Religious Tolerance in Eastern Europe

Religious Plurality as a Socio-Political Factor in the Ukraine

Katrin Boeckh

Introduction

The development of inter-confessional and -religious ties in Ukraine during the last decades is a remarkable example for the positive effect of religious tolerance. This example is even more striking, as the churches themselves initiated a closer collaboration in an ecumenical spirit, after having been hindered to establish ties among each other during the decades of the Soviet church repression.

This study will focus on the ethic dimension of tolerance, on tolerance as "virtue of democracy" and as a social principle. It will also show that tolerance can be misused demonstratively to enforce political claims. In this context, tolerance functions as a tool of power – not only in the Soviet era, but also in the decades after the end of the Soviet regime. Alas, tolerance does not work, if it is only a political norm or its "application" is demanded by regulations or laws. Tolerance in its full dimension can only exist if it is practiced voluntarily – independent of whether the actor is conscious about this notion or not. Real tolerance presupposes the recognition of "the other" in full knowledge about its essential nature. Real tolerance can only function if it prevails on both sides, meaning that each of both "tolerant partners" accepts the other with the same intensity. These aspects of active and pro-active tolerance became visible in the discourse between churches and religious communities in Ukraine at the moment, when, after the fall of communism, it became possible to get in touch with each other.

Generally, the confessional and religious situation in Ukraine is interesting for the conceptualization of Christian tolerance, as there is a huge number of churches and religious communities and a large variety of different creeds, confessions and religions. In the year 2018, in whole Ukraine, 35.162 parishes of more than 100 different religious communities

had been registered by the state authorities.[1] According to these numbers, that do not include the numbers of believers within the parishes and the religious communities, the largest number of parishes belong to the Orthodox Church and her different branches: 12.437 parishes adhered to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (of the Moscow Patriarchate; UOC-MP), 5.363 to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate (UOC-KP) and 1.171 to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). Then 3.470 parishes were part of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, 442 of the Greek Catholic diocese of Mukachevo in Transcarpatia, while the Roman Catholic Church comprised 943 parishes. 2.816 parishes were Baptist, 2693 parishes were Evangelical Christian, 1.070 Adventist, 83 Lutheran, 129 Reformed, 1.496 Charismatic, 287 Jewish, 265 Muslim, 63 Buddhistic, and many smaller groups.[2]

Generally, religiosity among the population in Ukraine remains on a very high level: during the years 2010–2018 about 72 percent of the population confess a religious adherence.[3]

While the Ukrainian government registers the number of parishes of different religious communities, the exact numbers of their believers are not counted. A survey in 2018 provided information on the believers among the approximately 44 million Ukrainians:[4] 67.3 percent of the respondents identified themselves as Christian Orthodox (28.7 percent UOC-KP; 12.8 percent UOC-MP; 23.4 percent "just Orthodox believers"; 0.3 percent UAOC; 0.2 percent Russian Orthodox Church (as distinct from the UOC-MP); and 1.9 percent undecided; 9.4 percent as Greek Catholic; 2.2 percent as Protestant; 0.8 percent as Roman Catholic; and 0.4 percent as Jewish. Further 7.7 percent declared to be "simply a Christian", whilst 11 percent stated that they did not belong to any religious group. Smaller religious communities were formed by Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists. Later in 2018, when the Ukrainian government together with UOC-KP, UAOC, and some bishops, representing the UOC-MP, asked the Ecumenical Patri-

1 The religious organizations in Ukraine (as of 1 January 2019), in: Statistics on Religions (2019), https://risu.ua/religiyni-organizaciji-v-ukrajini-stanom-na-1-sichnya-2019-r_n97463 (last access: 11–17–2020).

2 Ibid.

3 Razumkov Center (2018): Osoblyvosti relihijnoho i tserkovno-relihijnohosamovyznachennja ukraïns'kykh hromadjan: tendentsiï 2010–2018rr. (informacijni materialy), Kiev, https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2018_Religiya.pdf (last access: 11–17–2020).

