ethnic identity. Orthodox Church institutions are perceived as the ‘national’ church of the Russian Federation. This results in the Orthodox Church becoming entangled in various parapolitical affiliations, which in turn has specific implications in the political and interdenominational spheres.”⁷ In practice, this means that Russia also uses the religious factor as an instrument of influencing the post-Soviet space, and even more broadly, the entire ‘canonical’ area of the functioning of Russian Orthodoxy.⁸

² Tomasz Olejarz. 2020. Polityka konfesyjna Federacji Rosyjskiej jako wyzwanie dla bezpieczeństwa o charakterze niemilitarnym. In *Rosja wobec państw Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej: zagrożenia niemilitarne*. Ed. Tomasz Stepiński, 111–113. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Europy Środkowej.

³ Торжественный приём по случаю Дня народного единства (17.03.2021). <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19562>.

⁴ Встреча с участниками Архиерейского собора (15.03.2021). <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17409>.

⁵ Владимир Путин. 2012. Россия: национальный вопрос (14.03.2021). https://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html.

⁶ Marcin Orzechowski. 2017. Noworosja jako element postzimnowojennego modelu reintegracji na obszarze poradzieckim. W *Ukraina. Czas przemian po Rewolucji Godności*. Ed. Andrzej Furier, 283–284. Poznań: Wydawnictwo CSFE.

⁷ Olejarz. 2020. Polityka konfesyjna Federacji Rosyjskiej jako wyzwanie dla bezpieczeństwa o charakterze niemilitarnym, 112.

⁸ Alicja Curanović. 2010. *Czynnik religijny w polityce zagranicznej Federacji Rosyjskiej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 17–18.

This assumption is essential to the considerations contained in this article. The aim of the article is to analyse the significance of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine autocephaly process as an element of gaining independence from the Russian Federation, also in the field of religion. The aforementioned autocephaly fits in the context of events that threaten the implementation of one of the most important assumptions of Russia's political strategy towards Ukraine, which is to maintain this country within the zone of exclusive Russian influence. The annexation of Crimea and the federalisation of Donbas, which is in fact a de-Ukrainianisation project aimed at strengthening Russian identity in south-eastern Ukraine, are the most important elements of the aforementioned political strategy, also referred to as the strategy of neo-imperial expansionism.⁹ Launching a powerful propaganda apparatus, including the Russian media, and activating the so-called agitators working not only in the separatist territory, but also in cyberspace, are mere examples of activities aimed at strengthening the sense of self-identification of the people of Donbas with the historical and religious legacy of Russia.¹⁰

In this article, the authors attempted to verify the following research hypotheses. Firstly, as already pointed out, the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church is of great importance for Ukraine's attempts at gaining independence from Russia. It is, in fact, a factor that strengthens Ukrainian national identity, while limiting e.g. Russia's influence on the Orthodox Church of Ukraine of the Moscow Patriarchate, which constitutes a 'propaganda speaking-tube' to justify Russian actions in Crimea and the Donbas representing an element of the deconstruction of Ukraine's statehood.

Secondly, the religious factor is one of the available instruments to influence the political and social space in Ukraine. This refers to the so-called political monitoring, i.e. the consistent support of pro-Russian political forces in Ukraine with financial and human resources, as was the case during Viktor Yanukovich's election campaigns in 2004 and 2010¹¹, as well as the 'gas whip strategy' consisting in increasing the prices of energy resources and limiting supplies, which in the case of transmission networks was also a means of putting pressure on Central and Western European countries.¹²

⁹ Marcin Orzechowski. 2015. *Od realnego pragmatyzmu do neoimperialnego ekspansjonizmu. Ewolucja strategii politycznej Federacji Rosyjskiej wobec Ukrainy*. Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe „Minerwa”, 150–155.

¹⁰ Андрей Марчуков. 2014. Свободный Донбасс, проект “Новороссия” и общерусский ответ на “украинский вызов” (21.03.2021). <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1802208.html>.

¹¹ Orzechowski. 2015. *Od realnego pragmatyzmu do neoimperialnego ekspansjonizmu*, 10.

