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Religious Aspects in Interstate Conflicts: the Russian-Ukrainian Case

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LIST OF ABBRIEVIATIONS

AUCCRO All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religous Organizations

CSDP Common Security and Defence Policy

EU European Union

EUAM European Union Advisory Mission

NATO North Atlantic treaty Organization

OSCE The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OUN Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists

ROC Russian Orthodox Church

UAOC the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church

UGCC Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

UK United Kingdom

UN United Nations

UNSC United Nations Security Council

UNSCR United Nations Security Council Resolution

UOC Ucranian Orthodox Church

UOC-KP the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate

UOC-MP Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate

US United States of America

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, drawing a historical caesura for international relations and foreign policy scholars, journalists and analysts. The search for the roots and motivations behind the military action has often been sought from a political or economic perspective. However, this conflict, between countries with significant historical and cultural overlap, not only undermined the post-World War II order, but also led to dramatic changes in the religious configurations of Ukraine and Russia and in the landscape of the occupied territories. Indeed, the religious dimension is not often recounted by Western media and academics. Nevertheless, the conflict has amplified the political and geopolitical nuances of inter-Orthodox relations within Ukraine and global Orthodoxy.

In an attempt to counter the Russian government's claim of the existence of a "Russian world" *(Russkiy mir),* a Russian cultural, political and spiritual sphere of influence that includes "Little Russia" (Ukraine), the Ukrainian state became involved in the creation of a new *independent* Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The literature was thus divided between those who analysed the history of the achievement of autocephaly as a *separate* and autonomous movement compared to the quest for independence and separation from Russian influence, those who saw the results as *correlative* factors of a deeper conflict, and those who instead analysed the outcomes as *consequential* to a path that had already been traced. However, the problematic nature of these different interpretations is the lack or distorted perception of in-depth studies of the dynamics within a few centimetres of Eastern Europe, as well as the minimisation of a clash of identities or, to use Juergensmeyer's typology (1996), ethno-ideological religious nationalisms.

There was a time when dissimilar and, therefore, *divergent civilisations* would probably have been discussed, but the history between Russia and Ukraine is not only complicated but also *interconnected*.

To avoid the risk of chasing after the events of a conflict that shows no sign of arresting, realising that publications on current affairs tend to quickly become obsolete, while predictions on the future are always risky, this writing proposes the observation of the years 2013/2014 up to 2022, and aims to present the religious dimension as a concause, or legitimising factor, of an identity conflict by answering the question: *how did the religious dimension play a role in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict?*

The Euromaidan or Revolution of Dignity, which began in late 2013, seems to be the keystone of long-dormant clashes, dramatically reshaping Russian-Western political relations and provoking an escalation of tensions between Russia and Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea,

support for the "separatists" in the Donbas, and militant opposition to Ukraine's accession to Western institutions such as NATO and the EU are all part of a broader "civilization" project inspired by the union between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), the Russian state, and the Russian World.

The Russian World has become a manifestation of Russian religious nationalism and what today, we could call "neo-imperial", as reported in the transcript of the interview in the paragraph "the interviews", by the journalist Mattia Bernardo Bagnoli. On the one hand, the concept of the Russian World manifests *the religious narrative of the ROC* and, on the other, encapsulates *the messianic mission* of the Russian state's foreign policy in its immediate neighbourhood, or Russian terminology, the "near abroad". The latter is justified by the former in a powerful mixture of territorial and sovereignist claims. Despite the militants' stated goals of protecting the rights of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) and a Russian-linked Orthodoxy in Ukraine, the clashes had a clear impact on the interests of the ROC in Ukraine and on its position in the entire Orthodox world. The social trust of the UOC-MP, the ROC and its leaders decreased significantly. Many UOC-MP communities have changed religious jurisdiction. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople legitimised Ukrainian Orthodox churches. It conferred autocephaly on the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) in 2018, calling into question Ukraine's status as a canonical territory of the ROC.

The dissertation consists of three parts.

The starting point for this analysis is a review of those who have discussed the events from the spring of 2014 to the signing of the Minsk agreements, the acquisitive aggression conducted by the new form of Russian foreign policy, and dwelling on constructivist theories. Focusing on narratives, constructivist studies explore the role of *agents* in promoting particular understandings of social reality, including their interpretations of identity and interests, while recognising that these understandings are themselves shaped by dominant discourses in Russia and Ukraine. Many constructivists do not explicitly dwell on nationalism; however, their emphasis on ideational factors indicates a potential overlap with the topic. For instance, some authors have pointed out how Russian assertiveness has been underpinned by a new focus on "soft power", which seeks to promote Russia as a "centre of values", including a naturally existing community of civilisations based on a common Russian language, traditions and culture; the Soviet historiography of a common past; the legitimisation of state-society relations; hierarchy; a Russian-centric world. These are all elements of the notion of *Russkii mir* according to the definition proposed by Valentina Feklyunina (2016), which is explored in more detail in the section on "The Historical and Religious Context of the Russo-Ukrainian

Conflict". In support of some constructivist visions of a "civilising turn", it is noted that, even before the more recent conservative turn, a dominant theme of cultural and political nationalism emphasised the uniqueness of Russian civilization as opposed to the Western "Other". This is then linked to the literature proposed by those who have delved into the religious dimension within the broader conflicts and, in particular, with those who have been able to use religious sentiments as a magnifying glass for the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

However, the theoretical framework on religions and conflicts deserves analysis in its own right and it is briefly explored in the section "A theoretical framework on religions and conflicts", in which the perspectives of those who consider religion as a factor in inciting violent conflict or *a method of legitimising* insurrection are reported. More specifically, Zeev Maoz and Errol A. Henderson (2020) masterfully summarise the different interpretations in the definitions of *primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist*.

Turning the analysis back to the subject of this research, it is emphasised how the religious dimension operates in the more appropriate context of *inter-state conflicts*, as in the case of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Here it is underlined how religion, although not the sole driver of inter-state conflicts, represents one of the most significant conflict factors. The role of religion in generating and inhibiting armed conflicts between states is examined, a matter, therefore, of foreign policy and not just domestic political rhetoric.

The willingness to scrutinise how the community was formed and what dynamics guided the interaction between the groupings of individuals of the different factions under a true formation of religious allegiances in Ukraine is evidenced in the contribution of studies conducted by the sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer.

Since 1996, Professor Juergensmeyer has pointed out how some religious traditions, with universal claims and global ambitions, also offer resources to strengthen local identities.

Ethno-ideological religious development advances along a path in which the recognition of a state of discontent intersects with the perception that the problem is, in some ways, religious, that political difficulties have a religious cause and that religious goals have a political solution. Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for the separatists in the Donbas are presented as archetypal examples of nationalist foreign policy, Acting as legitimising factors of a political project partially justified on the basis of the defence of ethnic Russians and of the reunification of the Russian nation. However, the religiously motivated political conflict differs from a purely ethnic discourse insofar as public life appears to be regulated by certain religious principles. It is not simply tied to the question of who can control resources, recognition and opportunities for cultural reproduction. As stated in my interview by Anna Fratsyvir, Ukrainian

student winner of the selection promoted by the European Commission and the Education and Culture Executive Agency on the occasion of the European Year of Youth 2022 for the "Youth Talks": "*this is not just a war for natural resources. Russia has everything, but it also desires to spread an ideology again, to be a hegemonic leader.*"

In the second part of the research, an attempt is made to intersect historical events with concrete examples of what has been stated so far, such as when on 22 December 2018, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko signed a law that required the UOC-MP to change its name to make its affiliation with the ROC clear. To do this, two moments are identified: a *"before"* and an "*after*" 2014, ending on 24 February 2022, when Russia crossed the Ukrainian border into several areas and bombed several cities and infrastructures.

In other words, any discussion of Russian foreign policy would be incomplete without investigating the role played by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in promoting *Russkii Mir*. Similarly, any enquiry into the construction of a Ukrainian post-Soviet identity would be fragmentary without investigating the differences between the Orthodox Churches Moscow Patriarchate and Kyiv Patriarchate that led to the demand for and recognition of *Ukrainian Autocephaly.*

In conclusion, to provide an overview of the decisive art that the religious dimension could have played in the inter-state conflict, a brief exposition of the concept of "*multitrack diplomacy*" is provided.

This last element finds no basis either in the literature reviewed or in the statements made by the interviewees, reported in this last chapter. In times of conflict, the leaders of the world's great religions can provide "the necessary social capital", according to Professor Pasquale Ferrara, for "the creation of networks and the promotion of a relationship of mutual trust, essential for the development of lasting peace" (P. Ferrara, 2014, p.18). Nevertheless, in the case of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the latter does not seemed to have happened, nor are there any significant cases of de-escalation reported during the period under review, and this brings us back to the question of *how the religious dimension played a role in the Russian - Ukrainian conflict.*

I. STATE OF THE ART

Investigating the roots of the hostility between Russia and Ukraine is of particular interest today, given the violent re-ignition of the conflict. Many authors are questioning the deep-seated reasons that triggered the military escalation that has persisted for months and accompanies the drafting of this thesis with the ever-new discovery of unpublished themes and observations, even prior to the Ukrainian territorial invasion by Russia on 24 February 2022.

In 2022, Central European University Press published "The War in Ukraine's Donbas Origins, Contexts, and the Future" edited by David R. Marples, in which the events from the spring of 2014 to the signing of the Minsk Agreements are chronologically reported through the reflections on social and public life in the conflict zone by Oksana Mikheieva from the Ukrainian Catholic University of Lviv, and Oleksandr Melnyk, a post-doctoral fellow at the Ukrainian Research Institute of Harvard University, who analyses the topic of cultural identities, (inter)community ethics and reconciliation politics in the context of the "Evacuation-200" initiative. The mission was initiated by the Department of Civil-Military Cooperation of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in early September 2014 following the Battle of Ilovaisk, in which several volunteers brought back from the conflict zone and the Donetsk National Republic and Luhansk National Republic nearly 800 bodies of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians, as well as a smaller number of Russian insurgents and volunteers. The analysis provides interesting food for thought on the relationship between State and civil society.

Later in 2022, the political scientist Taras Kuzio presented a historical understanding of "President Vladimir Putin's obsession with Ukraine" and why Western aversion and sanctions have not deterred Russian military aggression. His book identifies the sources of this lack of acceptance of Ukrainian autonomy within certain elements that characterise Russian national identity.

In the "Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy", Andrei P. Tsygankov (2018) paints an overview of contemporary Russian politics. A complex volume that explores the social and material conditions in which foreign policy is formed and implemented. The text analyses the instruments and actors involved in policy-making, including diplomacy, the military and the media. It contextualises them in the country's relations with the United States, Europe and Asia. In addition, the most influential theories of international relations are presented.

Elena Kropatcheva's (2018) chapter shows how *realists* explain Russian empire-building, status claims and military interventions. *The balance of power* seems to be the key to understanding the conditions and opportunities to which Russia reacts according to the

perceptions and constraints of its leaders. One thinks of Russian opposition to NATO expansion, understood as a threat to national security and an obstacle to the Kremlin's pursuit of the great power position, or Russia's military interventions in Ukraine, perceived as "a global competition with the United States for power and security in an anarchic environment" (Andrei P. Tsygankov, 2018).

Russia's policy in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea and destabilisation strategies in the east would therefore be nothing more than a *defensive* reaction to the policies of the West (Elena Kropatcheva, 2018). For others, however, the annexation of Crimea marks a new phase of acquisitive *aggression*, a new form of foreign policy for Russia that has "victimised Ukraine". Picking up on the theses of American political scientist and international relations realist John Joseph Mearsheimer, the most powerful governments not only aim to have the most material resources in their region of the world, but also wish to limit the independence of their neighbours' foreign policies (Elias Götz, 2016). Ukraine, albeit partially, encountered the alternative of EU and NATO affiliation and saw it as a means to establish a counterweight position to Russia's impulses.

The opposition is thus evident with the *constructivist* school, which views Russian foreign policy in aspirational terms, believes in the logic of social interaction between international and domestic, and argues that *"normative or ideational structures are as important as material structures"* (Reus-Smit, 2013, p.224). While not denying the importance of material factors, constructivists generally believe these factors are not important in themselves but through the shared meanings that actors attach to them. The constructivist approach' emphasis on shared knowledge demonstrates the importance of *intersubjectivity* since, it is argued, international identities, interests, norms, and rules develop and change within specific cultural and historical contexts. According to Flemming Splidsboel-Hansen (2015), if Russia has perceived "Euro-Maidan" and Victor Yanukovych's loss of power as "instigated by the West", it is because Russia responds to cognitive filters intertwined with a collective identity, which cause these systemic inputs to be interpreted by the Russian elite and the public in a negative way. As Craig Calhoun (2013) stated in an interview: *"the way we understand what it means to resolve things by voting or discussing conflicts between Muslims, Christians, Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Orthodox...each of these is a product of the way the world has been imagined. The way the solidarity of people within groups has been shaped by that imagination and has been made historically real[1]"*.

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[1] Calhoun, C. (2013, 19 November). The power of imagination. (N. z. Fürstenberg, Interviewer)

The object of constructivist analysis is thus not only the relationship between states but the construction of reality as an imaginative product. The study of material elements is subordinated to the search for the "meaning" and "understanding" of the ideas and beliefs that inform the actors on the international scene (Fierke & Jørgensen, 2001).

Furthermore, while the religious dimension within conflicts is examined by many, the particular use of religion as a lens in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is the subject of varied and complex literature.

Dmytro Vovk (2020) reads the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a driver of the changed Church-State system in relation to areas of national security, such as autocephaly for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. According to the author, *de jure* and *de facto,* Orthodox Churches enjoy special partner status with the State, as well as various exclusive privileges and opportunities. According to the Russian worldview, the relations between *Sacerdotium* and *Imperium* are based on the principle of their *"harmonic relationship" (simfonija valsteij)*. Although political and religious institutions have always coexisted, "the alliance between throne and altar", "the symphonic model," or "improperly caesaropapism" has led to considerable overlap creating new theological difficulties (I. Gabriel, A. Papanikolaou, & K. Stoeckl, 2017, p.3). Church and nation are seen as realities relentless and inseparable from each other, and Moscow becomes the political and religious capital of the universe, uniting the religious factor with a political ideal (G. Codevilla, 2018).

Elizabeth A. Clark and Dmytro Vovk (2020) in "Religion During the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict" offer an interesting analysis of the multiple roles of religion in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict from 2014 to 2018, examine the creation of the new Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its ramifications in the geopolitical sphere. This volume is part of the series "Routledge Religion, Society and Government in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet States" edited by Lucian Leustean, a reader in politics and international relations at Aston University, Birmingham. This series consists of a set of monographs dealing with religion and society in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states, focusing mainly on the history of churches in relation to governmental structures, the impact of intellectual ideas on religious values, and the role of religions and faith-based communities in promoting national identities. According to Elizabeth A. Clark and Dmytro Vovk (2020), the use of religion as an *accelerator or marker of identity* was, in fact, particularly evident in the Donbas, where many Ukrainian churches and interfaith organisations called for a cessation of violence and reconciliation and spoke out against Russia's aggressive policies towards Ukraine.

In the chapter by Elizabeth A. Clark (2020), the situation in Russia and Ukraine is analysed through the use of the concepts of emotional engagement and civil religion, emphasising the resulting challenges to religious freedom. In other words, the author underscores how minorities are marginalised at the expense of majority religions in times of war, i.e. when religion's emotional and spiritual resonance increases.

Also, Stanislav Panin (2020), through a survey of the media in Russia, examines the ideological patterns concerning *marginal religious groups* and unaffiliated spiritualities in Russia during the conflict in Ukraine.

Tymofiy Brik and Stanislav Korolkov (2020) provide a spatial analysis of religious diversity and freedom in Ukraine. After exploring data on registered religious communities in Ukraine between the Euromaidan of 2013-2014 and the emergence of the new independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine at the end of 2018, the authors state that the number of registered UOC-KP communities increased after Euromaidan, while the number of UOC-MP communities remained stable, interpreted as a potential sign of state or local favouritism towards the UOC-KP.

For Cyril Hovorun (2020), the decision of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to grant autocephaly was precisely a popular initiative supported by the government. Although numerous attempts to acquire autocephaly are reported throughout the 20th century, Professor Hovorun highlights that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict was the catalyst for the UOC's cause.

Jerry G. Pankhurst's (2020) hypothesis is that relations between Russian Orthodoxy and Ukrainian Orthodoxy would have changed, due to Euromaidan, in seven historical, political, geopolitical and ecclesiastical aspects. These include: the creation of an independent Ukrainian state; the development of the country's political elite and society; Russian aggression; Ukraine's tendency to move closer to the West; the restructuring of the global Orthodox Church, which altered the power dynamics between the ROC and the Ecumenical Patriarchate; the struggle for political leadership, and the question of UOC autocephaly. Among the main variables postulated by Jerry G. Pankhurst (2020) is the realisation that *"new states such as Ukraine, through a historical process, reach a level of maturity in national identity that allows them to begin to act with authority"*. All fifteen post-Soviet states were new, and each had to develop and institutionalise a national identity. This requirement then opened up a contestation in the symbolic spheres and a debate on how to reconcile religion and national identity.

The Church is seen as a cultural institution interconnected with other cultural parts. The change of one of the parts stimulates the change of the others. Although Ukraine and Russia are multi-confessional states, each has a symbolic historical relationship with the Orthodox Churches

there. For over three centuries, the Orthodox Churches in Russia and Ukraine have been linked, with temporary variations given by major political upheavals, under the Moscow Patriarchate. Trying to adapt to the State's independence from Russia on the international stage, the Ukrainian Orthodox achieved their Church's self-celebration through the aforementioned factors (Jerry G. Pankhurst, 2020, pp.160). Each factor was a *contingency* that could have taken a different direction. However, their confluence opened the door to the Ukrainians' *imagination* that they could have their *own* Church and break away from Russia.