4 Ukraine 2018 International Religious Freedom Report (2018), https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/UKRAINE-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf (last access: 11–16–2020).

archate for autocephaly, the number of Orthodox identifying themselves as adherents of the UOC-KP increased to 45.2 percent, while 16.9 percent of the respondents declared themselves as members of UOC-MP, and 33.9 percent perceived themselves "just as Orthodox believers."[5]

These numbers cannot be taken for granted. It is astonishing that, only about three decades after the end of communist atheism, so many residents of Ukraine declare themselves religious. This also sets Ukraine apart from the most part of the post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe, where the population defines itself less and less religious.[6] In addition, in Ukraine, a historical development can be observed: Here, the real non-existent tolerance towards churches turned into an active support for their existence, as well by the government as by the church members, despite of many political upheavals of which the post-Soviet transformation phase is the last one.[7]All this makes the situation in Ukraine an interesting case study for tackling aspects of religious tolerance, particularly because a broad interdenominational as well as interreligious competition is dominating here, in contrast to neighbouring Russia, where religious plurality is currently not considered worthy of promotion and is even seen as a threat. With this in mind, religious tolerance in nowadays Ukraine cannot be regarded as something natural. Scrutinizing tolerance as a historical category in the Ukraine, this study will demonstrate that, despite of their struggle of life under Soviet oppression, the majority of the churches in Ukraine found a way to establish connections to each other after the end of the Soviet regime. By creating even a common political body, they became more and more an active factor and a moral instance in contemporary political life. This will be evolved in two sections: The first part will analyse the tense situation for religions and churches within the Soviet State, while the second part will focus on the initiatives of churches and believers in the framework of the independent and pluralistic Ukraine.

1. No Religious Tolerance in the Soviet Union and the Soviet Ukraine

While Marxism actually anticipated the automatically vanishing of religions during class struggle, the Bolsheviks did not wait for this to happen.

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5 Ibid.

6 In 1998, only in Romania, Poland and Croatia less people than in Ukraine declared to be atheists: see: Tomka/Zulehner/Toš 1999: 207.

7 See: the historical stages of the formation of religious plurality in Ukraine in: Boeckh/Turij 2015.

Immediately after the October Revolution in 1917 they launched their attack on all churches with different degrees of intensity. The biggest enemy of the Bolsheviks was the ancient regime – the tsarist monarchy. So the Orthodox church, traditionally a supporter of autocracy and an "instrument of the class enemy", became a main target for the Bolsheviks since their seizure of power in the Russian capital Petrograd.

Lenin's decree from February 2nd 1918 on the separation of church and state and of school and church was the first of a huge amount of regulations that strictly limited religious life and punished any kind of actual or alleged transgression. The churches lost their status as legal persons, they were prevented from educating pupils in schools, their properties were seized and thus, churches and monasteries were deprived of their material basis for living. The next step was the elimination of church hierarchy and clerics. Until 1920, at least 28 bishops of the Orthodox Church had been murdered, thousands of priests, monks, nuns, and active laymen were sent to forced labour camps. One special camp for clerics (and other political prisoners) was located in the White Sea, on the islands of Solovki archipelago – the main site of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's book "The Gulag Archipelago".

The political repression also affected the Orthodox communities in Ukraine, where in 1918, a short living national republic had been proclaimed. In Kiev, a non-canonical church council was held in 1921 and the Ukrainian autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) was established under its auto-consecrated metropolitan Vasyl Lypkyvs'kyj (1864–1934). Although the Russian Orthodox Church did not recognize him, the UAOC became very active in the early 1920s. Claiming to represent a Ukrainian national church, it quickly gained followers among Ukrainian intellectuals and lower clergy, but also among the rural population. It is roughly estimated that around one third of the Orthodox believers in Ukraine followed the UAOK, whereas two thirds followed the Russian Orthodox Church. The Soviet regime did not intervene against the UAOC at first since this denomination was obviously weakening the Russian Orthodox Church, but at the beginning of the 1930s, the clerics of the UAOC were arrested and the church was liquidated fully.