¹² Marcin Orzechowski. 2008. Bicz gazowy jako element rosyjskiej ruletki. Stosunki Federacji Rosyjskiej z państwami europejskimi na płaszczyźnie energetycznej. In *Quo vadis Europa. Problemy polityczne i gospodarcze*. Vol. 2. Ed. Maciej Janowski, Joanna Jonczek, Leszek Ślepowroński, 153–165. Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Volumina.

Thirdly, the opposition of the Russian Orthodox Church to the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is part of the ongoing competition for influence in the Orthodox world. For years, the Church in Russia, as the most numerous Orthodox structure in the world, has sought to weaken the position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which exercises only spiritual supremacy in Orthodoxy. This strategy is deeply rooted in the history and tradition of Russia, as it is closely related to the 15th-century idea of Moscow – the ‘Third Rome’, situating the Moscow state, and then Russia, as the spiritual successor of Rome and Byzantium, which manifests itself in the so-called ‘Orthodox geopolitics’ identified in this country with the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church’s influence.

And finally – fourthly, the aim of the actions taken by the Russian Orthodox Church is to protect the integrity of the canonical territory by supporting the maintenance of the post-Soviet space in the orbit of the political influence of the Russian Federation, and by opposing the West, which often openly contests the political domination of Moscow and the confessional ‘monopoly’ of the Moscow Patriarchate in this region.¹³ An important role here is played by concepts which are embedded in Russian geopolitical thought while often reaching the ideological space deeply rooted in Russian historiography, reflected in the views expressed not only by Vladimir Putin, but also by Alexander Dugin (Eurasianism)¹⁴ or Artur Ustian (neo-Byzantism).¹⁵

The discussed subject is of interest to analysts and researchers not only in Ukraine and Russia. The authors used sources in Polish, Russian and Ukrainian, not only contemporary but also historical, which was important for the complementarity of the analysis. Particularly significant were the studies by T. Olejarz, J. Potulski, T. Stępniewski, A. Curanović and, in the historical context, the work by J. Woliński.

1. Confessional Policy as an Element of the Strategy of Reconstructing the Superpower Position of the Russian Federation in the Post-Soviet Space and Globally

President Vladimir Putin once defined the collapse of the Soviet Union as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century”. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that work on a project known as the ‘Soviet Union light’ has been un-

¹³ Curanović. 2010. *Czynnik religijny w polityce zagranicznej Federacji Rosyjskiej*, 212–213.

¹⁴ Александр Дугин. 2000. *Основы геополитики. Геополитическое будущее России*. Москва: АРКТОГЕЯ-центр, 193–199.

¹⁵ Артур Устьян. 2009. *Политическая философия русского византизма и ареввизма*. Москва: Медиакрат, 333–335.

derway in Russia for some time.¹⁶ The project aims not only at maintaining influence in the post-Soviet space, but also rebuilding the position of a superpower in the system of international relations. All these elements make up a coherent picture of the conceptual foundations of Russian domination in the post-Soviet area as well globally. In the former, the main element is the necessity to restore the unity of the ‘Russian people’, sometimes referred to as the ‘Russian-speaking community’. The instruments to be used for the effective implementation of this concept may include attempts to integrate the post-Soviet area; either as a strict block, which the Eurasian Economic Union could become, or, in extreme cases, by creating a state organism covering at least part of this area.¹⁷ It is precisely on the basis of the ‘Russian world’ community that the priority political project called the Eurasian Economic Union¹⁸ is being implemented.

The term ‘russkiy mir’ refers not only to the economic sphere, but also, as it turns out, it is one of the key determinants of Russia’s civilisational identity, which constitute the ‘common denominator’ of activities undertaken both by the Russian Orthodox Church and secular political authorities. The central concept reflecting the common position of the state and the Church is ‘civilisation’ – the Kremlin predominantly uses the terms ‘Eurasian’ or ‘Russian¹⁹’, while the Church, understandably, prefers ‘Orthodox’.²⁰

The role of church institutions cannot be overestimated here, as they act as ‘reconstructors’ of the legitimate identity, revitalised with the use of the old historical tradition, while the Orthodox Church and Orthodoxy begin to symbolise a common past, binding present-day Russia with great traditions that confirm its cultural and civilisational identity.²¹ ‘Russkiy mir’ (Russian world) in this interpretation assumes the existence of a separate world of Russian spirituality, the integrity of which has been violated by past political events (including the already mentioned collapse of the USSR and the period of the so-called ‘second great sadness’ of the 1990s). The final effect of the reconstruction of this spiritual space should be the restoration of the canonical union between the conflicting Churches, carried out under the aegis of the Russian Orthodox Church. In this

¹⁶ James Brooke. 2012. Is ‘Soviet Union light’ the Future of Putin’s Russia? (22.12.2020). <http://www.voanews.com/content/soviet-union-light-future-putin-russia/1521341.html>

¹⁷ Orzechowski. 2017. *Noworosja jako element postzimmnowojennego modelu reintegracji na obszarze poradzieckim*, 286.