Denys Shestopalets' essay (2020) demonstrates the narrative of "politicisation" and "de-politicisation" that the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) used instead to shape their divergent attitudes and modes of action concerning the Euromaidan between November 2013 and February 2014. While the UGCC actively demonstrated its involvement in the protests by virtue of a "choice of civilisation", viewing them as a broad cultural issue concerning the ultimate definition of Ukrainian identity, the UOC-MP defined *European integration* as a political case. According to the UOC-MP, the Church was to be formally exempted from the need to express itself publicly on the issue, given the risk of compromising its internal unity. In doing so, however, the declared neutrality of the UOC-MP *de facto* supported the state authorities, designating the protest as a manifestation of political power struggles and another source of division among the Ukrainian population. Furthermore, Denys Shestopalets (2020) asserted that the UGCC archbishop Sviatoslav was a crucial figure in the symbolic conceptualisation of Euromaidan as the "Maidan of Dignity" or the "Revolution of Dignity". As proof, he quoted the following speech given by the primate during an interview with the Russian radio station "Ekho Moskvy" in December 2013:

> *"Already at the beginning of October 2013, representatives of all churches and religious organisations of Ukraine, including me, visited Brussels where we, on behalf of Ukrainian citizens specifically – not politicians, not oligarchs, not the government but our flock – wanted to tell our European friends that the Ukrainian people had made their choice. This choice is European integration. And this choice unites not only one region, e. g. western Ukraine, and not just one confession, for instance, the Greek Catholic Church[2]."*

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[2] Denys Shestopalets (2020). Churches, Politics, and Ideological Struggles in Ukraine: The Case of the Euromaidan Protests (2013–2014), Politics, Religion & Ideology, p.60

However, it should be noted in the primate's discourse that the UGCC needed to maximise the legitimacy of its actions and thus express itself not as the representative of a regional church in western Ukraine, but as the spokesperson of a national phenomenon that enjoyed support from the *entire* population. However, data from various social surveys repeatedly confirmed that the population did not unanimously support Euromaidan in all regions of the country. In December 2013, the archpriest of the UOC-MP, Heorhii Kovalenko, posted a message on his Facebook page describing the various forms of clerical activity during Euromaidan as "politically polluted":

> *"I am being asked why none of our priests are on the Maidan. And because such an activity is demonstrated by Greek Catholics, perhaps, this is the time to respond publicly. Firstly, our priests are present there, and this can be seen on Facebook, but they are there as citizens with their point of view and not as political instructors ['politruk'] or party organisers ['partorg']. Our Church does not need to promote itself through political action. Secondly, I do not understand why we need tent churches on the Maidan at all. [...] The Church has dissociated itself from 'political Orthodoxy' and has always asked that church symbols or rhetoric not be used in the political process[3]".*

According to the writings of Catherine Wanner and Viktor Yelensky (2019), the early leaders of the Ukrainian national movement understood the importance of religion in strengthening national identity but conceived of its usefulness in different ways. For some, religion played a significant role in everyday life and served as a vehicle for the expression and preservation of language, customs and religious traditions; for others, however, they argued that Orthodoxy was a fundamental component of Ukrainian-Russian identity and therefore detrimental to the growth of Ukrainian nationalism.

i. A theoretical framework on religions and conflicts

The relationship between religion and conflict is generally regarded as the *cause, inspiration or exacerbating factor* of violence (Reina C. Neufeldt, 2011).
Some argue that religion *incites* violent conflict when it establishes end goals, such as a religious legal system, or when it encourages persecution of observers of other faiths. The lack of agreement on shared goals is one of the leading causes of all conflicts. The perception of

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[3] Denys Shestopalets (2020). Churches, Politics, and Ideological Struggles in Ukraine: The Case of the Euromaidan Protests (2013–2014), Politics, Religion & Ideology, p.62

mutually incompatible goals and the claim that "the other" shares the same values as us make conflict inevitable (James F. Rinehart, 2010). As early as the 1930s, Lewis F. Richardson argued for the existence of a relationship between religious dissimilarity and conflict. Using the "Cultural Composition of Interstate System Members dataset of the Correlates of War Project", J. David Singer (1997) argued that religiously similar states were less likely to fight interstate wars against each other than religiously *dissimilar* states. Since culture creates identity, States are more likely to share similar norms, perceptions, beliefs and preferences if they share a common identity. Cultural ties or distances between two countries can impact their antagonistic interactions. Just as coordination is facilitated by cultural *similarity*, dispute resolution is also facilitated (Vincenzo Bove & Gunes Gokmen, 2016).

In contrast, other researchers have stated that religion *exacerbates* conflict when political elites use it to mobilise supporters, legitimise insurgency, and enlist and inspire fighters, as Juergensmeyer, M. (2012) writes:

> *In the images of religious war, this victorious triumph is a grand moment of social and personal transformation, transcending all worldly limitations. One does not easily abandon such expectations. To be without such images of war is almost to be without hope itself. The idea of warfare has had an eerie and intimate relationship with religion.[4]*

Most of these studies have used Huntigton's characterisation of "civilisations" as the source of their argument on "religiously similar states".

Some scholars of religion and conflict have argued that religious beliefs directly influence a population's behaviour. In contrast, others believe religion is a benign transformative force in politics that challenges existing theories and methods of understanding international relations. Still, others believe that religion can destabilise world politics because of its inherent connection to forms of *nationalism* that promote violence. Moreover, many argue that it is not religion itself but the mobilisation of religion by political actors that leads to severe religious violence (Peter S Henne, 2012). According to Max Weber (1946), nationalism implies allegiance to an authority that holds a monopoly on the "legitimate use of physical force" in a given society, while Anthony Giddens (1985) describes nationalism as the "cultural sensibility of sovereignty", implying that, in part, it is precisely the awareness of being subject to an

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[4] Juergensmeyer, M. (2012). Religion in the New Global War. *Di http://www. wcfia. harvard. edu/sites/default/files/614_Juergensmeyer. pdf, diakses*, *3*(20), 2012.

authority invested with so much power that gives nationalism its strength (M. Juergensmeyer, 2010).

The extensive use of dyadic variables to identify the cultural identity of each State in the international system is a key attribute of most of this research. According to Huntington, a civilisation is "the highest cultural group of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have" (Vincenzo Bove & Gunes Gokmen, 2016). Huntington further argues that distinct macrocultural regions can be identified worldwide, including Western, Latin American, Confucian (Sinic), Islamic, Slavic Orthodox, Hindu, Japanese, Buddhist and African civilisations. As is evident, religion is the main distinguishing feature of civilisation and wars between civilisations typically arise between groups of people practising dissimilar religions (Vincenzo Bove & Gunes Gokmen, 2016). In doing so, however, it is assumed that the definition of religion is that of a proponent of stability, coherence and continuity of society. Furthermore, while it is true that, as A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1945), religion can contribute to social cohesion as the bearer of morality, the consistency of human action should not be taken for granted.

In **"Global Religions and International Relations: A Diplomatic Perspective"**, Professor Pasquale Ferrara (2014) reaffirmed the need to go beyond the usual "clash of civilisations" without running the risk of incurring into the "constraint of including religions within the broader cultural phenomena" or "compressing the question of identity," limiting it within the confines of the religious phenomenon (P. Ferrara, 2014, p.8).

In "Scriptures, Shrines, Scapegoats, and World Politics", published in 2020, Zeev Maoz and Errol A. Henderson question how the religious characteristics of States and their environment should therefore influence the scope, timing and nature of their involvement in international conflicts. The authors summarise the literary landscape of the discipline into three main perspectives: *primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist.*

The primordialist perspective considers religion as a permanent political force, an intrinsic source of conflict that, however, is not equally powerful in all societies but is determined by the degree of separation between religious/political institutions and the religious homogeneity/diversity of the society. In other words, the more religiously homogeneous a society is, the more intertwined its religious and political institutions are and the greater its level of involvement in conflicts.

Religiously homogeneous states, which have a close association between religious and political institutions, are also those most likely to use identity factors to motivate their external relations. When determining the circumstances justifying the use of force, defining allies and enemies,

and determining national objectives, religious leaders and political leaders are more likely to be in accord.

According to Henne's study (2012), precisely because of the close ties between religious and State institutions, a State is more or less inclined to use religious ideas, values and symbols when confronting a "secular" enemy. When there are intimate ties between religion and State, when a religious state is at odds with a secular state, religion influences conflict behaviour by causing an ideological distance between the adversaries, making the use of force in the conflict more likely (Peter S Henne, 2012). Religious factors examined according to the primordialist approach thus have the capacity to both *trigger and fuel* wars between states. They make conflicts more violent, protracted and less amenable to a negotiated resolution, adding an element of indivisibility to an already zero-sum game (Zeev Maoz and Errol A. Henderson, 2020, pp. 155-160).

The thesis that sees religions as an intrinsic *cause* of conflict is then articulated in a second school of thought, the *instrumentalist* school, for which religions can become an instrument of social mobilisation when society is religiously homogeneous and when religious and political institutions are closely related. According to this perspective, religions *reinforce* contemporary politics' "securitisation processes" (P. Ferrara, 2014, p.12).

The assumptions of the instrumentalist perspective concern the *effect* of religious variables on national conflict behaviour. The first is that religious factors are more likely to influence the conflict behaviour of politically unstable states than politically stable ones. The second is that politically unstable states are more likely to engage in conflict against religiously dissimilar states (Zeev Maoz and Errol A. Henderson, 2020, pp. 161-162). These assumptions are based on simple causal mechanisms. Political leaders whose political survival is at risk are more likely to use conflict as a diversionary tool to counter internal opposition. Moreover, in such circumstances, leaders tend to manipulate threats to fundamental values or make significant claims on assets held by other states, motivating people to ignore their everyday problems and risk their lives for their country.

According to the studies of analysts who support the idea that all reality is constructed, conflicts can be *caused* by factors such as culture, beliefs and values. People define and sustain their existence through language, rituals, and conceptions of the sacred.

The constructivist perspective agrees with the primordial idea that religion is an important marker of identity; however, it suggests that religion, as well as other cultural characteristics such as language, competes with *the interactive experience of the State*. In an infinite co-constitutive cycle, the activities of the agents within the structure, the states, instantiate the

normative structure, which in turn is reproduced by the agents (Dessler, 1989). Suppose one thinks of religion as the cultural expression of a people's ultimate sense of meaning. In that case, it is understandable that these cultural elements interact and change over time just as people have. "Religion is global in that it is linked to the global transport of peoples and ideas" (M. Juergensmeyer, 2006).

Identity is shaped by experiential factors, which change according to the interaction between the State and its external environment, between socially constructed international ideas such as democracy, interdependence or anarchy. As states accumulate interactive experiences, the significance of religion as a predominant marker of identity diminishes. Religious sentiment is a strong social force, but the political relevance of religion depends on the environments in which it is practised. As Rogers Brubaker (2015) points out, religion is often used as a possible marker of belonging, a source of solidarity, or identity. However, strictly speaking, this type of study does not represent a real generalising strategy for the study of religion but rather a study of *ethnicity*. Conflicts involving religiously identified parties need not involve "religiously defined stakes". They can be conflicts caused by divergent political powers, the need for economic resources, reasons for symbolic recognition or the achievement of national self-determination.

Furthermore, only in the latter case is it possible to subsume religion under the repertoire of *politicised ethnicity*. Indeed, to understand the effect of religion on contemporary inter-state disputes, one must first consider that the nature of the institutional connections between religion and the State determines the extent to which religion influences state behaviour. It is necessary to observe, for example, whether the constitutional law is based on religious norms or whether there are forms of favouritism towards the official religion, which may take the form of support for the activities of the religion or restrictions towards minority religions. Peter S. Henne (2012) summarises these connections into four categories of states: *religious State,* where there are strong institutional links with religion*; civil State,* where there is no official religion, although religion still plays an important role in the functioning of the State and there are some laws based on religion or some official favouritism towards religious groups*; passive secular State,* where there is a clear separation of religion and State, but religion is allowed to play a role in politics; and, *assertive secular State,* which limits the role of religion in politics. When religious organisations have institutional links with the State, religion has an impact on State policies; this gives religious groups influence over politicians and increases the significance of religious beliefs in a nation's politics (Peter S Henne, 2012). For this reason, according to the typology proposed by Zeev Maoz and Errol A. Henderson, religion is

significant in societies where there is no separation of religion and State. The authors also postulated the following axioms, although not always supported by empirical evidence:

C1. Religious factors are more likely to affect the conflict behaviour of states at their early stages of national independence than at the latter stages.

C2. Religiously similar states are less likely to engage in conflict if one or both states are newly formed than if both have been independent for a long time.

C3. Religious factors are more likely to affect conflict levels in newly formed regions than in regions where most states have been independent for a long time.

Looking at these axioms, however, reveals the introduction of another element characterising the relationship between religion and conflict, that of the "nation-state". The nation-state is the most common target of spatial identification because it can give people a sense of unity; it is endowed with history, real or imagined, that provides a sense of continuity; it has borders that create a sense of group distinction and differentiation from the "other". It has political and cultural institutions that constantly remind people of their belonging to the group, producing so-called rituals of "banal nationalism" (Billig, 1995).

The theory and practice of national identification and state-building, used in all former Soviet republics, depend on history, although this is particularly complex in Ukraine.

The severe crisis that Ukraine experienced after the fall of the USSR fostered the growth of "mythological awareness", which contributed both to the preservation of a Soviet mythological element in the collective identity and to the psychological adaptation of society to the unsettling circumstances (V. Kravchenko, 2015). For most Russians, Ukraine remained a member of the triune Russian Orthodox nation, alongside "Great Russia" and "White Russia", Belarus. For this reason, in the unofficial hierarchy of the peoples of the Soviet Union, ethnic Ukrainians were ranked as "second among equals" after ethnic Russians. Kyiv was the religious heart of the Orthodox world and the "mother of Russian cities"; Sevastopol and Poltava were enduring symbols of imperial Russia's military might. The only realistic alternative to Soviet communism, therefore, seemed to be a new form of nationalism. The Ukrainian authorities faced the task of reforming the institutions, borders and symbolic space of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic into national equivalents (V. Kravchenko, 2015). According to the national paradigm, the entire Soviet history is considered a foreign occupation. Ukraine within the USSR is portrayed as a victim of Russian imperialism. With other nations of the "socialist camp", Ukrainians were seen as a captive nation dreaming of restoring their state independence

and returning to the "family of Europe". The aim is to revive an idealised image of Ukrainian statehood rather than portray the current reality, particularly the many histories of the territories that make up modern Ukraine (M. Bagnoli, 2021).

According to the constructivist view, an individual, a social group or a community must understand and share the meaning of being part of a nation to determine what is in its interest (Thomas, S.M., 2005). And since both the territorial extent and temporal depth of a nation are beyond the immediate experience of any individual, the constitution and existence of a nation imply the transmission of traditions and their interpretation.

In "The Intervening Function of Religion in International Conflict", Professor Rinehart (2010) argues that religion plays a significant role in contemporary international relations because it enables the achievement of the goals of national and sub-national groups involved in conflicts. According to the process he describes, religion, firstly, builds identity foundations; secondly, it establishes rules; thirdly, it provides a methodology for problem-solving; and finally, it *legitimises* authority to pursue established goals. In the case of the Russian Orthodox Church, religion, in exchange for protection, acts as a source of legitimisation of state authority, establishing itself as a nation-building force (G. Codevilla, 2018, p.95). Based on *social contract theories*, this process involves a community within a defined *territory* whose members share cultural or civic characteristics and a common vision of the future. Religious groups influence to varying degrees the intensity these place attachments are experienced and how the contours of group loyalties or antagonisms are defined (Harned, 2022). In religious states, close ties between religion and the State grant favoured religious groups greater institutional access and funding, increasing their political power (Henne, 2012). Moreover, religion-state connections intensify the ties between regime elites and religious groups, making it more likely that elites come from or are aligned with religious groups. Moreover, religion-state connections amplify the significance of religious symbols in political discourse (Nexon, 2009).

In summary, interactive experience can *reinforce* the importance of religion as a prism through which the elites and masses of states identify friends and enemies. In others, religions become *"explosive"* when used to forge identity (Pasquale Ferrara, 2014, p.14), i.e. when they *"offer their powerful symbolic repertoire to social and political actors, who use it to talk about strictly mundane issues"*. Indeed, it often happens that religions "take the place of ideologies" because of the "need to fill an identity gap" (Pasquale Ferrara, 2014, pp. 10-11).

ii. Religion in Interstate Conflicts

The link between religious conflict and nation leads us to the more accurate discussion of "inter-state conflicts".

Religion from an inter-state perspective is *'a religion inside a box'*, a way of combining religion and nationalism. This is a topic that Kenneth Waltz (1959) would have included in his "second picture", i.e. the "motivations of states" behaviour in the international arena (Pasquale Ferrara, 2014). Highlighting the importance of institutions and religion-state connections exclusively runs the risk, in fact, of only observing domestic politics. On the contrary, the fundamental interest of this analysis is to understand when domestic religious sentiment and international issues combine to threaten the legitimacy of a regime. As such, religion could be seen as a critical driver of foreign policy (Pasquale Ferrara, 2014, p.28). According to Davis Brown's (2020) definition:

> *Interstate armed conflict is different: it involves two juridical equals in a Hobbesian environment where all parties can seriously harm all others. The natures of their respective casus belli are different also: in intra- and extra-state wars, non-state actors react to real or perceived abuse of states' internal sovereign prerogatives, but interstate war ensues because one sovereign's armed forces have intruded on the exclusive prerogative of the other (by border crossing, blockade, seizure, or outright attack). While the ethical grounds for legitimate force might overlap these three types of armed conflicts, we only know this to be confirmed once those war ethics are examined through interstate interaction.*

Davis Brown (2020) examines the role of religion in generating and inhibiting armed conflicts between states, arguing that religious ideas can influence their decisions to use military force against other states, even in the case of inter-state conflicts with no overtly religious objectives. In fact, he argues that religion is not the sole driver of armed inter-state conflict but is one of several significant conflict factors. Most, if not all, inter-state interactions are characterised by subtlety, ambiguity, misunderstanding, dishonesty and, ultimately, uncertainty. Particularly in situations of hostile deterrence, policymakers are often unable to understand the adversary's preferences; at best, they can only hope for a probabilistic understanding of the main factors (Frank C. Zagare and D. Marc Kilgour, 2000, p.104). In other words, religion may not only have been the bearer of national traditions but may also have contributed to the formation of a

nation through various developments. In the case of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the analysis of Ukrainian national and religious narratives should be understood in light of Russian religious nationalism and its application to Ukraine.

iii. The Concept of Religious Nationalism

In "The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism", Mark Juergensmeyer (1996) presents three types of religious nationalism:

- ethnic religious nationalism;
- ideological religious nationalism;
- religious ethno-ideological nationalism.

Ethnic religious nationalism is a type of "people and land related" nationalism in which religion is seen as a high aspect of ethnic identity.

Ethnicity studies emerged to make sense of the multitude of identity mobilisations and claims that challenged the models of political development, national integration and the civilised nation-state proposed by mid-century modernisation theory. Ethnicity has been constituted as an object of study in this line of work by abstracting from the specificities of religion but also of language and other ascriptive markers as attributes of identity and difference (Rogers Brubaker, 2015). Professor Juergensmeyer (1996) uses the term "ethnic" to refer to communities connected by history or culture who feel oppressed or restricted within an old social order and wish to establish their own political identity, usually in their own geographical region.

Religious conceptions of right order exist at the personal, family, community, social and cosmic levels. Considered separately, visions of the right order may be compatible with the conception of religion as a vastly intimate and personal sphere of activity. However, in many religious traditions, personal, familial, communal, social and cosmic forms of order are understood as closely interconnected, and it is this framework that forms of public religious claims challenge the understanding of religion and politics as distinctly differentiated spheres (Rogers Brubaker, 2015).

Scholarly attempts to define religion always emphasise the importance of order. As Durkheim (1976) observed, religion has a wider force than can be suggested by any dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. For Durkheim, the religious point of view includes both the idea that such a dichotomy exists and the belief that, as a structure of ultimate order, "the sacred side will always reign supreme" (Mark Juergensmeyer, 2010). In this context, religion is merged with a culture of domination or liberation. Religion is "politicised" by the ethnic approach to religious nationalism, and religious identities are instrumentalised for political ends.