By Stalin's rise to power, a new phase of church persecution was introduced. While more and more bishops and priests were sent to labour camps, in the religious communities laymen became growingly active and tried to step in political functions; party authorities perceived this as an

assault and danger for the political system.[8] So the "Law on Religious Associations" of 1929 was a full attack on lay activists in the parishes as it prohibited each form of social, missionary and charity activities. Church buildings were closed in masses, clergymen were increasingly persecuted and interned as "enemies of the people". Religious life was only possible within very narrow limits, if it was after all. Shortly before the Second World War, it seemed that the organization of the Russian Orthodox Church had almost been destructed. The other churches and religious communities suffered the same fate, so the hierarchy of the Catholic Church had been deleted after a show trial under the pretext of political accusations against 17 Catholic representatives in Moscow in 1922. Here, two of them were sentenced to death, and while Archbishop Jan Cieplak (1857–1926) was pardoned, Monsignore Konstanty Budkiewicz (1867–1923) was shot dead. The remaining defendants were sentenced to long prison terms. The Catholic Church was specifically suspect to the regime because its highest representative, the Pope, had his seat abroad, beyond Soviet control, and also, because it was considered a national Polish church. The high effort that the Soviet State invested in liquidating religious appearances and representatives, was rooted in the fact that it took into account the reaction of the Western countries and of the population within the USSR, for the permanent atheist propaganda had in no way caused the masses to suddenly lose their religion. So, here it becomes clear, that there was no state tolerance towards churches and believers. Clerics were condemned as "enemies of the people," and in no case as religious persons, which would have caused at least the discontent of many still existing believers in the Soviet Union. Alas, religious beliefs were not exterminated among the population, and in some cases, also party members did not refrain from their confession.

Until the collapse of the Soviet system, the Soviet authorities cultivated a contradiction of what they said and what they did instead, as they treated religious representatives as "criminals" and brought them before a judge, while the Soviet government claimed to be generally tolerant towards religions. Accordingly, the so called "Stalin Constitution" of 1936 (in force until 1977) declared freedom of religion and conscience. As to its Art. 124, in the USSR, "for the purpose of guaranteeing the freedom of conscience for the citizens, the church is separated from the state and the school from the church. The freedom to practice religious cults and the freedom to conduct anti-religious propaganda are granted to all citizens." Art. 135

8 Freeze 2012: 49.

about the right to vote proclaimed additionally, that there was a "universal suffrage: all citizens of the USSR who have reached the age of 18 have the right, regardless of their race and nationality, creed, level of education, residence, social background, financial situation and previous activity, to participate in the elections for the deputies and to be elected, with the exception of the mentally ill and persons who have been convicted by the court in disregard of the right to vote." In fact, often enough, people who were condemned because of their believes, were forbidden to vote – the question of voting in a one-party-system, such as the Soviet Union was one, is not raised here.

Remarkably, the Soviet Union laid much stress on demonstratively propagating a high level of religious freedom in the country and the alleged religious tolerance. This is in fact an important hint on the still existing religiosity of the masses. So in the Soviet Union, a facade democracy was maintained with pseudo-tolerance towards religion, but in reality, nobody could refer to the legal rights of believers, as the state authorities used violence to prevent it.

The consequence of the massive and general religious repression was that the churches lost their most important front figures and their most loyal representatives. As official contacts between different churches were not possible, and each church struggled for its very existence, "ecumenism" could not develop. It was an unparalleled blood toll, that the churches in the Soviet Union had to pay; nothing similar can be found in European church history. Especially the Orthodox Church in the states that followed the USSR has not been able to recover from this destruction to this day.

There was only a more tolerant episode during World War II, when the enemy from the outside forced the regime to concede more wiggle room to the churches. A short phase of liberalization began for the churches and the faithful, both in the occupied territory of the USSR, where the German invaders also eased the church repression to a certain degree, and in the non-occupied Soviet territory, the "home front". Here, Stalin used the mobilizing power of the Orthodox Church to motivate the population to take action against the external enemy. In return for the assurance of submission and loyalty to the Soviet power, he allowed the election of a patriarch. So Sergius I. was appointed patriarch of Moscow and Russia in 1943, but died already in 1944. Public confession of faith and attending masses became also easier during the war. At the same time, new state authorities were introduced: The "Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church" and the "Council for the Religious Cults" (meaning all other churches) were to secure the surveillance of the religious activities.

They closely collaborated with the secret police, handing over information on the churches and on religious actors.