¹⁸ Обращение Президента Российской Федерации, 18 марта 2014 года (23.02.2021). <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

¹⁹ Дугин. 2000. *Основы геополитики*, 228–234.

²⁰ Olejarz. 2020. *Polityka konfesyjna Federacji Rosyjskiej jako wyzwanie dla bezpieczeństwa o charakterze niemilitarnym*, 114–115.

²¹ Monika Nizioł. 2004. *Dylematy kulturowe międzynarodowej roli Rosji*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Skłodowskiej-Curie, 137–138.

context, ‘russkiy mir’ is increasingly more often presented by the political authorities as a Russian civilisation project that secures and connects Russia’s Orthodox identity with its political ambitions as a superpower.²² It should also be noted that the reconstruction of Russia’s superpower position in the post-Soviet space is closely linked to the security policy, including religious security, which influences, inter alia, the qualitative nature of this policy, sometimes referred to as ‘confessional policy’ or ‘confessional diplomacy.’

The analysis of the provisions contained in the “National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation” shows that ‘religious security’ – constituting an important component of national security – is a priority.²³ This is an extremely important aspect not only in the context of political and interdenominational relations in the entire post-Soviet area, but also from the internal perspective of those countries in which the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate plays an important interreligious and quasi-political role.²⁴

The element that binds both entities, i.e. state decision-making centres and church institutions, continues to be the described vision of the place and role of the Russian Federation in the new multipolar international order, defined through the prism of the anti-occidental doctrine. This vision involves perceiving the West as the main adversary and the conviction that Russia must regain its superpower position at the level of international relations. Furthermore, both sides agree that one of the conditions for Russia’s rebirth in the world is its moral renewal in the spirit of traditional cultural and religious (Orthodox) values.²⁵

It should therefore be emphasised that the convergent visions of the identity of Russia (a separate civilisation), the international order (the aforementioned multipolarism) and the civilisational mission (the leader in the new balance of power between the West and other civilisations, the patron of interdenominational dialogue) constitute the basis and foundation of cooperation between the state and the Church, undertaken and implemented on the domestic, international and interdenominational levels.

²² Tomasz Olejarz, Piotr Bryliński. 2011. Uwarunkowania ideologiczno-konfesyjne polityki zagranicznej Federacji Rosyjskiej wobec obszaru WNP. In *Federacja Rosyjska – Wspólnota Niepodległych Państw*. Ed. Tomasz Kapuśniak, 146–147. Lublin – Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej.

²³ Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 31 декабря 2015 года N 683 „О Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации” (27.03.2021). <https://rg.ru/2015/12/31/nac-bezopasnost-site-dok.html>.

²⁴ Olejarz. 2020. Polityka konfesyjna Federacji Rosyjskiej jako wyzwanie dla bezpieczeństwa o charakterze niemilitarnym, 116.

²⁵ Ринат Набиев, Анвар Гафаров, Руслан Ибрагимов. 2013. Государственно-конфессиональные отношения в России. Казань: Казанский университет (19.03.2021). <https://kpfu.ru/portal/docs/F2054703497/4.pdf>.

To sum up, in the confessional policy of the Russian Federation, the priority objectives of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate on the international level include strengthening Russian influence in the area of the so-called ‘close abroad’ (canonical territory), especially cultivating the cultural (religious) closeness of Russia with the countries of Eastern Europe – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and selected countries of the Black Sea basin and the Caucasus.