Ideological religious nationalism is "linked to ideas and beliefs". Juergensmeyer (1996) uses the term "ideology" by looking at the meaning proposed by "the French ideologists of the 18th century", who were "consciously creating a framework of values and moral positions that would play the same role in supporting the new secular social order that traditional religion had played in favour of the old". According to one of the ideologists, Destutt de Tracy, whose 1817 book Elements of Ideology introduced the term to the world, "logic" was to be the only basis of the "moral and political sciences", an interpretation that the author called paradoxical given the anti-scientific drift often associated with the term (M. Juergensmeyer, 2010)

In "The global rise of religious nationalism" (1996), the sociologist argues that ideologues were equating their "science of ideas", what they called ideology, and what we call religion. Similarly, religious nationalists are rejecting the ideological foundations of Western secular nationalism and replacing them with a new ideological framework, which combines traditional religious beliefs with the modern notion of the nation-state; in contrast to the ethnic approach, ideological religious nationalism "religionises" politics. Political issues and struggles are placed in a sacred context, "compatibility with religious goals becomes the criterion for an acceptable political platform". Religious ideas are erected as edifying sources of governmental authority, and national aspirations are merged with religious quests for "purity and redemption".

Both religious and secular-nationalistic frameworks of thought conceive of the world in coherent, manageable ways; they both suggest that there are levels of meaning beneath the day-to-day world that give coherence to things unseen, and they both provide the authority that gives the social and political order its reason for being. In doing so, they define for the individual the right way of being in the world and relate persons to the social whole.[5]

The constitution of a social whole has often led some religious nationalists to see their secular leaders as part of a conspiracy controlled perhaps by foreign political networks and, for this reason, to obstruct them. Even more often, the conflict grafts with leaders far beyond national borders.

Ethno-ideological nationalism combines the other two forms while acquiring both ethnic and ideological characteristics. Similarly, it identifies both ethnic rivals and secular leaders of its own people as "enemies". In "Thinking Globally About Religion", Mark Juergensmeyer (2002) argues that religion has always been global: religious communities and traditions have always maintained permeable boundaries, and have moved, shifted and interacted with each other across the globe. In some religious traditions, with universal claims and global ambitions, there is no doubt that "the other" can convert to the faith. Nevertheless, religious affiliation not only provides a link to transnational networks but also offers resources to strengthen local identities (M. Juergensmeyer, 2019). Ethno-ideological religious development matures along a path in which awareness of dissatisfaction intersects with the perception that the problem is, at some level, religious, that political difficulties have a religious cause, and that religious goals have a political solution.

The idea of pursuing a policy of defence against the Russian Federation, even in the pursuit of obtaining religious autonomy, seems to place the Russian-Ukrainian case in this typology. Indeed, the story of the achievement of an autocephalous church is reminiscent of the attempt to "establish one's own political identity" (Juergensmeyer, 1996).

II. THE HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

i. History before-2014

In the 1990s, there was a widespread feeling that the new State needed a *united* Ukrainian Orthodox Church *independent* of Moscow. Questions of religious identity and independence were indeed central to the construction of the Ukrainian State and nation (Coleman, 2022). Supporters of autocephaly recalled the Kyiv Metropolitan's affiliation with Constantinople prior to 1686, i.e. before Ecumenical Patriarch Dionysius IV signed the Patriarchal Act for the partial transfer of jurisdiction over the Orthodox Church of Kyiv to the Moscow Patriarchate. Among the supporters, even the first president of independent Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk, had actively participated in the call for a "united and independent" church, bringing back a slogan dating back to Ukraine's brief independence in 1918: *"For an independent state, an independent Church"* (Heather j. Coleman, 2022).

Faced with the re-emergence of the autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UAOC), on 28 October 1990, the Moscow Patriarchate granted the Ukrainian Exarchate the status of an autonomous non-canonical church under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. In addition, the Moscow Patriarchate changed the status of the Kyivan Metropolitanate to a local church with considerable autonomy within the Moscow Patriarchate: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC-MP). On 25-26 June 1992, an Ecclesiastical Council in Kyiv established the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, which was declared "schismatic" from the Moscow Patriarchate and was not recognised by any other Orthodox Church (Kadri Liik, Momchil Metodiev, & Nicu Popescu, 2019). Since then, the three Ukrainian Orthodox Churches:

- the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP),
- the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) and
- the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC)

have existed separately and have disputed parishes, church properties and faithful in Ukraine. With 12,251 religious entities registered as of January 2011 (including 11,952 communities) and 9,680 clergies, the UOC-MP was the largest in religious entities. The UOC- KP had 4,508 registered associations (including 4,371 communities) and 3,021 clergies. The UAOC had 1

227 registered religious associations (including 1 190 parishes) and 699 clergies (Naja Bentzen, 2019). On 15 December 1992, the Unification Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches voted to merge the UOC-KP, the UAOC and parts of the UOC-MP.

In the summer of 2013, Putin and Patriarch Kirill visited Ukraine where, together with Ukrainian President Yanukovych, they celebrated the 1025th anniversary of the adoption of Christianity in *Kievan Rus*. The celebrations promoted slogans such as *"We are one!"*, *"Unity for the Slavic peoples!"* and *"Holy Rus"* (Lutsevych, 2016).

In November 2013, due to the association agreement's lack with the European Union and the ensuing Euromaidan protests, clergy of various denominations intervened with different responses. The UOC-KP offered St Michael's Cathedral in Kyiv as a refuge for protesters from government forces, "siding with the Revolution of Dignity". Metropolitan Volodymyr of the UOC-MP invited the government and the population to the Cave Monastery for peace talks. Ecumenical liturgies took place on the Maidan (Independence Square) in Kyiv. The position of the UOC-MP was criticised for refusing to perform burial rites for Ukrainian soldiers involved in anti-terrorist operations (ATO) and for accusing them of committing "fratricide" (Lena Surzhko Harned, 2022).

In contrast, after Crimea's annexation and the start of the war in the Donbas, Patriarch Filaret of the Kyiv Patriarchate supported Ukrainian soldiers participating in anti-terrorist operations (ATO) in the Donbas and lobbied international partners for military assistance to Ukraine (Lena Surzhko Harned, 2022). In response, Russian Church officials accused "Uniates" and "schismatics" of instrumentalising the polarisation of Ukrainian society. The Russian Patriarch then extolled the virtues of the Russkii mir – "the Russian world" and declared:

"Russia belongs to a wider civilisation than the Russian Federation. We call this civilisation the Russian world. It is not the world of the Russian Federation, nor of the Russian empire. The Russian world begins at the baptismal font in Kyiv. Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians are part of it.[6]*'*

Euromaidan, the war in the Donbas and Russia's seizure of Crimea have thus shaken the situation of Ukrainian Orthodoxy, raising the question of the legitimacy of the UOC-MP and the relationship between Church, State and Nation in Ukraine again.

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[6] Liik, Kadri, Momchil Metodiev, & Nicu Popescu. 2019. "Defender of The Faith? How Ukraine's Orthodox Split Threatens Russia." European Council on Foreign Relations. p.8

ii. Years 2014 – 2022

The link between the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the increasingly pressing demands for recognition of a single Ukrainian Orthodox Church illustrates the complex and still modern relationship between State and Church. The power of war to increase the need for natural religion becomes an advocate for building patriotism, a space for religious conscience and belief, providing access to the transcendental in the face of death and tragedy.

On 18 February 2014, demonstrations by some young people in front of the Parliament and along Instytutska Street in Kyiv were repressed by the disproportionate use of force by riot police and Berkut forces, resulting in the death of over one hundred protesters and the burning down of the Maidan and the trade union building. On the night of 18 February 2014, protesters used firearms on the Maidan (William Jay Risch, 2022). Residents of the Donbas began to perceive the spreading discontent, leaving fertile ground for the invasion of the region by some radical nationalists. The 1 March 2014 demonstration in front of the Lenin Monument in Donetsk, initially organised by city officials to protest against the actions of the Kyiv government, generated chaos when Pavel Jurjevich Gubarev and his formation "Defence of the People of Donbas" (*Narodnoe opolchenie Donbassa*) proclaimed Gubarev "people's governor".

On 3 March 2014, EU foreign ministers held an extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council meeting on the situation in Ukraine, adopting the "Council Conclusions on Ukraine". The document reads:

> *"The European Union strongly condemns the clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces as well as the authorisation given by the Federation Council of Russia on 1 March for the use of the armed forces on the territory of Ukraine. These actions are in clear breach of the UN Charter and the OSCE Helsinki Final Act, as well as of Russia's specific commitments to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity under the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 and the bilateral Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership of 1997[7]."*

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[7] EU-Ukraine summit, Kyiv, Ukraine, 12 October 2021 - Consilium. *https://www.consilium.europa.eu/* en/meetings/international-summit/2021/10/12/.

After Russia vetoed the Security Council resolution on Ukraine (S/2014/189), the action passed to the General Assembly, which, on 27 March 2014, adopted Resolution A/RES/68/262 to affirm its commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and to emphasise the invalidity of the 2014 referendum in Crimea (A. Cherviatsova, 2022).

On 12 April 2014, as reported by Mark Rachkevych in the Kyiv Post, "masked men in military fatigues and bulletproof vests" seized the police station, the District Security Service of Ukraine and the Ministry of the Interior in Donetsk.[8] On 14 April, pro-Russian militants led by former members of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GRU), Igor Girkin and Igor Bezler, took control of government buildings in many oblast cities, including Sloviansk, Mariupol, Horlivka, Kramatorsk, Yenakiieve, Makiivka, Druzhkivka and Zhdanivka. In May 2014, immediately after announcing the results of their referendum on self-government, the Donetsk region proclaimed itself independent and asked Moscow for annexation to the Russian Federation; the Luhansk region, on the other hand, requested the formation of a federation of independent states. In Donetsk, the vote count was 89.9% "yes" to self-rule and the "no" vote at 10.09%. In Luhansk, the "yes" supporters were 96.2%. Representatives of the "Donetsk People's Republic" (DPR) and the "Lugansk People's Republic" (LPR) signed a joint declaration to create the "Union of People's Republics" (UPR) (Kimitaka Matsuzato, 2022). As events progressed and despite the UN General Assembly's actions, European organisations became more vocal in qualifying Russia's involvement in the conflict in Ukraine. In particular, the Council of Europe not only strongly condemned "*the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Russian Federation*" but also imposed sanctions on Russia, disenfranchising its delegation and excluding it from the body's monitoring missions and leadership structures (David R. Marples, 2022). The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), in its 1990 resolution, "Reconsideration on substantive grounds of the previously ratified credentials of the Russian delegation"[9], considered that the actions of the Russian Federation leading to the annexation of Crimea, the military occupation of Ukrainian territory, and the threat of the use of military force constituted a severe international law violation, including the United Nations Charter and the Helsinki Final Act of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This position

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[8] *Kyiv Post*. Retrieved 28 July 2015: https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/war-against-ukraine/armed-pro-russian-extremists-seize-police-stations-in-donetsks-slavyansk-shaktarysk-fail-to-take-donetsk-prosecutors-office-343195.html

[9] PACE website - Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=24432

was reiterated in PACE Resolution 2132, "Political Consequences of Russian Aggression in Ukraine" of 12 October 2016 and Resolution 2198, "Humanitarian Consequences of the War in Ukraine" of January 2018, referring to the "ongoing Russian war against Ukraine". The documents urged the Russian authorities to cease all financial and military support to illegal armed groups in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and to stop recognising passports and any other documents issued in the controlled territories.

On 13 June 2014, the BBC reported on the Russian gas dispute in Ukraine and the subsequent order of Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk to organise the disruption of supplies. After the fall of pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, Russia started to impose a tariff of $485.50 per 1,000 cubic metres on Ukraine in February, in contrast to the previous tariff of $268 per 1,000 cubic metres. According to the thinking of the realist literature, Putin's response was an expression of great power intent on taking pre-emptive action, as it might deem necessary, to deny potentially hostile powers the discretionary availability of military and naval facilities on territory geopolitically close to its borders (John Berryman, 2018). On 2 July 2014, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) adopted several resolutions, including the Resolution "On the Clear, Serious and Incorrect Violations of the Helsinki Principles by the Russian Federation". In OSCE documents, the Russian Federation was referred to as a violator of the principles of international law and an aggressor state in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

However, the Russian Federation ignored all these "urgings", "deep concerns" and "appeals" (David R. Marples, 2022).

On 14 July, the second session of the UPR Parliament was held in the Luhansk City Council building, during which the name of the confederation was changed from "UPR" to *"Novorussia"*. Kimitaka Matsuzato (2022), a professor at the University of Tokyo, critically examined this terminology, noting how, in the unrest of spring and autumn of 2014, the slogan "Novorussia" began to express the desire of anti-Maidan activists that the separation from Ukraine would not be limited to Crimea and the Oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk, but would continue to expand to cover the whole of south-eastern Ukraine. At the same time, "high-profile incidents" continued, such as the rebel attack on the Volnovakha checkpoint on 22 May, the shooting down of the transport plane with fifty paratroopers from the 25th Airborne Brigade over the Luhansk airport on 14 June, the shelling of Ukrainian positions near the port and, the Ilovaisk debacle on 29 August 2014, when more than 400 fighters lost their lives in a single day (Oleksandr Melnyk, 2022).

It was the context of the military developments of August-September 2014 that led to the signing of the Minsk Agreements, a package of documents adopted in September 2014 (Minsk-1) and February 2015 (Minsk-2).

Minsk-1 refers to the Protocol on the results of the Trilateral Contact Group (OSCE, Ukraine, Russia, with the participation of separatist leaders) consultations of 5 September 2014 and the subsequent Memorandum of 19 September 2014. These documents encapsulated provisions to ensure an immediate bilateral ceasefire, monitoring and verification of the situation by the OSCE mission, the instant release of all hostages, as well as those wrongfully held, the removal of unauthorised armed groups, military hardware, fighters, and mercenaries from Ukrainian land, and a prohibition on drone use (David R. Marples, 2022). However, a few weeks after the signing, the provisions of the Minsk-1 ceasefire were violated, and the conflict escalated. The parties involved had to continue the so-called "Minsk process" and negotiate a new document.

Minsk-2 demanded that Ukraine recognise and legalise local separatist powers in the occupied territories through local elections and suggested that Ukraine would have taken complete control of the border with Russia only if constitutional reforms were implemented (David R. Marples, 2022). Despite the ratification of this second document, the reprisals have shown no signs of stopping. Once again, the Council of Europe expressed "deep concern" about the continued violations by the Russian Federation. The OSCE emphasised *the need for the Russian Federation itself to fully comply with its commitments in the 2014 Minsk Agreements and the package of measures for the implementation of the 2015 Minsk Agreements, as well as to use its considerable influence on illegal pro-Russian armed groups*". Although attempts at direct mediation were left to Germany and France, the EU became a major humanitarian donor in the conflict region and established a European Advisory Mission (EUAM) to Ukraine, a 300-strong civilian mission under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). However, this mission has a strategic mandate and is still mainly concerned with "advising on long-term reforms" (Thomas de Waal & Nikolaus von Twickel, 2020).

David R. Marples (2022), professor at the University of Alberta, in his "The War in Ukraine's Donbas. Origins, Contexts, and the Future" noted that, in 2014 - 2015, Ukraine seemed reluctant to take an unambiguous stance towards Russia. The usage of incongruous rhetoric for a long time exacerbated the difficulty in understanding the conflict. Indeed, on the one hand, there have been several documents adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament, the *Verkhovna Rada*, defining Russia as an "aggressor"; on the other hand, until January 2018, Ukraine's resistance against armed aggression in the Donbas was referred to as an "anti-terrorist operation". As

stated in the Law "On the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of Citizens and the Legal Regime of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine" of 15 April 2014, Ukraine used terms such as "temporarily occupied territories". In its Resolution of 27 January 2015, "On the Verkhovna Rada's appeal to the United Nations, the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and the national legislatures of all states of the world to recognise the Russian Federation as an aggressor state", the Ukrainian Parliament stressed that "*Ukraine remains an object of military aggression carried out by the Russian Federation, among other means, through massive terrorist attacks*". Nonetheless, Ukraine has long based its self-defence on the Law "On Combating Terrorism" of 20 March 2003 instead of appealing to the Article "On the Defence of Ukraine" of 6 December 1991, which would have allowed the President of Ukraine "to call a partial or total mobilisation, to declare a state of war in Ukraine or specific areas of the country, or to use the Armed Forces of Ukraine or other military formations" (Article 4). The law "On the peculiarities of state policy to ensure the sovereignty of the Ukrainian state over the temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk regions", which came into force on 24 February 2018, changed the qualification of events (David R. Marples, 2022).

The narrative of the ecclesiastical landscape was nonetheless diverse.

Oleksandr Zakharchenko, then leader of the DPR, asserted in May 2015 that only the Roman Catholic Church, Islam and Judaism were recognised by the DPR and that all other religions, including Greek Catholics and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), were harmful "sects" (Elizabeth A. Clark, 2020).

On 12 February 2016, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, at a meeting with Pope Francis in Havana, referred to plans for a more independent Ukrainian Church as a *"schism"* that violated "canonical norms". The Patriarch's decision not to attend the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church on the island of Crete in July 2016 inexorably complicated the path to recognition of Ukrainian autocephaly. Planning for this Council began in the 1960s. The Russian Church had demanded that every council document be unanimously approved by all churches represented at the Council. Nevertheless, the Moscow Patriarchate later claimed that the meeting would not be representative. The Churches of Antioch, Bulgaria and Georgia had consequently announced their decision not to participate. The reason was that some of the documents would lead to a dangerous modernisation of Church doctrine (Oleksandr Melnyk, 2022).

After the Council, a one-hundred ten-page document was drafted on the importance of a common "*social ethos*" and respect for the liberal democratic ideals of freedom and equality. Aristotle Papanikolaou, an Orthodox theologian from Fordham and a proponent of this document, pointed out during a lecture at Georgetown University that the Russian Orthodox Church's support for President Putin was now proof of the rejection of this ethos, "a form of religious nationalism that in many ways is annulling the other" (Paul Elie, 2022).

After adopting the Yarovaya Law in July 2016, the state further increased its power over society by using the Orthodox Church and limiting the influence of other religions besides those considered "traditional" (J. Bugajski, 2022).

Television Service of News (TSN) correspondent Yakov Noskov reported in an article on 5 January 2018 that a priest from the Moscow Patriarchate refused to officiate at the tragic death of a young boy in Zaporizhzhya because he did not recognise the Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate and was to be considered unbaptised. And while representatives of other Christian churches condemned the position of the UOC deputy, the diocese supported the position of its clergyman, calling his actions in conformity with the canons.

2018 was also the year in which Russia and Ukraine commemorated the role of Grand Prince Volodymyr in the Christianisation of their respective peoples 1030 years ago. Together with Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria, who was in Moscow on a fraternal visit, Patriarch Kirill celebrated the Holy Liturgy on 28 July in the Moscow Kremlin. After the holy mass at the newly erected monument to Vladimir in the square outside the Kremlin, the speaker made a few remarks:

> "*Vladimir wished his people to share with him the joy of life in Christ and the light of the Gospel truth to shine in the Russian land…The Day of Baptism [of Rus'] is celebrated today in Moscow, Kyiv, Minsk and other cities. Millions of people offer up their prayers to the Equal-to-the-Apostles Prince for prosperity and peace in the countries of historical Rus[10]*" (His Beatitude Patriarch, 2018).