After the end of the war, church repression began again. A clear sign was the destruction of the Greek Catholic Church in Western Ukraine, that had been invaded by the Red Army in 1939 for the first time, until it became eventually a part of Soviet Ukraine after 1944/45. Here, the Greek Catholic Church in Galicia goes back to the Union of Brest in 1596, while the Uniate Church of the Carpathian-Ukraine originated in the Union of Uzhhorod in 1646. They appeared particularly threatening to the Soviet government: First, because the Pope as their highest authority resided outside the country's borders and foreign contacts were suspected of having an undesirable political influence on the population. The other reason why Stalin persecuted the Greek Catholic Churches was that they had been a national factor for Ukrainians since the 19th century and they had a big influence on the population. So they were dissolved by force: in Galicia after a "pseudo synod" in L'viv in 1946, in Carpathian Ukraine with a mere declaration after a holy mass in 1949. Those priests, monks, nuns, and believers who refused to break away from it had to face punishment. Hundreds of thousands of believers were affected, as well as the members of the orders and priests, many of whom were interned and sent to labour camps in the East of the Soviet Union. According to the Greek Catholic Church, ten bishops, 1,400 priests, 800 nuns, and thousands of lay people were violently killed under Soviet rule. Cardinal Josyf Slipyj (1892–1984) was the only bishop to survive a long camp imprisonment. In 1963, he was released and exiled to Rome, where he died in 1984.[9]

While one church was suffering, another benefitted from political measures: The Russian Orthodox Church in western Ukraine experienced an upswing due to the ban on the Greek Catholic Church, because the regime had determined that the Orthodox Church should incorporate the Greek Catholic believers, clergy, and their church buildings. This ultimately led to the fact that there were more Russian Orthodox Churches in western Ukraine than in Russia (the return of these parishes during the 1990s was not free of conflict). It is part of the tragedy for the Russian Orthodox Church that Moscow played it off to the detriment of the Greek Catholic Church. Alas, this is not the only example for the fact that the communist government repeatedly understood very well how to instrumentalise

9 His successor, Grand Archbishop of Lviv Myroslav Ivan Liubachivs'kyj (1914–2000), returned to Ukraine only in 1991. As to the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine, see: Persecuted for the Truth 2017.

church communities for its own purposes. But despite of all violent attacks, Moscow could not prevent that the Greek Catholic Churches in western Ukraine went into the catacombs and established a broad network of secret believers. The underground church in western Ukraine was the largest of its kind in the entire Soviet Union.

In the USSR, churches and religions were persecuted almost until they vanished completely from the scene. Until the late 1980s, believers were sentenced to long prison terms and received labour camp sentences because they belonged to dissident circles, because they were critical of the state, and because believers refused to serve in the military by joining the Red Army. Nevertheless, shortly before Mikhail Gorbachev who introduced a policy of political reforms ("perestroika"), in Ukraine, more than 6.000 officially registered religious communities existed – one-third of the number of religious organizations in the whole of the Soviet Union.[10]

When Gorbachev conceded policies of political opening and of "new thinking", he also included steps for religious tolerance by the still atheistic Soviet state. He recognized the relevance of Christian values such as peace, environmental protection and lively discussions on political failures. The legalization of the Greek Catholic Church in western Ukraine played a role in the evolution of an increasingly tolerant attitude towards churches in public life in the Soviet Union during perestroika. While in 1989, the state authorities counted approximately 650 former Greek Catholic priests, monks, and nuns in the western part of Ukraine and sharply criticised "anti-social and extreme" propaganda by religious "extremists",[11] this assessment reflected the observation, that the underground Greek Catholic Church always had supported human rights activists.[12] Dissidents repeatedly articulated the issue of the legality of the Greek Catholic Church. Gorbachev finally conceded it and announced it on December 1, 1989 when he met the Polish Pope John Paul II in the Vatican, who understood well how to deal with the Soviet leadership.[13]

Gorbachev also passed a law on freedom of religion and conscience shortly before the fall of the Soviet system on the first of December 1989. It was for him that religion and churches in the USSR became tolerable in the last instances of the Soviet Union. As his political attempts to reform

10 Yelensky 2012: 307.
11 Central'nyj Derzhavnyj Archiv Hromads'kych Ob'jednan' Ukra⇦ny (CDAHOU), Kiev, fond 1, opys 32, delo 2556, ark. 12–13: O religioznoi obstanovke /po sostoianiiu na I.0I.1989 goda/. 21.01.89
12 Yelensky 2012: 323.
13 See: Mikrut 2020.

the Soviet system failed, in December 1991, the end of the USSR was decided.