Russia, in its foreign policy assumptions, raises the importance of the cultural factor, with particular emphasis on its religious component – the more so as the concept of neo-Byzantism, referring to the rejection of modernisation and westernisation modelled on Western Europe²⁶, recognises the Orthodox religion as an important element of Russia’s geopolitical influence in the international environment. In practice, the supporters of the neo-Byzantine approach view the Russian Federation as the leader of all countries with Orthodoxy as the dominant religion, which include not only Eastern European countries, but also Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Cyprus, and Romania.²⁷

2. Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine as a Threat to the Confessional Policy of the Russian Federation in the Post-Soviet Area

It should be noted that the Ecumenical Patriarchate also contributed to the establishment of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The Patriarchs of Constantinople assumed a leading role in the church of the Eastern Roman Empire, which later became the Orthodox Church. Over the centuries, the Byzantine Church played a very significant role in the Orthodox world. Since the Great Schism of 1054, the Ecumenical Patriarch has been the honorary leader of Orthodoxy, bearing the ‘primus inter pares’ title. His role is to initiate and coordinate activities between local Churches, convene pan-Orthodox councils and meetings, and conduct dialogue with representatives of other denominations and religions. Even in the 5th century, there was an inclination to bestow Pope Leo the Great with the title of Ecumenical Patriarch, to which he did not agree. The title was assumed by the Patriarch of Constantinople, John IV (John the Faster), which was objected to by Pope Gregory I the Great: he believed that using the title of *ekumenikos* in the context as he understood it, i.e. as ‘actually universal’ – as the head of all Chris-

²⁶ Jakub Potulski. 2010. Współczesne kierunki rosyjskiej myśli geopolitycznej. Między nauką, ideologicznym dyskursem a praktyką. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 172–173 (16.03.2021). http://otworzksiazke.pl/images/ksiazki/wspolczesne_kierunki_rosyjskiej_mysli_geopolitycznej/wspolczesne_kierunki_rosyjskiej_mysli_geopolitycznej.pdf.

²⁷ Tomasz Stępniewski. 2011. *Geopolityka regionu Morza Czarnego w pozimnowojennym świecie*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 102–103.

tianity, destroyed the structure of the Church and elevated a bishop who used this title to a rank greater than that of the Council itself.²⁸

In the historical context, the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine bear the markings of an intraecclesial conflict. In 1686, the Moscow Patriarchate received a detailed map prepared by Constantinople cartographers, which depicted the canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate, as recognised by the four Orthodox patriarchs.²⁹ This map was the basis for the reconstruction of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine, as not only does it show the area being under the canonical jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church, but also an area that is quite important in the context of the autocephalous process, covering the territory of left-bank Ukraine as well as the entire Grand Duchy of Lithuania, at the time a part of the Republic of Poland.³⁰ The situation was changed by the Treaty of Perpetual Peace concluded on 6 May 1686 in Moscow, as a result of which the Republic of Poland relinquished the left-bank part of Ukraine, including Kiev, in favour of Russia, which in turn entailed the transition of the Orthodox metropolis of Kiev under the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate.³¹

A particular impulse for the intensification of activities aimed at implementing the discussed autocephaly process were the events that took place at the turn of 2013 and 2014. The protests began on 21 November 2013 due to the decision not to sign an association agreement with the European Union by the president at the time, Viktor Yanukovich. As the situation developed, the attitudes of the demonstrators would radicalise, and the postulates for the removal of the head of state and the implementation of a fundamental change in the country's situation grew in popularity. The movement itself turned into a nationwide revolution known as Euromaidan, or the Revolution of Dignity. The annexation of Crimea and the involvement of Russians supporting separatists in the eastern part of Ukraine triggered a military conflict between the two countries. In April 2014, the Russian Federation attacked Ukraine, waging a hybrid war in its south-eastern territories

²⁸ Andrzej Kuźma. 2011. "Prymat w Kościele w korespondencji Papieża Św. Grzegorza Wielkiego z patriarchami wschodnimi". *Rocznik Teologiczny* 53 (1–2): 112 (24.04.2021). https://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/files/Rocznik_Teologiczny/Rocznik_Teologiczny-r2011-t53-n1_2/Rocznik_Teologiczny-r2011-t53-n1_2-s107-121/Rocznik_Teologiczny-r2011-t53-n1_2-s107-121.pdf.

²⁹ Olejarz. 2020. *Polityka konfesyjna Federacji Rosyjskiej jako wyzwanie dla bezpieczeństwa o charakterze niemilitarnym*, 120.