According to the study "Characteristics of religion and religious community self-determination of Ukrainian citizens: Trends 2010-2018" (Особливості Релігійного І Церковно-Релігійного Самовизначення Українських Громадян: Тенденції 2010-2018) in the period 2010-2018, significant changes occurred in the confessional and ecclesial identity of Orthodox citizens. In

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[10] Clark, E. A. & Vovk D. (2020). *Religion During the Russian- Ukrainian Conflict.* Routledge. p.167

the study prepared for the meeting of the Permanent Round Table "Religion and Power in Ukraine: Problems of Relationships" on 26 April 2018, it is shown that the number of adherents of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has almost halved (from 24% to 13%), while the number of adherents of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kyiv Patriarchate has almost doubled (from 15% in 2010 to 29% in 2018). The survey conducted from 23 to 28 March 2018 with the support of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung also shows that in all regions of Ukraine (with the exception of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the temporarily occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions), the number of supporters of the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church has also grown over the years. Another critical fact highlighted by this analysis is that out of 2016 respondents aged 18 and over, the number of those who claimed that the Orthodox Church in Ukraine was part of the Russian Orthodox Church has gradually decreased. Thus, most citizens did not seem to support the idea of introducing a State Church in Ukraine. The level of support for this idea had decreased from 20% in 2000 to 10% in 2010, and has not exceeded 13% of respondents since then. From 2010-2018, the share of supporters of the national orientation remained almost unchanged ("Characteristics of religion and religious community self-determination of Ukrainian citizens: Trends 2010-2018").

In April 2018, former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, supported by the Kyivan Patriarchate Church and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, wrote to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople requesting autocephaly for Ukraine.

In July 2018, Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, the honorary head of the Orthodox Church, announced his intention to accept this request. On 11 October 2018, a synod meeting in Istanbul, chaired by Bartholomew, decided to proceed by granting autocephaly to the Ukrainian Church. As a preliminary step, the synod resumed Constantinople's jurisdiction over the territory of Ukraine, then lifted the ex-communication imposed on the Church leaders of the Kyivan Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church by the Moscow Patriarchate and rebuilt their "hierarchical or priestly rank". This paved the way for a Unification Church Council between the two Churches and the granting of autocephaly.

On 15 October 2018, the Moscow Patriarchate formally announced a schism, ending relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and ceasing participation in episcopal assemblies, theological discussions and multilateral commissions.

Meanwhile, despite the ceasefire, the fighting showed no sign of stopping. On 4 January 2017 alone, the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine, in the Donetsk region, had recorded 144 explosions in the area of the Avdiivka-Yasynuvata-Donetsk airport triangle. On 25 November 2018, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Coast Guard shot at and seized

three Ukrainian Navy ships at the entrance to the Kerch Strait, which connects the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The three seized Ukrainian Navy ships were attempting to pass from Odesa's Ukrainian Black Sea port to the Sea of Azov to the Ukrainian port of Mariupol. The Russian side perceived the incident as a planned provocation by the Ukrainian leadership. Ukraine described the action as an "act of aggression". Stepan Poltorak, the Ukrainian Defence Minister, asserted that Russia's ultimate goal in the Black Sea region was to *"force Ukraine to give up its right to sail through the Kerch Strait and to annex the Sea of Azov in its entirety"*. In response to the episode, the Ukrainian Parliament voted to declare martial law in the border territories for thirty days. On 25 May 2019, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea ruled that Russia should immediately release the three captured Ukrainian ships and military personnel[11].

On 15 December 2018, the bishops of all three Ukrainian Orthodox Churches were summoned to a council. The aim was to establish a new Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). Most of the Council's 192 delegates came from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate did not officially participate, but two of its bishops were present. Metropolitan Epiphanius was elected head of the new church as "Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine". Filaret, leader of the former unrecognised Ukrainian Orthodox Church - the Kyiv Patriarchate - received the rank of "Honorary Patriarch" in the new Church from President Poroshenko.

On 22 December, Poroshenko signed a law requiring the UOC-MP to change its name to clarify its affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The State thus seems to support its *own* church (Alshanskaya, 2020) explicitly.

On 5 January 2019, Patriarch Bartholomew signed the *tomos*, a decree of autocephaly for the new Church (Kadri Liik, Momchil Metodiev & Nicu Popescu, 2019). The tomos was conferred on the primate of the UOC, Metropolitan Epiphanius - elected by secret ballot at the Church Unification Congress on 15 December 2018 - in the Patriarchal Church of St George in Istanbul. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Ukrainian Parliament Speaker Andriy Parubiy attended the ceremony. The event was historic not only for Ukraine, but also for the entire Orthodox world (Naja Bentzen, 2019). For Ukrainians, autocephaly was a sign that their country was moving towards greater independence from Russia, now also in clerical and

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[11] Case Concerning the Detention of Three Ukrainian Naval Vessels: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-legal-materials/article/abs/case-concerning-the-detention-of-three-ukrainian-naval-vessels-ukraine-v-russian-federation-provisional-measures-order-itlos/E8317D44046243DD61DD9ED04D6ADA86

worldly matters (Kadri Liik, Momchil Metodiev, & Nicu Popescu, 2019). During the ceremony, President Poroshenko stated:

"Tomos, for us, is another act of proclaiming Ukraine's independence. It will complete the assertion of the independence of the Ukrainian State and strengthen religious freedom and inter-confessional peace. It will strengthen the rights and freedoms of citizens, especially those who were outside communion with Ecumenical Orthodoxy and who were unjustly called uncanonical.[12]"

The admission of autocephaly to the OCU was then recognised not only by the Patriarchate of Constantinople but also by the Greek Orthodox Church (October 2019) and by the Patriarchate of Alexandria (November 2019). The granting of autocephaly to the OCU then initiated the process of affiliation change of the parishes previously affiliated with the OCU-MP. However, by January 2020, only about 5% of the OCU-MP structures had consented. The change of affiliation was hindered by the judicial processes initiated by the UOC-MP concerning the re-registration of parishes with the local administration. There were also clashes in the communities, usually caused by an attempt to block the transition of a particular community by a clergyman belonging to the UOC-MP (Maria Piechowska, 2020). Intending to facilitate the transition of religious communities from one ecclesiastical jurisdiction to another, the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukrainian Parliament, enacted Law No. 2673-VIII on 17 January 2019. Previously, hierarchical religious associations used to stipulate in their statutes that certain activities and transactions had to be approved by a higher religious authority, e.g. the regent bishop. With the introduction of Law 2673-VIII, the decision of a community to transfer its jurisdiction to another religious association could be made exclusively by the majority of its members, without the need, therefore, to obtain the consent of the presiding bishops (Dmytro Vovk, 2020).

In April 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky won the election over incumbent President Petro Poroshenko in the second round with over 73% of the vote. His efforts to end the war in the east of the country started slowly, with the release of some prisoners and the withdrawal of Ukrainian forces from cities bordering the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. The news of the proposal to revive the Minsk agreements with the renewed participation of the presidents

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[12] "Ukraine: Millions of Ukrainians Expect Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church That Will Complete the Consolidation of Ukraine's Independence and Strengthen Interconfessional Peace." MENA Report, Albawaba (London) Ltd., July 2018.

of Russia, France, and Germany provoked some protests from the most militant circles in Kyiv and other cities, with accusations directed at the new President of "betraying Ukraine by making concessions to Russia". On 1 October 2019, President Zelensky reached the signing of the so-called Steinmeier Formula, defining that "non-government controlled areas" (NGCAs) were to receive political autonomy, according to the controversial definition of "special status". This recognition could only happen after the polls closed and definitively after OSCE observers declared that the vote met the organisation's standards. The separatists and Russia duly rejected these conditions (Thomas de Waal & Nikolaus von Twickel, 2020).

During the meeting held in Paris and hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron, the two sides - Ukraine and Russia - remained distant on the issue of federalisation and autonomy proposed for Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as on how new elections should be held. Zelensky insisted on compliance with the original agreements, according to which Ukraine had to be allowed to secure its eastern borders before holding any referendum (David R. Marples, 2022). Following the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak and the ensuing restrictions on people's ability to move, Ukraine accused Russia of deploying thousands of military personnel to its northern and eastern borders and the Crimean peninsula. In the meantime, Russia witnessed a constitutional reform, described by Professor De Stefano (2022), as "the most significant in post-Soviet history", providing not only a glimpse of how Russian power would develop in the future, but also formalising significant changes such as the rise of the Orthodox Church to a prominent position in politics. According to paragraph 2 of the new Article 67, the Russian Federation is bound "by a thousand-year history". It preserves "the legacy of predecessors, who passed on to us principles and faith in God". At the expense of a civic vision of society that, despite perpetual ambiguity, had been at the heart of the Swiss Constitution of 1993, the unprecedented reference to religion coincides with the growing identification of the Russian Federation with Russian culture and ethnicity (*Russkaja*) (Carolina De Stefano, 2022, p.189). In substance, Putin's new Constitution also speaks for the first time of the Russian language as the language of the people "forming the State". Finally, as can be seen from reading Article 67(1), patriotism and the political use of historical memory have also entered the Constitution: "the Russian Federation honours the memory of the defenders of the Fatherland, guarantees the defence of historical truth" and qualifies as inadmissible "the denigration of the significance of the people's endeavour to defend the Fatherland" (C. De Stefano, 2022, p.189).

In June 2020, Russia consecrated an impressive new Orthodox cathedral dedicated to the country's Armed Forces. The celebration was supposed to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the USSR's victory over the Nazis in May 2020, but due to pandemic considerations, the

inauguration was postponed. Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu, Armed Forces Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov and other senior officials attended the grand ceremony. Pronouncing the first liturgy in the church, Patriarch Kirill said that the cathedral "*holds the hope that future generations will inherit the spiritual legacy of past generations and save the Fatherland from internal and external enemies*". Lena Surzhko Harned (2022), in her article "Russian World and Ukrainian Autocephaly: Religious Narratives in Anti-Colonial Nationalism of Ukraine", argued that the Armed Forces Church could be understood as *"a physical manifestation of ethno-ideal Russian religious nationalism"*.

On 6 April 2021, an article in TheGuardian reported that online researchers identified troops moved to Ukraine's borders from western and central Russia, including artillery from Siberia. In this context, the EU and the UK have pledged "unwavering" support for the Ukrainian government amid concerns of military escalation. On 16 December 2021, the European Parliament adopted the "Resolution on the situation on the Ukrainian border and the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine" (2021/3010(RSP):

"Against the backdrop of a crisis on the EU-Belarusian border, the Russian Federation has been steadily increasing its military presence along the borders of Ukraine, amassing a current total of around 100 000 troops, and in the Donetsk and Luhansk areas of Ukraine that are currently occupied by Russian-backed forces, and has significantly increased the scale of its military activities in occupied Crimea, as well as in the Black Sea basin. The recent movements of Russian troops near the Ukrainian border have been matched by enhanced interference and disinformation campaigns by Russian proxies and media outlets in the EU, Ukraine and Russia itself. The Resolution stressed that the Russian military build-ups form part of a broader strategy, including elements of hybrid warfare waged by Russia against the European Union and its like-minded partners. It reiterated that Russia is using a confluence of threats, such as military, digital, energy and disinformation, taking advantage of the open system of the EU to weaken it.; […] Parliament: urges the Russian Federation to immediately and fully withdraw its military forces, cease its threat against the territorial integrity of Ukraine, stop all measures that further aggravate the conflict and de-escalate tension.[13]"

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[13] Texts adopted - Situation at the Ukrainian border and in Russian ....
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0515_EN.html.

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, crossing the country's border into several areas and bombing several cities and infrastructures.

iii. Russkiy mir (Russian World)

The attempt to investigate the religious dimension in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict originates from the reading of those who claim that Putin's desire to conquer Kyiv is part of a "spiritual quest" rooted in the cultural paradigm on the unity of Holy Rus' (*Svyataya Rus*), or Russian World (Russky mir or Rus'kii mir), the sacred and indissoluble unity of the Eastern Slavs belonging to "one people of the same blood and faith", i.e. sharing a common spiritual destiny (Nicolai N. Petro, 2018).

Mikhail Suslov (2014) explored the myth of the **"Holy Russia"**, strongly promoted by Patriarch Kirill, defining it as a powerful myth with a strong neo-colonial geopolitical aspiration based on messianic meta-narratives of subjugation, now more commonly known in the form of the Russkiy Mir (Russian World) concept.

In Russian, Mir means an ordinary Russian *peasant* and the *world*. The Mir could act as a constraint on the development of the Tsarist Russian Empire and the Russian nation. In the Mir, the whole weighed heavily on the individual who submitted to the authoritarian order. Each member lived by the collective wisdom of the whole (Taras Kuzio, 2022). As stated by Zhukova (2013), in the question of Russian national identity, Orthodoxy is represented as a profound element of the so-called "mysterious Russian soul". Religion, in this case, is thus not a question of personal freedom, but a determinism of civilisation: "*the ROC offers the Russian state a "national cause", a "cement" that holds society together*" (Zhukova 2013, p. 170). This is called "*ethno-ideological religious nationalism*" in Juergensmeyer's (1996) typology.

The role played by Orthodoxy in the development of a Russian foreign policy thus intersects with the positioning of Russia as a pole of civilisation and today a defender against Western liberalism. Furthermore, since the concept of *Holy Rus* excludes, by definition, a Ukrainian nation separate from the Russians, only a small Russian identity within a pan-Russian nation has grounds for existence. Moreover, while Russian foreign policy's priority is pursuing the national interest, while the declared priority of the ROC is the salvation of humankind, the spheres are bound together in the shared aspiration to restore honour to Russia. Nicolai N. Petro (2018) then clarifies that although using the same term in both *secular* and *religious* contexts may have generated considerable confusion, there are explanatory nuances. The term Russky mir, used by the State, is a typical public relations initiative. The concept refers to the use of

Russian abroad. It is an element of Russia's "soft power", increasing its influence among neighbouring countries and enhancing the country's image as a global power. According to this perspective, *the Church is a key player in defining a political strategy*.

On the contrary, according to the church, the term Russky mir is God's plan, under which these nations were baptised into one civilisation. The ROC sees its efforts as fulfilling a higher plan, the establishment of Holy Rus'. From the ROC's perspective, the Russian government, and any other government within its canonical territory, can be useful instruments for this purpose (Andrei P. Tsygankov, 2018). In the "Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy", Andrei P. Tsygankov (2018) masterfully conveys that the ROC *"sees the Russian mirror as a spiritual complement to national sovereignty, allowing people to look at their common heritage not as a threat to independence, but as a valuable resource in a globalising world"*.

This search for a new unifying Russian national idea based on religion echoes the traditional collaboration between church and State of the pre-Petrine era (Andrei P. Tsygankov, 2018). Moscow's historical messianism as the Third Rome, Soviet efforts to spread communism internationally, and the Kremlin's paternalistic approach to compatriots in the former republics exemplify this relationship. The idea that everyone should contribute to the universal life of the globe has been supported to some extent by all civilisations. However, Russian messianism has a unique quality. The Russian people have a much deeper understanding of their universal destiny than any other people, they share it with no other, and it may be enough to shape culture, psychology and history. The Russian people today possess a powerful potential for propulsion and fervour due to their awareness of their universal destiny; it is the reaction of a strong and impetuous youth to the tiredness and spiritual poverty of European life (D. Barsotti, 2017). Messianism thus has its intimate origin in the religious sentiment of Russian Christianity.

On the one hand, Russian messianism justified nationalism; on the other hand, nationalism was the instrument of messianic universalism. Orthodoxy had reduced the universality of Christianity by turning it into a State religion, a national Church. However, Christianity, for its part, cannot justify a religious messianism because it is not a national religion, nor can it be the privilege of a single nation (D. Barsotti, 2017, pp. 59-61).

Maria Engström (2014) explores this messianic ideology of Russian foreign policy under Vladimir Putin by invoking the image of the "*Katechon*", or a "shield" against apocalyptic forces. In ancient Greek, the term Kathéchon means "what restrains" or "who restrains". According to the eschatological vision of Christian culture, the Kathéchon is identified with imperial Rome, considered the last kingdom capable of protecting the world from the coming of the Antichrist. According to Russian tradition, the Kathéchon is proposed in the formula of

the "Third Rome", coined by the monk Filofej of Pskov in the 16th century. Moscow is seen as the force resisting a physical and metaphysical enemy sent by the Antichrist. The Kathéchon essentially stands in defence of Russian civilisation, starting with its Orthodox identity: "*The Kathéchon as an Orthodox kingdom defends Christians from forces hostile to the salvation of the soul*". (L. Gori, 2021, pp.101-104)

Therefore, the term "Russky mir" appeared well before 2014.

In 2000, Putin introduced the concept during his speech at the first congress of compatriots living abroad, describing it as a union of those who cherish the Russian language and Russian Orthodoxy, and called the three peoples, Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian as "brothers" (Taras Kuzio, 2022). After reunification and the election of Kirill as Russian Patriarch in 2009, the United Russian Orthodox Church was able to promote further integration of the nationalistic views of the so-called White Russian emigrants with the current nationalistic thinking about Russia's place in Eurasia, Russian-Ukrainian relations and the Western world. Valentina Feklyunina's (2016, pp.783-784) definition of the Russian world is clarifying, summarising it in four main factors:

1. a naturally existing community of civilisation based on a common Russian language, traditions and culture;
2. the Soviet historiography of a common past;
3. the legitimisation of state-society relations;
4. the hierarchy: a Russian-centric world.

The first element is a naturally existing community of civilisation based on a common Russian language, traditions and culture. As stated by Jerry G. Pankhurst (2020), "*the Russian World indicates the potential for colonial subjugation by virtue of the Russian language*". Elizaveta Gaufman (2020) also emphasises the strong ethnolinguistic element of the notion by stating that the Russian world involves either an affinity with the Russian language and culture or a geopolitical/civil narrative. Ethno-nationalists generally seek a more compact Russian state, where nation and state are co-terminated, and ethnic foreigners do not endanger culture and identity. The broader pan-Slavic Russian nation can thus include Ukrainians and Belarusians, and the idea of the "Russian world" can be seen as a nationalist and imperialist emanation of "*Homo Sovieticus*". The aim is to create an image of Russia's reborn glory and global status, avowedly subdued and denied after the collapse of the Soviet Union thanks to Western machinations (Janusz Bugajski, 2022).

The second element is the Soviet historiography of a common past: Kievan Rus' was the basis of the "Russian" State from which Russians and Ukrainians descended. Suslov (2014) and Kozelsky (2014) show that the notion of the Russian world is based on historical revisionism, in which the ROC exercises spiritual jurisdiction over geographical areas and people adhering to Orthodoxy. This ideology gives the Russian State the role of protecting these areas and peoples from foreign ownership or influence. Jerry G. Pankhurst examines the evolution of several historical narratives, including that of the "cradles of Orthodoxy". The author goes on to cite Professor Kozelsky's study (2014), according to which, during the reign of Nicholas I (1825-55), Russian scholars relied on the work of the famous Russian historian Nikolay Karamzin (1766-1726) and created a myth of Russian spiritual identity in which Kyiv ("mother of Russian cities") and Crimea[14] (where Prince Volodymyr was baptised in the town of Chersonesos) played a central role as the "cradle" of Christianity and Russian statehood. This narrative is based on the Chronicles of Nestor, a medieval monk who describes the origins of Kyiv Rus' and the subsequent baptism of its ruler, Prince Volodymyr, who imposed Christianity on his domain. With its centre in Kyiv, Orthodoxy spread to modern Russia and Ukraine's territories. Russian historians have even come to claim that the history of Rus' is the fundamental history of Orthodoxy and the Russian State, thus giving legitimacy to the Russian Empire. History thus became central to the narrative of religious nationalism since, for some Ukrainian scholars, the reality described in the Chronicles is, in truth, Ukrainian (Kozelsky, 2014).