It is purely speculative to figure out what would have happened, if the Soviet regime had not been aggressively atheistic, if it had allowed the churches to fully cooperate with its authorities, and if church leaders were active political forces from the beginning of the Soviet Union. One probable scenario would have been a stronger commitment by the Soviet people and perhaps even the protraction of its collapse. But this remains merely speculative as well.

2. The institutionalization of post-Soviet religious tolerance in the Ukraine

In 1991, Ukraine declared its independence as a state. This created a new political basis for the activities of the churches in the country whilst being confronted with the challenges of a more and more pluralistic and democratizing society. Religious freedom was guaranteed from the beginning, although, only in 1996, it was secured in the new Ukrainian constitution. Its Article 35 reads:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of personal philosophy and religion. This right includes the freedom to profess or not to profess any religion, to perform alone or collectively and without constraint religious rites and ceremonial rituals, and to conduct religious activity.

The exercise of this right may be restricted by law only in the interests of protecting public order, the health and morality of the population, or protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons.

The Church and religious organizations in Ukraine are separated from the State, and the school from the Church. No religion shall be recognized by the State as mandatory.

No one shall be relieved of his or her duties before the State or refuse to perform the laws for reasons of religious beliefs. In the event that the performance of military duty is contrary to the religious beliefs of a citizen, the performance of this duty shall be replaced by alternative (non-military) service."[14]

Religious freedom in Ukraine also created a new fundament for the growing confessional and religious plurality gaining momentum after the end of the Communist regime. In the 1990s, the religious landscape in

14 Wikipedia (2020): Constitution of Ukraine, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Ukraine_1996 (last access: 11–14–2020).

Ukraine changed rather drastically. Traditional and non-traditional religious communities grew and a number of new religious communities gained popularity, e.g. evangelical churches. This was a novelty for the Ukrainian believers. A similar development in Russia was hindered by a restrictive state policy.[15]

Church communities have been an object for politics in Ukraine since 1991, but at the same time they also became politically active themselves. For Ukrainian politicians, the churches in Ukraine were an important factor as they were highly respected among the population, that otherwise shared only a weak common historical experience, with cultural and linguistic differences in the whole country especially between East and West, but also between the centre and the provinces. So one aim that united all post-Soviet Ukrainian presidents was the attempt to establish a unified Ukrainian Orthodox church in order to strengthen the Ukrainian national identity, to build up the idea of a nation, and to promote the integration of the population. That endeavour became reality in 2019, when the autocephaly of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" was recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, uniting the hitherto not recognized Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kiev Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. That step alone required the willingness to discuss with each other and mutual tolerance in the previously divided orthodoxy of the country, which for a long time did not seem possible, as the churches themselves from 1991 onwards had to settle long lasting conflicts between themselves:

The Orthodox Church in Ukraine experienced the separation of several national directions that did not recognize each other, when Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine was confronted with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kiev Patriarchate, established in 1992. Before that, in 1990, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church had been re-established.

The Greek Catholic Church, on the other hand, has been in a dispute with the Holy See, because the relocation of the seat of her leader, the Grand Archbishop, from L'viv to Kiev went too slowly. The relationship between the Catholic and Orthodox churches was also burdened with a conflict, because the Greek Catholic Church pressed for the return of church property that had been expropriated since 1946 and had been given to the Orthodox Church. Initially, this was even accompanied by fights among the believers of the churches. Another problem was that

15 Karpov 2020: 308–311.

the Russian Orthodox Church was used by the Russian government as an instrument to exert influence over Ukrainian politics.[16] This continuum has been preserved from the Soviet era.

The open discussion between the churches became institutionalized when the churches in Ukraine established a common platform: The All-Ukrainian Council for Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO; also: Ukrainian Council for Churches and Religious Organizations/ UCCRO), which was created in 1996. It is a common organ of 90 % of the religious communities in Ukraine meeting regularly with a rotating leadership. The list of members of the Council in 2020 comprises the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (in unity with Moscow Patriarchate), the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Roman-Catholic Church in Ukraine, the All-Ukrainian Union of the Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, the Ukrainian Pentecostal Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Ukrainian Christian Evangelical Church, the Ukrainian Evangelical Church, the Trans-Carpathian Reformed Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ukraine, the Union of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine, the Religious Administration of Muslims of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Bible Society.[17]

Politically independent, it comments on major issues of Ukrainian politics, on behalf of all of its participating churches, meaning from a mere religious standpoint, which can differ from a secular-political point of view. As an umbrella organization it is a channel for church interests and a bridge to get into dialogue with politics and politicians, that the Council is constantly seeking. Special commissions underline its activities in cooperation with media, in social affairs and in questions regarding the restitution of socialized religious properties. The Council cooperates especially with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Defense.