³⁰ Paweł Przepiszewski. 2008. *Wyzwania i problemy rosyjskiego prawosławia*. Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna (28.02.2021). <http://ekumenizm.wiara.pl/wydruk.php?grupa=6&art=1204013670&dzi=1039028927>.

³¹ Janusz Woliński. 1936. *Polska i kościół prawosławny*. Lwów: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, Zielonogórska Biblioteka Cyfrowa (06.03.2021). <https://zbc.uz.zgora.pl/dlibra/show-content/publication/edition/18828?id=18828>.

using Russia's own military units and Moscow-controlled separatist units. The effect of these actions was the proclamation of the Donetsk People's Republic on 6 April 2014, and the Luhansk People's Republic on 27 April 2014.

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Supreme Council of Ukraine) initiated these actions in June 2016 by preparing a relevant document addressed to Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, in which the deputies emphasised, *inter alia*, the unlawful nature of the act of 1686 and the politicisation of the Russian Orthodox Church. The authors of the application pointed to the historical facts of the effective granting by Constantinople in the first half of the In the nineteenth century and in the second half of the In the 1950s, the autocephaly of individual Orthodox churches in the Balkans: Serbian (1831), Greek (1850), Albanian (1937) and Bulgarian (1945).³² The authors of the document argued that Ukraine had its own culture and state, and that after the events of 2014, it would never be part of Russia again.³³

The result of these actions, not only at the political but also diplomatic level, was a request to the Patriarch of Constantinople to issue a tomos (decree) granting autocephaly to Ukrainian Orthodoxy.³⁴ This was supported by both the president of Ukraine at the time, Petro Poroshenko, who paid the patriarch a personal visit for this purpose, as well as the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. The reaction of the Russian Orthodox Church was unequivocal: in September 2018, the Synod suspended working contacts with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and in October, it decided to sever all relations and Eucharistic unity with it.

The reunification required for the tomos took place on 15 December 2018 at the general council of the Kiev metropolis, where Metropolitan Epiphanius, one of the bishops operating theretofore in the Orthodox Church of Ukraine of the Kiev Patriarchate, was elected head of the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

In consideration of the fulfilment of the basic condition for granting the tomos, Patriarch Bartholomew I signed the document on 5 January 2019. The ceremonial presentation of the signed document took place on Orthodox Christmas in the cathedral temple of the Patriarchate of Constantinople dedicated to St. George in Istanbul. Thus, the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine became a reality. It should be pointed out that currently, 38.6% of the inhabitants of Ukraine declare that they belong to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine established over a year ago, which makes it the most numerous ecclesial community in the country.³⁵

³² Olejarz. 2020. *Polityka konfesyjna Federacji Rosyjskiej jako wyzwanie dla bezpieczeństwa o charakterze niemilitarnym*, 121–122.

³³ Adam Myślicki. 2019. "Konflikt konfesyjny na Ukrainie przełomu lat 2018/2019". *Przegląd Geopolityczny* 29: 105.

³⁴ Olejarz. 2020. *Polityka konfesyjna Federacji Rosyjskiej jako wyzwanie dla bezpieczeństwa o charakterze niemilitarnym*, 122.

³⁵ Myślicki. 2019. "Konflikt konfesyjny na Ukrainie przełomu lat 2018/2019", 106.

The new ecclesiastical situation in Ukraine caused the emergence of legal disputes. In December 2018, the Verkhovna Rada, by law, obliged the religious organisations which had their decision-making centres in Russia to change their name so as to reflect this dependence. Under the new regulations, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine of the Moscow Patriarchate should be re-registered as the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine. This did not happen, because in April last year, the Kiev administrative court recognised the new law as an unjustified interference of the state in the sphere of activities of a religious organisation (the Ukrainian constitution emphasises the separation of the state and the Church) and allowed the Orthodox Church of Ukraine of the Moscow Patriarchate to use the current name. In February this year, the Constitutional Court, at the request of deputies from the pro-Russian Opposition Block, began examining the law in terms of its compliance with the constitution.