In contrast, Anne Applebaum (2017, pp. 149, 155, 159) discusses the origins of Ukrainian "Chekist Ukrainianophobia" in the early 1930s during the Holodomor, the great famine in Ukraine in 1932-1933 caused by Stalinist policies, resulting in the arrest of Ukrainian national communists, intellectuals and cultural elites. The Holodomor of 1932-33 holds the most critical position in Ukrainian national martyrology. Officially recognised as a genocidal act against the

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[14] In 1954, Crimea became part of Ukraine based on an official decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, confirmed into law through an amendment to the Soviet Constitution of 1936 and included in Article 72 of the Soviet Constitution of 1977 and Article 77 of the Constitution of the Ukrainian RSS of 1978. In July 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian RSS proclaimed the "State Sovereignty of Ukraine as the supremacy, independence, integrity and indivisibility of the authority of the Republic within the boundaries of its territory, and its independence and equality in foreign relations". In 1994, Russia (with the UK and the US), after Ukraine acceded to the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty), signed the Budapest Memorandum committing them to respect Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and borders. The Soviet Union had insisted on the 'inviolability of borders' in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and during the 1990 discussions on the Charter of Paris for a New Europe (Socher 2021, p.55). In 1997, Ukraine and Russia signed a treaty recognising their border, followed in 2003 by an agreement on its delimitation. The same year, Russia and Ukraine signed an agreement on the Azov Sea and the Kerch Strait (Russian Nationalism and the Russian-Ukrainian War Autocracy-Orthodoxy-Nationality Taras Kuzio, 2022).

Ukrainian people, it turned the entire Ukrainian history of the Soviet era into a national disaster or even martyrdom. In this interpretation, the Holodomor took on a significant religious significance, embodied, for example, by the National Holodomor Memorial in Kyiv. However, in the Orthodox tradition, the Holodomor was perceived by ordinary people as a human tragedy rather than a culpable act against the Soviet regime (V. Kravchenko, 2015). Russia inherited not only buildings, equipment and personnel but also a Chechen mentality and operational culture from the former Soviet political police force, which strongly influenced the internal and external security policies of the Russian militocracy. Jerry G. Pankhurst (2020), on the other hand, argues that the German occupation of much of Ukraine during World War II, during which many churches that had been closed by the Communists were reopened, also reinvigorated the religious sensibilities of the Ukrainians. The different historical interpretations were further elaborated in the years that followed.

In an essay released on the Kremlin website on 12 July 2021, Putin refers to "Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians" as "descendants of ancient Rus" (Putin, 2021). During a visit to Kyiv in 2009, Patriarch Kirill called the city "the southern capital of Holy Russia" (Suslov 2014). Later, during the same celebration, visiting Crimea, Kirill called it "the 'heart" of "Holy Russia" (Suslov, 2014).

Another example of the different Russian and Ukrainian visions of history concerns the Soviet myth of Ukrainians and Russians as neighbouring peoples who had "reunified". In 1954, Crimea was transferred to Ukraine on the 300th anniversary of the 1654 Treaty of Pereyaslav (Kasymenka, 1954). In the Soviet Union, Ukraine was portrayed as a "small Russian tribe" (Taras Kuzio, 2022). The ROC thus portrayed the annexation of Crimea in 2014 as a morally and spiritually acceptable act. The Russkiy Mir myth also emphasises the sovereign right of the Russian State and the Russian Church over relics of Russian Orthodoxy, such as the Chersonesos site in Crimea, even if they were located in other sovereign countries. Therefore, it could be argued that the 2014 crisis was a clash of sovereignty in which Russia found itself at odds with the United Nations and international law. By promoting Russia as first among equals and seeking the primacy of its own interests in Eurasia, Russian elites exercised control over the external relations of its neighbours by its asserted position as "big brother" (Taras Kuzio, 2022).

Another landmark event occurred in 2020 when Russian constitutional amendments extended Putin's term of office until 2036. According to some authors, this introduced a new version of *Pravoslavie, samoderzhavie, narodnost* (*Orthodoxy-Autocracy-Nationality*) (Laruelle, 2021, p.9), the ideological foundations of tsarist Russia drafted in 1833 by Education Minister Count

Sergei Uvarov under Emperor Nicholas I. Taras Kuzio (2022) reports that the first element of Count Uvarov's ideology placed the Russian Orthodox Church at the centre of Russian culture and civilisation, encapsulated in traditional and conservative values. The term "Russian" was equated with the East Slavic peoples and the Pan-Russian nation. With this reform, "autocracy" seemed to have gained ground again due to the consolidation of the regime and the perceived duty of the State to promote Russia as a great power (Taras Kuzio, 2022). This leads us to the third element identified by Valentina Feklyunina, which contrasts the Russian world with a reality of external "enemies" to be defended against.

The third element is the legitimisation of state-society relations: the Russian world is a unique civilisation, distinct and superior to Western values. The members of the Russian world should not retrace the West but embark on their own path *together*. European integration is a "betrayal" of the Russian world. As Liah Greenfeld (1993, pp.254, 270) writes: *"The West was an integral and indelible part of the Russian national consciousness. There would simply have been no point in being a nation if the West had not existed"*. According to Valentina Feklyunina (2016), projected collective identity helped legitimising a specific model of state-society relations. Despite having Christian roots like Europe, the Russian world was considered superior to it because it upheld Christian principles allegedly lost. Russia was thus presented as the defender of traditional values against a decadent West that was undermining the sovereignty of the nation-state in support of multiculturalism. In 2010, Putin responded to the launch of the EU's Eastern Partnership with his Eurasian alternative, "the Customs Union of the Commonwealth of Independent States" (CIS), which in 2015 would become the Eurasian Economic Union. In 2012-2013, Putin pursued his project of "harvesting Russian lands" by pressurising former Ukrainian President Yanukovych to move away from the association agreement with the EU. Putin began to look at the EU in the same negative way that Russia had always looked at NATO. Although the EU did not offer membership, the enlargement of the Eastern Partnership to Eurasia violated what Russia considered its exclusive sphere of influence. As Taras Kuzio (2022) elaborates, the Russian myths of a superior Eurasia are "the flip side of the claim of a superior civic West. *Eurasianism* is defined by Nadezhda Arbatova (2019) as a "*reactionary ideology, superiority-inferiority complex and imperial phantom pain*" that embraces authoritarianism and imperial expansion as an alternative to modernisation, democratisation and reform.

The last and fundamental element for this analysis identified by Professor Feklyunina *is the hierarchy: a Russian-centric world.* Ukrainians and Belarusians identify with Russia and look to the Russian nation for "leadership" and protection. Exemplifying this is President Putin's

speeches on an "artificial" Ukraine (since 2008) and the "New Russia" (since 2014), in which he invited Russian citizens to signal that Ukraine's territorial integrity would not be recognised if it continued to align with the West (Pomerantsev, 2014, p.195).

Among the fifteen countries that emerged after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, it would be rather challenging to find a country that has become the object of Russian pressure more often than Ukraine. For years, the abovementioned language would be raised as solid proof of the raging Russophobia in Ukraine. At the same time, although it is impossible to measure with the necessary precision and accuracy, it could be argued that among the coloured revolutions, the events in Ukraine have caused much greater anger, discontent and a sense of apprehension among Russia's ruling elites (Sergey Sukhankin, 2022). An example of Russia's view of Ukraine as a satellite state of its power can be seen in the speech made by the Russian President during his annual press conference in December 2017 in response to a Ukrainian journalist stating:

"Now to the question whether we are far or close. I know that you, probably, will not agree with this, but each person has his own position. The Slavic world had a difficult beginning…In the end, Russia was formed, of which Kyiv was the centre. And in this sense, our historical, spiritual, and other roots give me the right to say that we are basically one people… In the nineteenth century, some people began to talk about the fact that Ukraine should be independent. Do they have the right to do this? They have. Significantly, perhaps, it was a real issue within the framework of the empire, where, probably, some violent Russification was being made, although, for Ukraine, this was least important because, after all, Ukraine is an Orthodox country. Then it was important. The column "nationality" was not in passports, I recall, there was only "religion." A Ukrainian was no different from a Russian in no way[15]" (Putin, 2017).

In conclusion, the President's speech allows us to read the Russian World as an integration project that extends far beyond territorial borders and which, as Foucault (2007) would describe it, aims to "lead a flock to salvation" (Taras Kuzio, 2022). However, this vision now clashes with a mature "Ukrainian civic nationalism" (Kulyk, 2014).

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[15] Vladimir Putin's annual news conference. President of Russia.
http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56378

iv. Ukrainian Autocephaly

With the beginning of the military conflict in Ukraine, churches and their priests found themselves having to take positions on the issues of war and patriotism. The reflection of the civic duty to protect the country became actualised in the promotion of values of a national civil society (Viktor Stepanenko, 2020) and the search by the country's leaders for new unifying principles. Barbara-Ann J. Rieffer (2003) described this as "instrumental pious nationalism". In times of political crisis, religion assumes the function of legitimising new political institutions, helping newly formed governments to consolidate and stabilise politics and influencing the choices of a large number of citizens. As pointed out by Miguel Glatzer and Paul Christopher Manuel (2020) in "Faith-Based Organisations and Social Welfare. Associational Life and Religion in Contemporary Eastern Europe", the aim is not to suggest that religion is instrumentalised by the leaders of democracies, but to share the view that it has an important function in the creation of new regimes. In addition to guiding the normative structure of public morality and praising the institutional separation of the churches from republican political authority, the authors call for due attention to how religion informs civil society participation.

In the case of Ukraine, civic nationalism took the form of the willingness of the majority of Russian-speaking Ukrainians to express their loyalty to Ukraine over the Russian world. The "decommunization" laws adopted in 2015 led to the dismantling Soviet-era monuments and criminalised any criticism of nationalist leaders and organisations from the World War II period. The Constitutional Court declared the law on regional languages unconstitutional, while the new education law restricted teaching all Russian-language subjects at the primary school level. Finally, Ukraine established a free trade zone with the EU and identified NATO membership as a foreign policy objective (Serhiy Kudelia, 2022).

However, although Ukraine's "modern anti-imperial nationalism" has a deeply inclusive nature (Volodymyr Kulyk, 2014, pp. 120-21), the Orthodox Churches in the country have not become a consolidating factor in Ukraine's transformation but rather have long exacerbated the country's exclusivist diversity. The UOC-KP and UGCC took a patriotic stance, blessing the citizen's constitutional duty to protect the country and its territorial integrity as a sacred act. In contrast, the UOC-MP mainly remained silent, trying to avoid condemnation of Russia as an aggressor and mostly talking about a "fratricidal war". It is in this context that the troubled path undertaken to obtain autocephaly was set.

As stated by Myshlovska, Oksana and Ulrich Schmid (2019), after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was characterised by "a weak sense of national identity", lacking a common project, a stable cultural core, a powerful transcendent idea or "a common social contract of mutual rights" and to unite the country (Wilson, 2002). In his famous "The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order", Samuel Huntington (1996) called Ukraine a country split on the fault line between civilisations: "Ukraine is divided between the united Ukrainian nationalist west and the Russian Orthodox east". This simplified view of Ukraine as a country divided into two clearly demarcated sides has been shared by various national and foreign observers (Riabchuk, 2000).

According to Myshlovska, Oksana and Ulrich Schmid (2019), the post-Soviet transition can be seen as a process of *nationalisation, regionalisation and transnationalisation*.

iv.1. The nationalisation process

The *nationalisation process* is reflected in the fact that an increasing number of people have identified with Ukrainian citizenship and accepted Ukrainian as the state language. The national perception was accompanied by the rewriting of historical narratives in which the Ukrainian nation and the formation of the Ukrainian State throughout history became the central themes.

In order to bring the discourse back to the subject matter of this analysis, I propose below some events that led to the achievement of autocephaly, with the aim of demonstrating the complexity of the historiographical work.

In 1991, Ukraine became an independent state, and the Ukrainian republic was restored. At the same time, precisely as it was when it was founded in 1917, it began to promote an autocephalous Church (Cyril Hovorun,2020). Mstyslav was proclaimed the first Patriarch of the UAOC in Kyiv in 1990 and enthroned in the Cathedral of St. Sophia. This proclamation, however, was not recognised by the other local Orthodox Churches. In 1992, Mstyslav became the formal leader of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC KP) as Patriarch, while Filaret was his deputy and informal leader. Although the UAOC agreed to join Filaret's group in 1992, part of this church soon decided not to join the UOC-KP, which was formed following the merger. Moscow, meanwhile, did not recognise the UOC-KP and the UAOC (Andriy Fert, 2020). Other canonical Orthodox Churches also considered them schismatic groups. In 1997, the Council of Bishops of the ROC anathematised Filaret. In 2008, the Ukrainian State came closer than ever to promoting the unification of Ukrainian Orthodoxy

under the presidency of Victor Yushchenko (2005-2010), who initiated and supported the process. He used the celebration of the 1020th anniversary of the Baptism of Kyiv as an occasion for reunification.

Addressing the flock on the eve of the celebrations, Metropolitan Volodymyr emphasised that the Baptism of Rus in 988 "*gave birth to Ukraine as we know it*" and "*the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has been with its people ever since*" (Volodymyr, 2007). In this way, he introduced the new idea of a specifically Ukrainian Church, which would have existed since the 10th century. In later years, this church would appear in the popular literature of the UOC-MP under two different names: "Ukrainian Church" and "Kyiv Church" (Andriy Fert, 2020). In the autumn of 2009, Metropolitan Volodymyr gave a speech in which he set out his vision of a specific path of Ukrainian Orthodoxy (Yelensky, 2013). According to him, Kyiv was a bridge between East and West (Andriy Fert, 2020). In the spring of 2018, the Ecumenical Patriarchate decided to grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian Church. This was announced to President Poroshenko while visiting Phanar in the week following the Orthodox Easter (8 April). On his return to Ukraine, President Poroshenko met with the hierarchs of all the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches and asked for their support for his initiative. The Kyiv Patriarchate and the UAOC unanimously supported the President and made official requests to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. On 19 April, the President asked the Parliament to support his request, and the Verkhovna Rada approved the relevant decision with a majority of votes. From 9 to 11 October 2018, a session of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was held in Istanbul, which, according to the communiqué (Head Secretariat of the Holy and Sacred Synod, 2018), decided to declare that the faithful of non-canonical churches "have been restored to communion with the Church", ending the schism that had existed in Ukraine since 1992. The new church was to be founded on the basis of the Kyiv Metropolis under the jurisdiction of Constantinople. The new church was founded during the Council held in St Sophia in Kyiv on 15 December 2018. Two churches that existed before then, the Kyiv Patriarchate and the UOC, were annulled, and all their bishops joined the new church, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (UOC). On 6 January 2019, Epiphanius made his first, irenic visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Istanbul. During a solemn ceremony, he received from Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople a tomos granting autocephaly to the UOC. On 3 February, Metropolitan Epiphanius was enthroned as Primate of the new Church.

The UOC-MP treated the new church the same way it had previously treated the Kyiv Patriarchate and the UAOC, i.e. as schismatics. The UOC-MP not only refused to recognise the OCU but also excommunicated the bishops and priests who decided to join it. The UOC-

MP followed the line of the Moscow Patriarchate, which unilaterally broke relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate (Cyril Hovorun, 2020).

iv.2. The regionalization process

At the same time, there has been *a process of regionalisation* of the historical imagination. In recent years, contested and controversial memorials have occurred in different regions of Ukraine, such as the erection of monuments to Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) leader Stepan Bandera in the western regions, to Russian Empress Catherine II in Odesa, and to Stalin in Zaporizhzhia (Myshlovska, Oksana & Ulrich Schmid, 2019). Until the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the subsequent war in eastern Ukraine, Ukraine was divided into twenty-four provinces (oblasts), one autonomous republic (Crimea), 479 divisions (raions), and 415 cities. These administrative units can be classified into broader categories (regions). Galicia, comprising the Lvivska, Ivano-Frankivska and Ternopilska oblasts, and the Donbas, comprising the Donetsk and Luhanska oblasts, are unanimously accepted to be distinct and prototypical regions for the West and east of the country. More difficult to categorise is the Ukrainian centre. For example, the Zhytomyrska oblast has been considered by some researchers to be a part of the northern region, along with the Chernihivska and Kyivska oblasts (Nemiria, 2000), and by others (Vasiutynskyi & Kalachnikova, 1997) as part of the centre, along with Vinnytska, Kirovohradska Oblast, Cherkaska, Khmelnytska and Kyivska.

Fundamental to understanding the country's regional dynamics is the study conducted by Catherine Wanner and Viktor Yelensky (2019) in "Regionalism without Regions" published by Central European University Press, in which the authors trace how religion has historically been an agent of localisation, binding believers to their place of residence, and how religious institutions have evolved into agents of nationality.

The divisions of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine largely coincide with regional variations in the geopolitical orientations and linguistic identity of the country's population. The vast majority of Orthodox Church of Ukraine parishes are located in the West, north and centre of the country. At the same time, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) is stronger in the east and south (Viktor Stepanenko, 2020). There are also differences in levels of loyalty to local churches, norms of behaviour associated with religious traditions and the intensity of practices specifically related to religious doctrine. These differences reflect how religion contributes to a specific cultural geography characterised by regionally variable social practices. However, regional differences in the form of variable cultural geography do not

necessarily merge into a sense of identity. However, they reflect various historical experiences, such as when a particular territory was incorporated into an empire, be it Russian, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman or Soviet. Although both religion and confessionalism have historically been regarded as issues of little importance to the Ukrainian national project, by the end of the 20th century, Ukrainian elites began to demonstrate a somewhat different approach to religion and religious institutions. In the aftermath of his appointment as Prime Minister, Arseniy Turchynov met with representatives of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations (AUCCRO), emphasising the importance of the religious community in the promotion of moral values and the consolidation of the nation. The religious leaders apparently expressed their support for the legitimate government of Ukraine, calling on it to fully restore the constitutional order and also condemning any discussion of a potential division of the country. Before his presidency, the fifth President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, was known as a relatively conservative UOC MP from the monastery of St Jonah. However, as President of Ukraine, he impetuously assimilated the rhetoric of his predecessors, who had insisted on forming a united and administratively independent Orthodox Church in Ukraine (Viktor Yelensky, 2020). Ultimately, the country and regions were imagined as part of new *transnational identities and communities*, e.g. Europe or the Orthodox Russkii mir (Russian world).

iv.3 The transnationalisation process

The analyses presented in "Regionalism without Regions" sought to explore how the identities declared by the 6000 people interviewed in March 2013 could be used to identify distinct national regions. On a scale of 1 to 5, respondents were asked to rate how strongly they identified with various non-territorial identity patterns, including family, gender, age, profession, interests or hobbies, religion and social status, as well as Ukrainian, Russian or other nationality, East Slavic community and Europe. The ratings were subsequently transformed into standardised z-scores, where scores greater than zero indicated better identifications than the national average and scores less than zero indicated weaker identifications. In terms of national self-categorisation, the western, central and northern regions were predominantly homogenous (Ukrainian). At the same time, the south and east of the country were mixed, with Russians constituting a substantial minority in both the east and south, Tatars in the Crimea region, and significant Hungarian, Bulgarian, German and other minorities in the Chernivetska oblast and Transcarpathia. Individuals identified as Ukrainian

were predominant in all provinces except Crimea, while those identified as "Russian" were in second place.