It is also a valuable and effective tool for resolving conflicts among the churches themselves and externally. Especially after the Orange Revolution 2004/05 and after the Euro-Maidan 2013/14, inter-religious and inter-denominational contacts increased with the help of the Council.[18] It is a visible bearer and promotor of religious tolerance as photos in the media

16 Yelens'kyi 2013: 285–286, 418–422.
17 VRCIRO, https://www.vrciro.org.ua/en/council/info (last access: 12–4–2020).
18 See: Boeckh 2016.

show frequently sessions of the council and their discussions, uniting the religious leaders around one common table.

In its own words, the UCCRO is "as an interfaith institution, aiming to unite the efforts of various denominations to focus on the spiritual revival of Ukraine, coordination of interfaith dialogue in Ukraine and abroad, participation in a legislative process on church-state issues, and the implementation of comprehensive charitable actions. […]

The Council of Churches gives special attention to and calls for the establishing of social justice, freedom of peaceful assemblies, religious freedom, and other fundamental human rights, including the fight against corruption, protection of public morality, providing a social protection for the vulnerable and poor, promoting the fair and transparent elections."[19]

Common interests shared by each AUCCRO member are peacekeeping on a national and personal level, the freedom of religion, the care for families, life protection and other social issues. In personal meetings with leading politicians, parliamentary groups and the state president(s), the AUCCRO expresses its position in concrete aspects of financial support for the needy, but also in domestic violence, that has risen under COVID-conditions, for the religious support in the army, and for issues of violations of religious freedom within Ukraine and abroad. The Council also establishes contacts with political, diplomatic and religious organizations abroad, e.g. with ministers in Israel, with the Prime Minister of Canada, with government officials in Berlin, with religious leaders in the USA and with religious leaders of Russia in Norway.[20]

The position of the Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate remained problematic. Whilst the other churches in Ukraine expressed themselves more and more independently from politics, the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate was and is an extended arm of Moscow's foreign policy. This issue is particularly critical in relation to the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Crimea, which has been annexed by Russia in violation of international law in 2014, and in the "People's Republics" of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, which are strongly influenced by indirect and direct Russian military help. From a Europe-wide perspective, religious persecution is currently prevailing here like nowhere else. This is a step backwards in Soviet times, and the new rulers here make no effort to hide this:

19 VRCIRO, https://www.vrciro.org.ua/en/council/info (last access: 12–4–2020).
20 VRCIRO, https://www.vrciro.org.ua/en/council/info (last access: 12–4–2020).

Religious freedom has come to an end in Crimea, for the now prevailing Russian legal situation hardly allows Muslim, non-Orthodox Christian, Jewish and other communities to exist. Their followers are being bullied: For example, the FSB security service searched students in a Muslim medrese for evidence of a "Muslim danger" and the visitors of a liturgy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kiev Patriarchate were attacked by hooligans and declared as "anti-Russian". According to a Crimean human rights group, until November 2020, more than one hundred Muslim Tatars were fined for allegedly "missionary activity".[21]

In Donetsk and Luhansk also a lot of pressure is put upon "non-Russian" Christian churches: In May 2014, the leadership of the "Donetsk People's Republic" declared the Russian Orthodox Church the predominant faith. This was also actively supported by priests of the Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate. For the pro-Russian rebels, the Russian Orthodox Church is an important momentum of identity, lacking other elements that could unite them and the population of the occupied zones. Each other confession and religion is accused "to spy" for the "fascist government" in Kiev or the West. Fearing religious persecution, thousands of Muslims and Jews have left the areas under rebel leadership.[22] Catholic and Protestant representatives were beaten and imprisoned, churches were devastated. All other religious communities are severely restricted in their activities by threatening or kidnapping their clergy or by raids during church services. Greek Catholic priests are intimidated, captured and tortured to leave their parishes.[23] A similar situation with evangelical pastors. In June 2014, militants from the "Donetsk People's Republic" murdered

21 In the occupied Crimea, another mosque attendant accused of 'illegal missionary activity', 13 November 2020: RISU (2020), https://risu.ua/en/in-the-occupied-crimea-another-mosque-attendant-accused-of-illegal-missionary-activity_n113461 (last access: 11–14–2020).