The granting of autocephaly did not entail automatic recognition of this fact by other local Churches. Thus far, 3 out of 14 canonical Orthodox Churches have done so – including, besides the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Greek Orthodox Church (in October 2019) and the Patriarchate of Alexandria (in November 2019). This should be considered a moderate success of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, as the process of recognition by other Churches, most frequently due to political reasons, may take years or even decades. The autocephaly met with a favourable response from the Orthodox Churches of Cyprus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia; it is thus possible that one of them will be next to decide to recognise the new structure.

The fact that the Orthodox Church of Ukraine had obtained autocephaly revealed the divisions and differences of interests existing in the Orthodox world. The hitherto covered up dispute for primacy between the Church of Constantinople and the Russian Church turned into an open conflict, requiring other Churches to refer to this dispute and determine their positions towards it. Contrary to appearances, this does not serve to strengthen the position of the Russian Orthodox Church.

At the same time, two more Orthodox Churches officially declared their disapproval of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine: the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Antioch and Jerusalem Patriarchates and the relatively new Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania are also against the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.³⁶

³⁶ Marta Piechowska. 2020. Cerkiew Prawosławna Ukrainy – rok po uzyskaniu autokefalii (26.03.2021). https://pism.pl/publikacje/Cerkiew_Prawoslawna_Ukrainy__rok_po_uzyskaniu_autokefalii.

Conclusion

To summarise the considerations contained in this article, it should be concluded that the Orthodox Church of Ukraine autocephalous process may be of significant importance in the current conflict situation in which the two countries have found themselves – the autocephaly strengthens the Ukrainian national identity, while limiting, at least in some part, Russian influence in Ukraine by weakening the role of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine of the Moscow Patriarchate, which, as previously mentioned, openly supports the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the actions of the self-proclaimed republics in the east. There is also a chance that owing to autocephaly, it will be possible to become independent of the Russian Orthodox Church, which until now has represented the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in global religious organisations (e.g. in the World Council of Churches and Orthodox councils).

The recognition of the independence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine was of great importance for Ukrainian domestic policy. It was one of the main elements of the election campaign of former president Petro Poroshenko, who was personally involved in autocephaly negotiations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and then in the organisation of the unification council in Kiev. It cannot be denied that the victory of Volodymyr Zelensky in the presidential elections in Ukraine did inhibit somewhat the growth of the significance of autocephaly in the political and social space in this country. This is mainly due to the fact that from the very beginning of his presidency, he appeared as a supporter of maintaining the constitutional separation of Church and State, and thus avoided any favouring of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, although, as some people from Zelensky's closest circle (e.g. Serhiy Sivocho, Donbas advisor) admit, it can play an extremely important role in the potential reintegration of the areas that are currently beyond the control of the authorities in Kiev.

Despite the fact that in the near future the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is not going to become the dominant, let alone the sole Orthodox structure in the country, with the publication of the tomos it has become the fifteenth full-fledged and independent (autocephalous) Orthodox Church. The establishment of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is important not only for its followers, it is undoubtedly an added value, both in terms of internal politics and Ukraine's position in international and interdenominational relations.³⁷ Although Russia tried to use

³⁷ Janusz Kowalczyk. 2020. Społeczno-polityczne uwarunkowania powstania Kościoła Prawosławnego Ukrainy (29.04.2021). <https://phavi.umcs.pl/at/attachments/2020/0207/102602-cew-analiza-nr26.pdf>.

conflicts over parish church affiliation to fuel social protests in Ukraine, the attempt to initiate them on a larger scale has failed.

The analysis carried out within this article allowed for the verification of the research hypotheses presented in the introduction. All the hypotheses have been positively verified. There is no doubt that the direct result of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine unification and obtaining autocephaly is the initiation of the process of limiting Moscow's influence that promotes the ideology of the alleged civilisation of the Russian Orthodox world, which is harmful to Ukrainian statehood. While in the political sphere the Russian Federation will make every effort to maintain Ukraine within its sphere of influence, in the religious dimension it seems that the gradual acceptance of the autocephaly of Orthodox Church of Ukraine by other Orthodox Churches may lead to limiting the relations of the Russian hierarchs with these Churches, and consequently, to the progressive isolation of Orthodox Moscow. Therefore, it will be extremely important for Russia to counteract such phenomena, e.g. by maintaining its influence within the framework of the aforementioned 'Orthodox geopolitics' in Central European countries.

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