Figure 2.1. Ethnic self-categorizations of the studied sample across ten regions
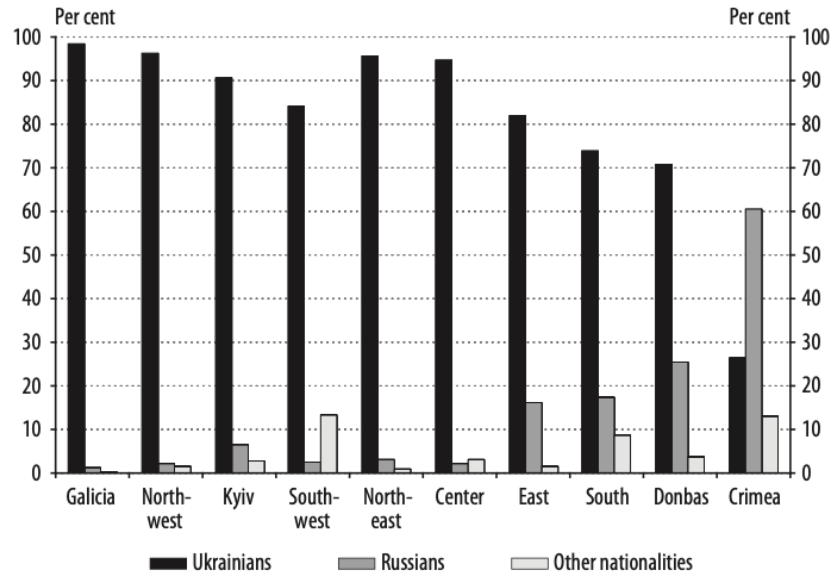
Source: Survey (2013)

In his conversational analysis, Dr N. Leustean went on to observe that in his interviews, there was a link between "church" and "support", with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate closely associated with the state authorities and pointed out that the Kyiv Patriarchate was positioned between "Russian" and "Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate". According to the author, it is presumable that already during the beginning of the conflict in the Donbas, the churches were able to offer something that the State lacked in terms of resources, i.e., mobilisation and organisation at the local level for the benefit of humanitarian emergencies.

Table I.4. Word frequency, 16 interviews in Kyiv, Ukraine (March–September 2018)

UOCKP is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate; UOCMP is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate.

The Euromaidan of 2013-2014 was a powerful manifestation of national civil society protests against the authoritarian government. It was also the most radical public attempt at political change regarding Ukraine's European integration. The conflict, which started in November 2013, continued until the end of February when Ukrainian President Yanukovich fled to Russia, protesters attacked the presidential palace, the violence of the riot police, the Berkuts, escalated, and, in a series of events that have never been clarified, hundreds of protesters died under the barricades of Kyiv's Maidan. Soon afterwards, the southeastern regions began to reassert their unity, rapidly degenerating into what has been called the Donbas War (M. Bagnoli, 2021, p. 243). According to Viktor Stepanenko (2020), these revolutionary events also brought to the fore questions of the public role of religion in Ukrainian society, as together with intra-Orthodox divisions, they further engaged the churches in the political and civil society spheres and increased solidarity between civil society and religion in Ukraine. Euromaidan reinforced the latent conflict between Ukraine's two geopolitical paths - i.e. its aspiration for European integration and its gravitation into the pro-imperial Russian geopolitical camp, "Russian world" - and actualised questions of Ukrainian national, cultural and State identity. The rift within Ukrainian Orthodoxy has turned into an ecclesial conflict that is not only national but also geopolitical. Euromaidan was in itself a question of values. The protest movement articulated

universal social virtues and a moral vision concerning a "good society", justice, solidarity and human dignity in its programme. The concept of dignity became not only the "primary guiding symbol" of Euromaidan that "forged feelings of unity, solidarity and determination" for the activists (Wanner, 2017, p. 3), but the polysemantic character of the concept of dignity, which encompasses broad humanitarian, international legal and historical religious meanings, also provided the protests actions with their multifunctional legitimacy and justified them as the morally just pursuit.

Another important confirmation of the growing public role of churches in the conflict was the initiatives conducted chiefly within the Council of Churches and Religious Organisations throughout Ukraine. Even if these initiatives were not fully successful and failed to prevent deadly violence on both sides, it was a valuable experience attempting national reconciliation (Viktor Stepanenko, 2020).

III. RELIGION AND FOREIGN POLICY: THE ROLE OF FAITH ACTORS IN INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In conflict situations, the problems of promoting civil society, development, ethnic or religious minority treatment, conflicting interpretations of religious freedom, force and non-violence, and the problems of how to promote peace, justice and reconciliation become *interconnected* issues. Seemingly tangible or objective issues, such as territory or governance, open to rational calculation, are now intimately rooted in the cultural and psychological factors that drive and sustain the conflict. Thus, diplomacy is no longer only concerned with the logical calculation of the material interests of States (S.M. Thomas, 2005), but also analyses the change of actors and the place where conflicts occur. Similarly, traditional diplomacy, based on the representation of states, is no longer sufficient to manage today's complex and interdependent international relations. In contrast, multi-track diplomacy seems more capable of understanding the importance of non-state actors, such as non-governmental organisations, religious groups, and economic and social actors, in shaping social groups' interests, aims and objectives.

In the chapter "Soulcraft as Statecraft? Diplomacy, Conflict Resolution, and Peacebuilding", Scott M. Thomas (2005) argues that "the global resurgence of religion" has meant that religious virtues and practices rooted in faith communities are becoming a more central part of diplomacy and peacebuilding. The author points out how realist theory may have been deficient in including "faith-based diplomacy" in its discussion topics, excluding it from "realpolitik", albeit an element of expression of power politics and interstate interchange. While great powers have long been the sole determinant of war or peace in so-called interstate or track-one diplomacy, according to constructivist theories, diplomacy is articulated in a cultural and religious context. How identities are constructed is faced with the interplay of domestic and foreign policy factors. In turn, religion, for faith-based diplomacy, has been a missing dimension of statecraft. Therefore, the doctrine sought to fill this void by expanding the role of faith in the existing instruments of statecraft and introducing the realm of religion into foreign policy (S.M. Thomas, 2005).

The concept of faith-based diplomacy still operates primarily within the existing social order in international relations and focuses on integrating faith into diplomatic or political institutions. In other words, faith-based diplomacy consists of a "two-way spiritual orientation", according to which, on the one hand, politics is appropriately oriented and ordered in a teleological sense towards the transcendent; secondly, there is a genuine

recognition of the active role of the divine in human affairs. In this way, diplomacy questions what Max Weber called "religious ethics", i.e. limiting the accepted role of religion to personal religious motivations for public ends or social action (S.M. Thomas, 2005, p.173), and instead articulates the ends themselves within a discourse of strategic rationality.

According to Douglas Johnston (1994), religious or faith-based diplomacy is particularly suited to the analysis of "non-material identity-based conflicts", as it focuses attention on the impact of shared spiritual beliefs or values, the emotional stakes involved in a conflict (Johnston, 1994).

R. Scott Appleby (2003) describes religion as "the missing dimension of state craftsmanship" and asserts that if it could be rediscovered, one could: (1) identify the brilliance of each religious tradition and its ways of producing social harmony; (2) access the mystical, experiential and syncretistic dimensions of faith traditions; (3) engage scholars, theologians and others who see conflict resolution as a normative commitment of their religious tradition; (4) develop conflict resolution experts within religious communities; and (5) tap into NGO, State and private actors to enhance religious-secular dialogue (Nicolai N. Petro, 2015).

Professor Pasquale Ferrara (2014) points out that leaders of major world religions can provide the necessary "social capital" in times of conflict. In other words, faith actors can play a limited but crucial function in de-escalating conflict, using their capacities to support professed efforts to build trust and recognition. The Russian Orthodox Church is often portrayed as a political agent. State authorities and Church leaders appear together in official ceremonies, the Patriarch discusses political issues, and the Church asserts its right and duty to be an important moral voice in society. This is because the Orthodox Churches have contributed significantly to the construction of "civil religions", presenting elements of cults and religious ideologies and thus collaborating in nation-building. At the same time, they can mobilise the masses to participate in destructive nationalist conflicts and encourage the exclusion of the "other" (Cyril Hovorun, 2017, p. 253).

One of the instruments to adopt the doctrine of the new Russian civil theology is the traditionally conciliar one. Articles of the new creed are discussed and accepted at "ecumenical" councils, the so-called World Council of the Russian People (*Vsemirnyj Russkij Narodnyj Sobor*). The Church provided this religion with a theological language through which it began to express itself by speaking of unifying social and political values rather than prayer.

In Ukraine, on the other hand, there is a clash between two types of civilised religions: "the Russian-style imperialist" one, which is widely supported in the eastern and southern parts of the country, and "the Balkan-style nationalist" one, which is prevalent mainly in the western part. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate largely embraces "the Russian imperial paradigm". At the same time, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church rely on "the nation-based civil religion" (Cyril Hovorun, 2017, p. 259).

The research of scholars and officials who have grasped the potential for religious leaders and communities to transform conflict has been summarised by Reina C. Neufeldt (2011) into three dominant large-scale "theories of change" that are embedded in current approaches to interreligious dialogue: *theological*, consisting of theology and religious studies; *political*, from political science and international relations; and *peacebuilding*. Interreligious dialogue initiatives arising from these different fields produce different patterns and expectations of outcomes. For example, people who engage in dialogue from a theological perspective are less inclined to view religion as a source of conflict than those who operate from a political and peacebuilding perspective.

Peacebuilding is a response to the *disintegration* of the social fabric, the political and institutional framework, and the potential cultural clashes that underlie war (P. Ferrara, 2014). Religion became a key resource for conflict transformation and peacebuilding interventions in the late 20th and early 21st century; before then, religion was seen by political science and psychology as an integral part of the culture in ethnopolitical disputes and, as such, involved in conflicts of values and identities. According to Reina C. Neufeldt (2011), the psychological foundation of the powerful ideology of ethnic nationalism, which we have seen theorised by Mark Juergensmeyer (1996), is still group identification, i.e. emotional attachment and affiliation to a group of like-minded individuals. The concept of peacebuilding emerges from a holistic conception of peace that is used in the literature on international relations as something more than the absence of war or armed conflict between States. Whereas the absence of war or unstable peace is often referred to as "negative peace" in the peace studies literature by framing it in the fear, uncertainty and insecurity of others generated by military force, the so-called "stable peace" or "positive peace" is the absence of war preparedness or expectations of war and is often associated with the reduction of what are considered to be the causes of violent conflict: economic deprivation and structural violence. Starting from the famous statement of UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutro-Ghali, who linked peacebuilding exclusively to post-conflict support of peace agreements

and the reconstruction of war-torn societies, the concept is increasingly understood in a dynamic way (Thomas, S.M., 2005). Interreligious dialogue is recast in the context of peacebuilding as a starting point for action at the local level and in other spheres of society (education, economic and livelihood cooperation), shifting engagement from the individual to the relational, structural and cultural level (R. C. Neufeldt, 2011). Peacebuilding can be distinguished from the narrower concept of peacemaking, which is the attempt to resolve a dispute or armed conflict between states, often using the methods outlined in the United Nations Charter, Chapter VI, on "Peaceful Settlement of Disputes", including negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration (Thomas, S.M., 2005).

The theological perspective views interreligious dialogue as an opportunity for exchange and understanding between clergy, religious leaders, laity and theologians through an exchange of documents, thematic panels or structured discussions in order to gain greater knowledge, and positive opinions between participants, a deepening of each other's faith, potentially moving religion away from conflict (R. C. Neufeldt, 2011). The approach focuses on individual and relational change within the dialogue group. It aims to eliminate negative stereotypes and dehumanisation of the *other* and develop a platform to address the root causes of conflict and its consequences.

The political approach to interreligious dialogue aims to produce coexistence or social harmony, increase the perceived legitimacy of a political process and actors, or, conversely, delegitimise actors who promote the use of violence. This is done by quoting and conveying the messages of high-profile religious actors at the request of leaders or state institutions. Religious leaders are considered credible and trustworthy, represent their communities in public forums, and are considered capable of catalysing support. The underlying premise that religion is a cause, inspiration or exacerbating factor in official political negotiations and processes constitutes the assumption of how and why things will change as a result of interfaith interaction in political forums. According to this methodology, religious actors are crucial but not essential in seeking political solutions to disputes.

Table 1 Comparison of Interfaith Dialogue Perspectives

	Theological	Political	Peacebuilding
Scholarship roots	Theology and Religious Studies	Political Science and International Relations	Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding
Religion and violent conflict	Religion does not cause violent conflict; its resources can inspire violence if the faith is perceived in danger	Religion *causes* conflict (defines end-goals, inspires repression). Religion *exacerbates* conflict (rally supporters; legitimate, motivate insurgents; identify sacred objects and holy sites for protection; discount physical survival)	Religion *causes* and *exacerbates* violent conflict. Source for identity and value conflicts
Religion and formal peace processes	Religious actors and institutions operate outside of political and legal structures	Religious leaders and religious institutions *support* secular peace processes	Multiple roles for religious actors and institutions in peacebuilding (lead or support; formal and informal; multi-layered)
Purpose of interfaith dialogue	Increase understanding of doctrines, beliefs, values and practices. This can include establishing common values. Develop relationships of mutual respect. Active theology	Educate the other. Increase legitimacy of political processes and/or actors and de-legitimate violent religious actors. Expand political options	Transform attitudes and perceptions of the other. Access deep spiritual resources for meaningful peacebuilding. Broaden participation in peacebuilding processes. Develop platform for joint action to address roots and consequences of conflict
Focus of change	Individual. Relational amongst dialogue group members	Broad-based relational (media outreach). Structural (political process)	Individual. Relational (within dialogue and broader-based). Cultural (culture of peace). Structural (political processes, exclusionary structures)

i. The concept of multitrack diplomacy

In discussing the tensions and antagonisms that characterise international relations, non-state actors should no longer be assessed as competitors to states in international relations. Indeed, non-state actors can hinder the work of traditional diplomacy but also provide new opportunities for state diplomacy. Inter-state diplomacy was founded on the idea that the objective of armed conflict was the defence of the national interest and therefore had to start with compromises and negotiations related to the security sphere. However, the subjective and experiential realities that shape the interests, aims and objectives of various social groups have also become the focus of interest of the variety of diplomacy methods that lie outside the formal diplomatic or governmental system and are now called part of "multi-track diplomacy".

Multi-track diplomacy represents an evolution in the management of international relations and a response to the challenges posed by globalisation and the emergence of new non-state actors. By the term multi-track diplomacy Scott M. Thomas (2005) refers to "informal, non-governmental contacts that take place at the individual, state and societal levels, below the level of analysis of the international system" and include private citizens, social groups and religious groups:

Track 1—Governments

Track 2—NGOs and professional organisations

Track 3—Business community

Track 4—Private citizens

Track 5—Research, training and educational institutes

Track 6—Activists

Track 7—Religion

Track 8—Funding organisations

Track 9—Media and communications.

All these actors are now central to the search for conflict resolution, a peaceful resolution to an issue that has led to a dispute or disagreement that has escalated into a violent conflict between states or non-state actors. The search for resolution may include forms of negotiation, mediation or arbitration. Certain religious traditions have been associated with this new field of study in international relations, given the recorded increase in ethnic and ethnonational conflicts, the "global resurgence of religion", and the ensuing peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities.

In the religious context, subjective and experiential realities can strongly impact the shaping of international interests and conflicts. Therefore, multi-track diplomacy considers religion essential to oversee diplomacy and conflict prevention. Multi-track diplomacy works with multiple actors using a wide range of tools and communication channels to achieve its objectives, including dialogue, cooperation and education. This makes multi-track diplomacy a more flexible model that can be adapted to the challenges of today's world. In sum, multi-track diplomacy represents an evolution in the management of international relations and a more inclusive and interdisciplinary way to address the conflicts and challenges that characterise the world. Its ability to consider religion as a critical factor and to work with all actors makes it a valuable resource for the international community. However, examples of the use of this form of diplomacy are absent in the case of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014-2022. Although, as we have seen, there has been no shortage of attempts to intervene in favour of civil society over the years, there have been no significant episodes in which representatives of the Orthodox Church Patriarchate of Kyiv, the Orthodox Church Patriarchate of Moscow and the Russian Orthodox Church have been present at the negotiating tables.

ii. A methodological overview

In order to understand what it was that allowed the two pieces of the puzzle to be joined together, enabling them to be reunited in non-fragile aggregates or, in any case lasting long enough to ascertain their existence, semi-structured interviews were conducted with those who had experienced his conflict on their own or made it a core theme of their professional experience.

Interviews provide insights into participants' experiences and perspectives. This type of interview allows for flexibility in the questioning process, unlike structured interviews that follow a standardised set of questions. Although aware that, without empirical analysis and given the small number of interviewers, the information gathered may not be generalisable to a more comprehensive population, the semi-structured interviews allowed for a fair amount of coverage of topics and room for possible insights not initially foreseen.

The data collection method, the semi-structured interviews, is also an excellent source of reliable and secure data. In fact, this method allows for the collection of unique and personal information from first-hand sources such as civil society, journalists and reporters who have given their consent for the publication of their name and the recording of the conversation, demonstrating with transparency and pride the different perspectives of different contexts.

iii. The interviews

Anna Fratsyvir is a student at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv from the International Communication programme, writes for the blog Svidomi and is currently a trainee at the European Parliament. As part of the training for the European Solidarity Corps and under the auspices of the European Year of Youth, Anna Fratsyvir was also selected among those young people from all over Europe who had the opportunity to have their thoughts heard for Youth Talks. Thanks to her participation in this project promoted by the European Commission, Anna Fratsyvir was able to talk about her experience of the war in Ukraine and how Europe reacted with solidarity towards the Ukrainian people. In my interview, we discussed events dating back to a time when she was but a 14-year-old girl.

Q. What do you think was the role of religion in spreading or de-escalating the conflict in the Donbas in 2014?

A. Countries and their institutions have the ability to use soft power. They somehow prepared the ground for future occupation. They created common cultural and religious spaces. People started to imagine themselves as part of this Russian culture, part of this Russian society. Especially older people born in the Soviet Union, where education was total propaganda. They were raised with the idea of the USSR of patriotism and they tend to be more vulnerable. They were thought from early childhood the propaganda of "one nation and one country". People had changed their mindset. And when a true war started in 2014, some of them were prepared. They were waiting…and they said: "yes, we are probably brothers". While others were more into "studying and understanding" … so they understood what was happening. Usually, those people just moved from the Ukrainian side to territories controlled by the Ukrainian government, or went abroad. Regarding religion in this context: before 2014, when our Church was part of the Russian Patriarchy, during most of the prayers, it was recall the idea of joint nations, the importance of the use of the Russian language, and that countries are not as important as God. They had started to put into the minds of religious people this idea of being not Ukrainians but Russians or something that belongs to both.