22 Sabra Ayres, In rebel-held Donetsk, religious intolerance grows. Religious groups that are not Russian Orthodox go underground or shutter their doors amid persecution (March 17, 2015), in: Al Jazeera America (2020), http://america.aljazeera.com/multimedia/2015/3/in-rebel-held-donetsk-religious-intolerance-grows.html#:~:text=Before%20the%20conflict%20started%20last%20year%2C%20post-Soviet%20Ukraine,years%20of%20being%20suppressed%20by%20the%20communist%20government (last access: 11–26–2020).

23 UGCC priest was seated in electric chair in Donetsk, 22 December 2014; RISU (2020a), http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/freedom_of_conscience/58548/ (last access: 11–16–2020).

a pastor from the Renewal Church in Mariupol.[24] In the same month, armed men under Russian command kidnapped and murdered four members of an Evangelical Church in Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast.[25] Jehovah's Witnesses have been kidnapped and mistreated repeatedly in Donetsk and Luhansk since 2014, as they refuse the use of weapons. Religious buildings have been vandalized, confiscated, and turned into "offices" of the rebel regimes.[26] Generally, in the zones in the East of Ukraine, the anti-terror zones, religion is instrumentalised as a means of power by the new dominating forces, tolerance is alien to this situation. Nowadays in Ukraine, two opposing zones of religious tolerance are prevailing: the occupied area in the east with an anti-tolerance position, while the churches on the free territory of Ukraine have found a common ground for dialogue.

As to the concept of tolerance among Ukrainian churches and religious groups, the following aspects can be highlighted that led the historical path to the actual situation:

Religious tolerance seemed to be that detrimental for the Soviet state, that the Bolshevik regime repressed each church organization from the beginning. At the same time, it did not allow inter-confessional and inter-religious contacts, so that an ecumenical understanding could not develop.

After the end of the Soviet Union, religious tolerance among the churches did not arise at once. It needed the help of religious leaders

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24 Statement of Heads of Evangelical Protestant Churches of Ukraine on Religious Persecutions in Donetsk and Luhansk Regions (2014), on 8 July 2014, http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/07/22/statement-of-heads-of-evangelical-protestant-churches-of-ukraine-on-religious-persecution-in-the-donetsk-and-luhansk-oblasts/ (last access: 11–16–2020).

25 Euromaidanpress (2014): Chronicle of Terror: Religious persecution by pro-Russian militants in east Ukraine, 19 August 2014, http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/08/18/chronicle-of-terror-religious-persecution-by-pro-russian-militants-in-east-ukraine/ (last access: 12–18–2020).

26 See the report of the Institute for Religious Freedom (Kiev) (2018): Religious Freedom at Gunpoint: Russian Terror in the Occupied Territories of Eastern Ukraine. Analytical report on the situation in regard to religious freedom and religiously motivated persecution in the separate territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine, temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation. September 2018, 2018.10.24-IRF-Report-ENG.pdf (last access: 11–26–2020). See also the report with testimonies and interviews of witnesses and victims of religious persecution in Eastern Ukraine: Institute for Religious Freedom (Kiev) (2015): When God becomes the Weapon. Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. April 2015, http://irf.in.ua/files/publications/2015.04_Report_Religious_persecution_in_occupied_Donbas_eng.pdf (last access: 11–26–2020).

to find a common organizational structure that united most of the existing religious groups. Especially the external shock of the Euro-Maidan in 2013/14 has renewed this impetus for the churches in Ukraine to collaborate and to strive together for a peaceful coexistence and for human rights, democracy, and freedom.

In the actual situation in Ukraine, religious tolerance is not guaranteed in the occupied territories in the East and on Crimea. Here, literally the Soviet regime of religious repression is rebuilt, that allows only the existence of the Orthodox church of Moscow Patriarchate.

In the pluralistic state of Ukraine, the churches and religious groups set up their own political institution representing the overwhelming majority of all churches. Here, tolerance is the key factor, as small churches are regarded as equal partners of the bigger churches. This is a clear example for the observation that religious tolerance is not based on the same quantitative measures of all participants, but it is a shelter for the weaker side, thus stabilizing social peace even under politically unstable conditions.

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