Q. Part of the Ruskii Mir...

A. Yes, part of the Ruskii Mir exactly, the main principle of media, of journalists, books, films, shows, and even movies for kids. It's propaganda. Now our security forces are starting to investigate the churches of the Moscow Patriarchate, and they revealed so many Russian books, documents, and passports, which are illegal in Ukraine. In 2014, many priests of Moscow churches tried to hide people who were killing in the Maidan. They were covering people who had decided to prosecute revolutionary activists. In Ukraine, we tend to say that this Church is like a Russian agent in our Country. They gather information; they spread misinformation; they instrumentalize religion to make people believe that Russia is not responsible, that nothing is clear in this war, and that we are one nation. And when you ask those people who often go to Church about these topics, they reply that Ukraine has existed only for thirty years while God has existed since ever. This narrative is something that people believe in. Another aspect is, for example, in villages, there are no sirens… and churches usually start ringing bells when there is a missile strike threat. This means that people must go to shelters because there is a high possibility of missile strikes. There were many cases when Moscow's patriarchate churches didn't do that. So, when there needed to say to people that there was a danger, they just didn't ring the bell, and people didn't know that there was a

possible missile strike and a high possibility of being killed. You don't know precisely where this rocket is going to fall. It is a very sensitive topic. It is a project.

Q. Who was the religious leader that was considered by as a "reference point" after 2014?

Religious people, in this case, turned a blind eye. They said that it was not the church's fault. They say that they are helping Ukrainian forces. Maybe their local church does it, but the global image is different. People tend to deny facts just because they blindly believe. You will never hear a priest directly saying that Ukraine is bombing. They would rather say that peace and forgiveness have to be pursued. But which peace can we talk about when our freedom is under attack? This is the idea of hiding propaganda under those religious priers. People, or to be too naïve, or to be too blind, or to be brainwashed… often continued to follow their creed. I was born in Western Ukraine, but a few years ago, I moved to Kyiv, which is why I met a lot of people from many regions. For West, East, South and Nord. From everywhere. And I also have relatives in Odesa and the Donbas region. This is why I cherish living in the capital because I know a lot of people with different stories, and this is another topic. There is a narrative that says that Ukraine is divided into East and West, which might be true in some terms. Still, especially in 2014, it changed a lot. Many Russians left and gained Ukrainian passports in the Eastern part of the country. We have some Russian-speaking problems, because some people tended to speak Russian for the most part, but after 2014 the situation changed. As far as I saw in Kyiv. Before 2014 Kyiv was a Russian-speaking city, but since I moved there in 2020, there has been a huge difference from when I was a kid. I went to see my relatives before the Euromaidan, and they were speaking Russian. After 2014 mostly spoke Ukrainian. Western Ukraine was created according to some narratives by Poland or the Austro-Hungarian empire, while the east by Russia. This is something that in the media is common to hear. Ukraine has a completely stolen history. When Kyiv and Rus were formed, there was no Russia or Ukraine. There was Moscovia. The historical roots are linked to reputation. Our identity was kept through the lens of this long history of imperialism.

Q. Do you therefore firmly believe that people thought they were fighting for Russian Orthodoxy?

A. The Russian Church in Russia goes straightly behind the Government. They even say their prayers on tanks, putting holy water on tanks. As a consequence of that, the Church in Ukraine of Moscow Patriarchy is a headquarter. They, of course, modify the narratives a bit, building

another product for Ukrainian publicity. They are not saying, "you need to fight for Russia," they say, "have faith in these guys". It's a religious project with political objectives. It's all about influence. It's a very long-term project. It was not something that started in a few years. A moral strategy that is used in every country and can be extremely successful. A country that can dominate others. People are raised with this idea. The Ukrainian Chuch always supported our military, but the argument was that we were right to fight in our territory, because we were not killing, but defending ourselves. The Moscow Patriarchy, on the contrary, said that since we were not killing, we should have been willing to leave our territory and sign an agreement. Of course, one pursues the Ukrainian interest, and the other no. It is naïve to say that it is just a war for natural resources. Russia has everything but also has the desire to spread an ideology again, to be a hegemon leader.

Q, and they didn't try to communicate to each other?

A. No. Just until recently, the Church of the Moscow Patriarchate rented Lavra, the Kyiv Monastery. One of the biggest churches in Ukraine, with this famous architectural building. And a lot of Ukrainians were against this agreement, because they understood the symbolism behind it, and they decided to stop the lease. They usually accuse each other of being a fake church, and they don't recognize the Ukrainian church to be legitimate, to be recognized as the only one. There was also the problem of misinformation, so many families decided to stop going to the Moscow Patriarchate Church and they started going only to the Ukrainian one.

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Q. Can you describe the development of religious freedom in the so-called Donbas People's Republics and conflict-affected areas since 2014?

A. On the Russian side of southern Ukraine and the Donbas, Orthodoxy goes on to generate identity functions, which are not exclusive. They are exclusive in the Ukrainian context, but especially since February, there has been pouring onto the battlefield of forces of such different religious and cultural backgrounds, which have also come from very distant and disconnected regions of Russia, that they have brought identity to be "the glue". Orthodoxy is a susceptible subject for the faithful and those who built the identity battle around it. Then, of course, there are also Muslims, Buddhists and atheists. In the Donbas, there are also pagan battalions, for example. But all of them must then protect and recognise their "allies". "Identity" should be read as a plural, since Russia is a multi-ethnic and multi-faith state. I also believe that Orthodoxy has been, and still is, a very sensitive topic, because it has been a way of affirming or reaffirming the identity primacy of "one over the other". The Moscow Patriarchate has pushed very forcefully - both from a political point of view in terms of government choices and from a popular point of view, directly on the faithful - the fact that Slavic peoples are one population also because of the common Orthodox faith. A church that, until 2018, was under the same patriarchate. Precisely because there is this primacy of Orthodoxy in Ukraine. Although, in reality, in addition to the schism in the Orthodox Church, strong Catholic sentiments have become particularly widespread in recent years. The fact that the confessional battle was fought there, in the years leading up to 2022, is undoubted given to the fact that this aspect from Moscow was repeatedly used in a "politicizing" manner. It is a central issue mainly because it is connected to language, culture and tradition. These are all issues related to an identity discourse tout court, elements that fit into many other battles.

Q: absolutely it was a way to read the conflicts...

A. The danger in trying to give a starting point is that so many of these lesser-considered aspects, such as religious function, but very much related to Ukrainian nationalism, actually go back to the history of the Soviet Union. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was already discourses of Ukrainian nationalism and the fact that it was frowned upon by Moscow. Of course, this was a marginal phenomenon. However, it is no coincidence that "the same claims" became "the same arguments" that led Ukrainian nationalism to develop in a certain way. They were dormant sentiments, and religion remained underlying up to a certain point. Then, when there was greater freedom of worship, it became part of this logic. Which in reality was already there, but it was a vehicle or perhaps a counterbalance to

nationalist sentiment. Religion for the Russians was also a way of keeping this phenomenon of renewed post-Soviet Ukrainian nationalism at bay. Again, it was there before, but it gradually became more popular. And in that case, religion acted as a brake because the Moscow Patriarchate had primacy even over the Kyiv Church. But this aspect should not be underestimated because Ukrainian nationalism was based on pillars. The decision to support the schism and assert its independence is also in the final parabola. It is as if recent post-2014 frictions have led Ukrainian nationalism to maintain its status even on the last remaining identity pillar, the last unifying factor with Moscow. It is a nationalism based on language, culture, tradition, symbolism, and what was left of what bound them to Russia? The Church.

Q. So you see it as a form of identity legitimisation, with military or political ends?

A. From the military-political point of view, it is one thing; from the civil point of view, it is another. From the civil point of view, confessions are very useful so that the population, even in the worst and most tragic moments, can have the perception of having solace. Think about the front with the military chaplains. Before 24 February, those fighting in the Donbas were Russian-speaking or ethnically Russian, because there had been a natural selection. After 2014 and the outbreak of the civil war, the people who actually wanted to remain under the control of the Kyiv government left the Donbas. There was a significant mass exodus. Then some people stayed out for necessity and are pro-Ukrainian, maybe from 24 February onwards in disguise, but there are Ukrainians in the Donbas too. That's why sabotage, espionage, and partisan actions still exist, although they are mixed. But mostly, those who are present in Russian-controlled territories are because they want to be with the Russians. So, it is clear that among the civilian population, the predominant religion is Orthodoxy. Many other people who have arrived in the Donbas since 2014, either to fight or to live there alongside the people directly experiencing this tragedy, have gradually embraced the Orthodox denomination. They may not have been believers before, or were Christian Catholics, but they came very close to Orthodoxy. In this case, I am talking about both combatants and civilians. And it is a story that I really heard many times while I was there. It is not an episodic thing of someone who had enlightenment. It was a universal glue in the Donbas from 2014 to 2022. Even the fact that Putin spoke about fighting Satanism was a message to these people who, over time, have made religious confession a reason for living. Also, because you can imagine the daily life of people living on the frontline, or in

cities like Donetsk since 2014…There, the line between life and death is centimetres. When fate is not up to you, to live in such a context for so long… if you don't have something vital to believe in... That is why Orthodoxy has been a glue. The idea of enduring all that to fight Satanism was a glue. Then some people believe in it today as they did yesterday. They have a metaphysical, spiritual transport. As I got to know, the fighters, even foreigners...not sharing anything culturally, or at any rate very little, speaking another language because many did not speak Russian and many other aspects that made them dissimilar to the "typical Russian fighter" what began to unite them over time was a precisely religious confession. And that is why I tell you that so many have renamed themselves.

As for coexistence with other confessions...I came up with this thing in the International Legion that surprised me. I found myself in their headquarters. So many from the Caucasus to the Donbas are fighters who have different confessions. Whereas if you go instead to the Chechen Rosgvardia, they are all Chechens or Islamists who may interact with other Russian regiments tout court or militiamen from the Donbas. In the case of this Legion, the interesting thing was precisely this: within the same Legion are Islamists and Orthodox Christians fighting in the same battalion. Even in the Wagner Group, there are perhaps pagans fighting with Christian-Orthodox. The schism was, in fact, a much-downplayed issue in terms of the impact it could have had on both civilians and the military.

I repeat, it was the last remaining bulwark of closeness between Ukrainian and Russian civil society. The decision to separate the patriarchates ended the situation. Even if "it is one thing to say it, and another to do it", because there may still be people who have seen their point of reference in the Russian Orthodox Church for seventy years and then, in 2018, decided not to change. In fact, Christmas 2022 was a Kafkaesque Christmas because many chose to continue holding services in Russian. Even in other military theatres I have seen recently, I have realised that religion is an evident theme. I give you the example of Kosovo, where there is a flourishing religious rediscovery, even architecturally. Still, no one is there if you go into the mosque or into the Orthodox church. In Bosnia, too, I witnessed the same thing. From a spiritual point of view, everything is much more diluted; it is a means to assert power. Whereas in the Donbas, religion is a spiritual refuge and, therefore, much more pervasive than one can imagine.

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Q. In your opinion, has the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict affected relations between Orthodox religious groups in both countries? If so, how?

A: In my opinion, it is clear that the religious factor was a precipitating factor and that this break should be seen in the context of Ukraine's broader disengagement from Ruskii Mir. The spiritual component is part of this process. Would it have happened if there had not been war in the Donbas? Would it have happened if Ukraine and Russia had not set themselves on a collision course? This is a speculative question, but the answer is probably no. Not being an expert in theological logic, I can say that Ukrainian Orthodoxy seems to have its own particularity that could be analysed further. The entire Orthodox world is a world that internally has divisions that are upstream of the Russian-Ukrainian hiatus. The Patriarch of Constantinople should be a key figure, but Kirill's influence and the Moscow Patriarchate's extraordinary weight are evident. The Orthodox world is diverse in itself, and less top-down than the Catholic world. It has a horizontality that is often unknown to us. And this is a bit of a premise, but then there are more exquisitely political issues. The schism between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Orthodox Church sees conflicts that even predate the primacy of the Moscow Patriarchate. There is, however, a political element ridden very strongly by Poroshenko, the president who has made the most explicit break between Ukraine and Russia.

Q. Do you, therefore, believe that the Ukrainian government somehow supported the achievement of autocephaly?

A: Yes, this absolutely. There is also another hat here, which is the communist policies that were made throughout the Soviet Union with respect to the religious population "across the board", because there was no religious discrimination on a neo-imperialist basis. That was one of the things that were part of the communist raison d'etre, that was applied in Russia, Ukraine and Georgia. Religion was seen by the party as something at odds with the state, but very different from Western secularism. The point is that, then, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in Ukraine, there were obviously pre-existing

ties to the State order. And if, at the same time, the last order also collapsed... you have double faults. And it was also a miracle, in fact, that this unifying bond between the two countries from a religious point of view held for so long, while a centralised political bond had disappeared. This relationship held precisely because of the horizontality of the Orthodox world, which was somehow able not to go into crisis as had happened to the apparent political independence, that was needed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In reverse, I wonder if there could have been a primacy of the Roman Catholic papacy over France, which became independent after the collapse of the Roman Empire? We are speaking in absurdities, but in my opinion, it has weighed heavily the fact that, by virtue of the political crisis generated after 2014, the Moscow Patriarchate and the particular figure of Kirill have allowed a return, also iconographically important, of the Orthodox religion in Russia. This return was promoted mainly in Putin's second phase. Still, from the beginning part of the project, it was undoubtedly to bring back religion as an instrumentum regni of the Kremlin. And so, the fact that Patriarch Kirill was a figure so tied to the Kremlin, so aligned with the Kremlin's positions, so much a transmission belt for Kremlin policies, so much so that we all know that Kirill was part of the KGB, becomes a figure contiguous to a project that, now that we have seen its conclusion, we can define as "neo-imperial". A project of linkage to the Moscow centrality that, however, until a few years ago, was not so evidently neo-imperial. Then if you are a politician, you start asking yourself who the Orthodox popes answer to, who do these people who belong to the Moscow Patriarchate answer to... Are they really free to preach, or do they respond to a higher agenda? And this is an issue that has weighed heavily.

Q. Hence we are dealing with what you mention somehow in your volume "A Putin model", a system capable of projecting itself ...

A. The Kremlin used every imaginable lever to bind, or continue to bind, the satellite countries to itself. And so, even then, the tension broke. The rope snapped, and autocephaly was born. It was part of an opposing project, the Ukrainian one, which did not want to accept that kind of binding - that it considered dangerous from a national point of view, not just from a creedal point of view. Then… remembering my colleagues' comments who believed there were a whole series of liturgies that must have had a

bearing… However, I cannot say how much, and I personally would not untie the religious aspect from a historical-political path.

Q. And how did the authorities, military or paramilitary groups react to the initiatives promoted by the churches after Euromaidan?

A. I haven't had first-hand experience with initiatives...certainly, religion in a post-communist world is not inherent to reactionary movements, and I see it less close to the Euromaidan youth horde and those pro-European street protests. It is a disconnect for that population that decided to untie itself from the future that Moscow was proposing. Whereas, if we go back to the discourse of security, the capillarity of religious structures... when you think that maybe a mayor is no longer a mayor unless there are 5,000 inhabitants, but the parish priest remains…the religious figure in both Ukraine and Russia became the that you can see on the ground. In the contact zone of the Donbas or in areas that are difficult by nature, it is clear that religion can suddenly play a role, rather than living in times of peace. Orthodoxy also has a transmission belt, solidarity, charity, which can become instrumental in times of crisis. This led to great scrutiny of Orthodox religious organisations' role in understanding how they moved around. Also, and this is a constant in the Ukrainian crisis, Ukraine has experienced the issue of territorial unevenness very strongly in the Dnipro line, in the East/West division. Then in 2014, it was realised that the country had still chosen the western camp, even in the eastern regions. But culturally and linguistically, it had historically, even induced by forced repopulations, a centuries-old stratification of Russian presence. All the more reason to wonder how the distinction between the various souls of the Ukrainian community had been organised. On the other hand, the promotion of de-escalation attempts at "dealbreaker" levels was never perceived.

Conclusion

In the attempt to answer the question *"how the religious dimension has played a role in the Russian – Ukranian conflict,* this thesis has firstly provided an overview of literature studies in different fields, such as sociology, history and international relations, on the role religion has played in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict from 2014 to 2022.

Drawing on the literature analysed, the thesis argues the connection between *religion* and *inter-state conflict* is a *causative relationship,* a legitimising factor of an identity conflict.

The religious element constitutes an essential ingredient of national identity, and, as such, it is deeply related with and integrated in foreign policy. Although it would be reductive to state that religious reasons represent the main driver and object of the conflict, the influential role played by religious factors should not be underestimated.

As this research has highlighted, in both Russia and Ukraine, state influence in creed-related affairs was prominent. Religious rhetoric and traditions have been an accelerator and indicator of the conflict. Moreover, religion itself has been deeply affected by the clashes. The Orthodox religion has been defined as a "civil foreign policy agent" and the conflict as "religious and ethno-ideological", inserting it in the typology described by professor Juergensmeyer. Ethno-ideological religious nationalism is a type of nationalism "linked to people and land", where religion is seen as a high aspect of ethnic identity, but also to "ideas and beliefs", where compatibility with religious goals becomes the criterion for a legitimate political platform.

Moreover, this dissertation attempted to trace some changes in Church-State relations in Russia. While historically, the Church and the State have often shared values and overlapped interests, the Russian Orthodox Church increasingly acts in partnership with the State, seeking to establish a "separation of spheres of competence" expressed according to the principle of "harmonious relationship" (*simfonija valsteij*). In the case of modern Russia, both the political establishment and the Church supported a different model of legitimisation of the current regime through the use of factors such as the promotion of a "Soviet historiography of a common past", the presence of "a naturally existing community of civilisations based on a common language", and adherence to Orthodox identity understood in cultural and political terms. The ROC provides the Russian State with a "national cause," or "cement," that unites society (Zhukova, 2013, p. 170). The messianism of the Rusky Mir concept thus has its intimate origin in the religious sentiment of Russian Christianity. And while Russian messianism

justified nationalism, nationalism was the instrument of messianic universalism (D. Barsotti, 2017, pp. 59-61).

To counter the Russkiy mir narrative, a Russian cultural, political and spiritual sphere of influence that includes "Little Russia" (Ukraine), the Ukrainian State has created a new independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church. However, as in any other situation, "civil religion" in the Orthodox context can be both beneficial and harmful. Its positive aspects include *uniting* people and forming them into a *nation*. State-sponsored and Church-blessed "nationalism" is a source of political authority and identity, gives states a sense of uniqueness and mission, and fuels patriotism. Among its negative aspects is the ability to inspire hatred and exclusion towards "the other", exacerbating conflict. This analysis, therefore, has also questioned the role between State and Church in Ukraine, analysed as a synthesis and conclusion of the existence of a Ukrainian national civic sentiment. The project of a united and indipendent Church has been instrumentalised as "another act of proclaiming Ukraine's independence", a patriotric sentiment which is emerging, also thanks to the promotion of a local church unrelated to Putin's nationalist claims. However, in the paragraph "Ukrainian Autocephaly", it has been pointed out how the presence of multiple Orthodox Churches within Ukraine until 2018 made them not a consolidating factor in the country's transformation, but on the contrary, evidence of the exclusivist differences between East and West.

In 2014, in particular, the UOC-KP and the UGCC took a patriotic stance, blessing the citizen's constitutional duty to protect the country and its territorial integrity as a sacred act. In contrast, the UOC-MP mainly remained silent, trying to avoid condemnation of Russia as an aggressor and mostly talking about a "fratricidal war". These differences reflect how religion contributes to a specific cultural geography characterised by regionally variable social practices. Nevertheless, regional differences in the form of variable cultural geography do not necessarily merge into a sense of identity but may also reflect various historical experiences. On the topic of "dissimilar" regional cultures, Anna Fratsyvir was very clear in her interview: *"There is a narrative that says that Ukraine is divided into East and West, which might be true in some terms. Still, especially in 2014, it changed a lot*." Journalist Mattia Bernardo Bagnoli also mentioned this in our conversation: "*Ukraine has very strongly experienced territorial inhomogeneity in the Dnipro line, in the East/West division. Then in 2014, it was realised that the country had chosen the western camp anyway, even in the eastern regions*." The messianic nature of Orthodox Christianity challenges the way local identities are constructed by introducing a new and peculiar interplay of domestic and foreign policy factors. Orthodoxy is described as the last element of cleavage or commonality, depending on one's point of view,

of a bond between Russia and Ukraine. "*The last remaining bulwark of closeness between Ukrainian and Russian civil society*," said Daniele dell'Orco.

The interviews allowed to gather unique and personal information from first-hand sources, providing insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants. However, the thesis has the significant limitation of not being able to include, although initially intended, accounts of the experiences of men or experts from the different churches in Russia, Ukraine or belonging to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Many considered the topic too sensitive or requested to remain anonymous, so I did not include their responses in the research. In conclusion, an overview of the resolution potential that the religious dimension has in inter-state conflicts is proposed: the concept of "multi-track diplomacy". Religious leaders indeed possess the influence necessary for the formation of "social capital". Nevertheless, this last element is neither reflected in the literature examined nor in the reported statements of the interviews, nor were any significant instances of "de-escalation" or "people-to-people contact" reported during the period under review. Thus, the question of *how* the Orthodox religion played a role in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict still remains and deserves further research.

SOMMARIO

"Religious Aspects in Interstate Conflicts: the Russian-Ukranian Case" si propone di esaminare *in che modo la dimensione religiosa ha giocato un ruolo* in quello che sembra essere un rapporto di *causazione,* o fattore di legittimazione, di un conflitto identitario.

Nel 2022 la Russia ha invaso l'Ucraina segnando una cesura storica per le relazioni internazionali e per gli studiosi, i giornalisti e gli analisti di politica estera. La ricerca delle radici e delle motivazioni celate dietro l'azione militare sono spesso state ricercate secondo il punto di vista politico o economico. Tuttavia, questo conflitto, tra Paesi che hanno una significativa sovrapposizione storica e culturale, non solo ha minato l'ordine del secondo dopoguerra, ma ha anche portato a cambiamenti drammatici nelle configurazioni religiose dell'Ucraina e della Russia e nel paesaggio dei territori occupati. La dimensione religiosa non è infatti spesso raccontata dai media e dagli accademici occidentali, ma il conflitto ha di fatto esaltato le sfumature politiche e geopolitiche delle relazioni inter-ortodosse all'interno dell'Ucraina e dell'Ortodossia mondiale.

Per non correre il rischio di rincorrere gli eventi di un conflitto che non accenna ad arrestarsi, comprendendo che oggi le pubblicazioni sull'attualità tendono a diventare rapidamente obsolete, mentre le previsioni sul futuro sono sempre rischiose, questo elaborato ripropone l'osservazione degli anni 2013/2014 fino al 2022 e, ha come obiettivo quello di presentare la dimensione religiosa come *concausa,* o fattore di legittimazione, di un conflitto identitario rispondendo alla domanda: *in che modo la dimensione religiosa ha giocato un ruolo nel conflitto russo ucraino?*

Sebbene la letteratura si concentri sul tema come la descrizione di un rapporto *correlato* ai grandi argomenti di politica estera o ne ha osservato gli effetti come *consequenziali* di un percorso già tracciato e sebbene le ragioni religiose non siano o, non lo siano esclusivamente, il motore e l'obiettivo principale dello scontro, la religione ha svolto un ruolo significativo che non dovrebbe essere sottostimato. La retorica e le tradizioni religiose sono state un acceleratore e un indicatore del conflitto. Inoltre, la religione stessa è stata profondamente colpita dagli scontri. L'elaborato sintetizza i risultati di studi provenienti da diversi settori, come la sociologia, la storia e le relazioni internazionali, per analizzare i vari aspetti del ruolo che la religione ha giocato nel conflitto russo-ucraino.

L'elaborato si compone di tre parti.

L'analisi propone nel suo capitolo introduttivo la rassegna di quanti hanno discusso degli avvenimenti dalla primavera del 2014 alla sigla degli accordi di Minsk, dell'aggressione acquisitiva condotta dalla nuova forma di politica estera russa, soffermandosi sulle teorie costruttiviste. Concentrandosi sulle narrazioni, gli studi costruttivisti esplorano il *ruolo degli agenti* nel promuovere particolari comprensioni della realtà sociale, comprese le loro interpretazioni dell'identità e degli interessi, pur riconoscendo che tali comprensioni sono a loro volta modellate dai discorsi dominanti in Russia e in Ucraina. Molti costruttivisti non si soffermano esplicitamente sul nazionalismo, tuttavia, la loro enfasi sui fattori ideativi indica una potenziale sovrapposizione con l'argomento in questione. Ad esempio, alcuni autori hanno evidenziato come l'assertività russa sia stata sostenuta da una nuova attenzione al "soft power", che cerca di promuovere la Russia come "centro di valori", tra i quali una comunità di civiltà naturalmente esistente basata su una lingua russa comune, sulle tradizioni e sulla cultura russa; la storiografia sovietica di un passato comune; la legittimazione delle relazioni Stato-società; la gerarchia, un mondo russo-centrico. Tutti elementi della nozione di Russkii mir secondo la definizione proposta da Valentina Feklyunina (2016), approfondita nel paragrafo dedicato nel capitolo "Il Contesto Storico e Religioso del Conflitto Russo-Ucraino". A sostegno di alcune visioni costruttiviste di una "svolta civilizzatrice", viene notato che, anche prima della più recente svolta conservatrice, un tema dominante del nazionalismo culturale e politico enfatizzava l'unicità della "civiltà" russa, contrapposta all' "altro" occidentale. Ciò viene quindi collegato alla letteratura proposta da chi ha approfondito la dimensione religiosa all'interno dei conflitti in senso lato e, in particolare, di coloro i quali hanno saputo utilizzare i sentimenti religiosi come lente di ingrandimento del conflitto russo-ucraino.

Tuttavia, il quadro teorico su religioni e conflitti merita un'analisi a sé e ne viene proposto un breve approfondimento nel paragrafo "A theoretical framework on religions and conflicts", in cui vengono riportate le prospettive di chi considera la religione come fattore di *incitamento* di una conflittualità violenta o *metodo di legittimazione* dell'insurrezione. In particolare, Zeev Maoz e Errol A. Henderson (2020) riassumono magistralmente le diverse interpretazioni nelle definizioni di "*primordialist*", "*instrumentalist*" e "*costruttivisti*".

Riportando poi l'analisi all'oggetto della sua ricerca si sottolinea in che modo la dimensione religiosa operi nel più opportuno contesto dei conflitti interstatali, come nel caso dunque del conflitto russo – ucraino. Qui si sottolinea come la religione, benché non sia l'unico motore dei conflitti interstatali, sia uno dei fattori di conflitto più significativi. Viene esaminato il ruolo della religione nel generare e inibire i conflitti armati tra gli Stati, materia di politica estera e non solo di retoriche politiche interne.

La volontà però di scrutare il modo in cui la comunità si è costituita e quali dinamiche hanno guidato l'interazione tra i raggruppamenti di individui delle diverse fazioni, in virtù di una vera e propria formazione delle fedeltà religiose in Ucraina, si evidenzia poi il contributo degli studi condotti dal sociologo Mark Juergensmeyer inserendo la capacità di ispirare la popolazione ad agire per cause che vanno oltre il benessere di base nella tipologia di "nazionalismo religioso etno-ideologico". Il nazionalismo religioso etno-ideologico è un tipo di nazionalismo "legato alle persone e alla terra", in cui la religione è vista come un alto aspetto dell'identità etnica, ma anche alle "idee e alle credenze", dove la compatibilità con gli obiettivi religiosi diventa il criterio per una piattaforma politica legittima. Dal 1996, il professor Juergensmeyer sottolinea come alcune tradizioni religiose, con pretese universali e ambizioni globali, offrano anche risorse per rafforzare le identità locali. Lo sviluppo religioso etno-ideologico si estende su un sentiero nel quale il riconoscimento di uno stato di malcontento si interseca con la percezione che il problema sia, per certi versi, religioso, che le difficoltà politiche abbiano una causa religiosa e che gli obiettivi religiosi abbiano una soluzione politica.

L'annessione della Crimea da parte della Russia nel 2014 e il sostegno ai "separatisti" del Donbas vengono presentati come esempi archetipici di politica estera nazionalista, fattori di legittimazione di un progetto politico parzialmente giustificato sulla base della difesa dei russi etnici e della riunificazione della nazione russa. Il conflitto politico di matrice religiosa si differenzia però da un discorso di pura etnicità nella misura in cui la vita pubblica sembra essere regolamentata in conformità con alcuni principi religiosi e non si leghi semplicemente alla questione di chi può controllare le risorse, il riconoscimento e le opportunità di riproduzione culturale.

Come dichiarato nella mia intervista dalla giovanissima Anna Fratsyvir, studentessa ucraina vincitrice della selezione promossa dalla Commissione europea e dall'Agenzia esecutiva per l'istruzione e la cultura in occasione dell'Anno europeo della gioventù 2022 per gli "Youth Talks": "*non si tratta solo di una guerra per le risorse naturali. La Russia ha tutto, ma ha anche il desiderio di diffondere nuovamente un'ideologia, di essere un leader egemone*".

Nella seconda parte dell'elaborato si cerca di intersecare gli avvenimenti storici ad esempi concreti di quanto affermato finora, come quando nel 22 dicembre 2018, il presidente ucraino Petro Poroshenko ha firmato una legge che ha imposto all'UOC-MP di cambiare nome per rendere chiara la sua affiliazione alla ROC. Per far ciò si identificano due momenti: un "prima" e un "dopo" 2014, conclusosi il 24 febbraio 2022, quando la Russia ha oltrepassato il confine ucraino in diverse aree e bombardando varie città e infrastrutture.

In altre parole, qualsiasi discussione sulla politica estera russa sarebbe incompleta senza indagare il ruolo svolto dalla Chiesa ortodossa russa (ROC) nella promozione del *Russkii Mir*. Allo stesso modo, qualsiasi indagine sulla costruzione di un'identità postsovietica ucraina sarebbe frammentaria senza indagare le divergenze delle Chiese ortodosse patriarcato di Mosca e patriarcato di Kyiv che hanno portato alla richiesta e al riconoscimento dell'*Autocefalia Ucraina.*

Vengono così ripercorsi alcuni cambiamenti nelle relazioni tra Chiesa e Stato in Russia. Se storicamente, infatti, la Chiesa e lo Stato hanno spesso condiviso valori e sovrapposto interessi, la Chiesa Ortodossa Russa agisce sempre più in partnership con lo Stato, cercando di stabilire una "separazione delle sfere di competenza" espressa secondo il principio di "relazione armonica" (*simfonija valsteij*). Nel caso della Russia moderna, sia l'*establishment* politico che la Chiesa hanno sostenuto un modello diverso di legittimazione del regime attuale attraverso l'utilizzo di fattori quali la promozione di una "storiografia sovietica di un passato comune", la presenza di "una comunità di civiltà naturalmente esistente basata su una lingua comune" e l'adesione all'identità ortodossa intesa in termini culturali e politici. La ROC offre allo Stato russo una "causa nazionale", un "cemento" che tiene insieme la società (Zhukova, 2013, p. 170).

Sono state quindi sottolineate l'aumento delle tensioni nelle relazioni inter-ortodosse sia in Ucraina che nell'ortodossia mondiale. Nel tentativo di contrastare la narrativa del Russkiy mir, una sfera di influenza culturale, politica e spirituale russa che include la "Piccola Russia" (l'Ucraina), lo Stato ucraino è stato coinvolto nella creazione di una nuova Chiesa ortodossa ucraina indipendente. Il 5 gennaio 2019, il Patriarca Bartolomeo ha firmato il *tomos*, un decreto di autocefalia per la nuova Chiesa (Kadri Liik, Momchil Metodiev & Nicu Popescu, 2019). Il tomos è stato consegnato al primate dell'UOC, il metropolita Epifanio, eletto a scrutinio segreto al congresso di unificazione della Chiesa del 15 dicembre 2018. Alla cerimonia hanno partecipato il presidente ucraino Petro Poroshenko e il presidente del Parlamento ucraino Andriy Parubiy. L'evento fu storico non solo per l'Ucraina, ma anche per l'intero mondo ortodosso (Naja Bentzen, 2019). Per gli ucraini, l'autocefalia era un segno del fatto che il loro Paese si stava muovendo verso una maggiore indipendenza dalla Russia, anche nelle questioni clericali (Kadri Liik, Momchil Metodiev, & Nicu Popescu, 2019).

Ma come in ogni altra situazione, "la religione civile" nel contesto ortodosso può essere sia benefica che dannosa. Tra i suoi aspetti positivi c'è quello di *unire* le persone e formarle in una *nazione*. Il "nazionalismo sponsorizzato dallo Stato e benedetto dalla Chiesa" è una fonte di autorità politica e di identità, dà agli Stati un senso di unicità e di missione, alimenta il

patriottismo. Tra i suoi aspetti negativi, c'è la capacità di ispirare l'odio e l'esclusione verso "l'altro", esacerbando il conflitto. In questa analisi ci si interroga quindi sul ruolo tra Stato e Chiesa in Ucraina, analizzato come sintesi e conclusione dell'esistenza di un sentimento civile nazionale ucraino, che sta nascendo, anche grazie alla promozione di una chiesa locale e di un sentimento religioso, estraneo alle rivendicazioni nazionaliste di Putin. Nel paragrafo "Ukranian Autocephaly" si sottolinea quindi come la presenza di più Chiese ortodosse all'interno dell'Ucraina fino al 2018 le abbia rese non un fattore di consolidamento nella trasformazione del Paese, ma al contrario prova delle diversità esclusiviste tra Est e Ovest. Nel 2014, L'UOC-KP e l'UGCC hanno assunto una posizione patriottica, benedicendo come un atto sacro il dovere costituzionale del cittadino di proteggere il Paese e la sua integrità territoriale. L'UOC-MP invece è rimasta per lo più in silenzio, cercando di evitare una condanna della Russia come aggressore e parlando per lo più di "guerra fratricida". Queste differenze riflettono il modo in cui la religione contribuisce a creare una certa geografia culturale caratterizzata da pratiche sociali variabili a livello regionale. Fondamentale per comprendere le dinamiche regionali del Paese è stato lo studio condotto da Catherine Wanner And Viktor Yelensky (2019) in *Regionalism without Regions* edito dalla Central European University Press, nel quale gli autori ripercorrono come la religione sia stata storicamente un agente di localizzazione, legando i credenti al loro luogo di residenza e come le istituzioni religiose si siano evolute in agenti di nazionalità. Le divisioni della Chiesa ortodossa in Ucraina coincidono in larga misura con le variazioni regionali negli orientamenti geopolitici e nell'identificazione linguistica della popolazione del Paese. La stragrande maggioranza delle parrocchie della Chiesa ortodossa di Ucraina si trova nell'ovest, nel nord e nel centro del Paese, mentre la Chiesa ortodossa ucraina-Patriarcato di Mosca (UOC-MP) è più forte nell'est e nel sud.

Nel paragrafo "the interviews" vengono trascritte le interviste condotte. Sono state infatti elaborate tre interviste semi-strutturate che mi hanno portato alla formulazione delle seguenti domande: *qual è stato il ruolo della religione nel diffondere o attenuare il conflitto nel Donbas nel 2014? Qual era il leader religioso che le comunità cristiane consideravano come punto di rifermento dopo il 2014? Il conflitto militare russo-ucraino ha influenzato le relazioni tra i gruppi religiosi ortodossi in entrambi i Paesi? Se sì, in che modo?* Queste interviste mi hanno permesso di raccogliere informazioni uniche e personali da fonti di prima mano, fornendo approfondimenti sulle esperienze e sulle prospettive dei partecipanti. La prima è stata rivolta ad Anna Fratsyvir, studentessa dell'Università nazionale Taras Shevchenko di Kiev del programma di Comunicazione Internazionale. Nell'ambito della formazione per il Corpo europeo di solidarietà e sotto l'egida dell'Anno europeo della gioventù, Anna Fratsyvir è stata

selezionata tra quei giovani di tutta Europa che ha avuto l'opportunità di far ascoltare il suo pensiero per gli Youth Talks. Nella mia intervista abbiamo discusso di eventi che risalgono ad un momento in cui lei non era che una bambina di 14 anni. Daniele Dell'Orco è un giornalista, collaboratore delle testate Libero e IlGiornale.it. Editore di Idrovolante Edizioni. Da luglio 2022 persegue la sua attività di reporter nelle zone del Donbass e nelle regioni annesse a settembre dalla Federazione russa, instaurando così un contatto diretto con gli abitanti di Donetsk e di altre grandi città e raccontando sui suoi canali quello che è stato, e che è tuttora, il clima che si respira nella zona di confine. Mattia Bernardo Bagnoli, giornalista, scrittore, è corrispondente per l'agenzia Ansa, dal 2015 a Mosca, oggi a Bruxelles. Si è laureato in Lettere e Storia all'Università di Bologna e ha conseguito il master in Giornalismo Internazionale presso la City University di Londra. Collabora con diverse testate, tra cui La Stampa e la Repubblica. Nel 2021 pubblica per People "Modello Putin. Viaggio in un Paese che faremmo bene a conoscere."

Sebbene l'elaborato presenti il limite significativo di non aver potuto includere, nonostante inizialmente preventivato, il racconto dell'esperienza di uomini o esperti delle diverse chiese presenti in Russia, in Ucraina o appartenenti al Patriarcato ecumenico di Costantinopoli, le risposte rilasciatami hanno comunque permesso una discreta copertura degli argomenti e spazio per eventuali approfondimenti non previsti inizialmente. Molti, infatti, hanno ritenuto il tema troppo sensibile o hanno richiesto di voler mantenere l'anonimato e pertanto ho ritenuto di non includere le loro risposte nell'elaborato.

Sul tema delle culture regionali "dissimili", ad esempio, la giovane Anna Fratsyvir nell'intervista rilasciatami è stata chiarissima "*C'è una narrativa che dice che l'Ucraina è divisa in Est e Ovest, il che potrebbe essere vero in alcuni termini. Ma dal 2014 è cambiata molto.*" Anche il giornalista Mattia Bernardo Bagnoli ha richiamato questo concetto nella nostra conversazione: "*l'Ucraina ha vissuto in maniera molto forte la questione della disomogeneità territoriale, nella linea di Dnipro, nella divisione Est / Ovest. Poi nel 2014 ci si è resi conto che il Paese aveva scelto comunque il campo occidentale anche nelle regioni dell'Est*". La natura messianica del cristianesimo ortodosso sfida il modo in cui le identità locali si costruiscono introducendo una nuova e peculiare interazione di fattori di politica interna ed estera. L'ortodossia viene descritta come l'ultimo elemento di scissione o comunanza, a seconda dei punti di vista, di un legame tra Russia e Ucraina. "*L'ultimo baluardo rimasto di vicinanza tra società civile ucraina e russa*" ha dichiarato Daniele dell'Orco.

In conclusione, nell'intento di fornire una visione d'insieme della potenziale arte risolutiva che la dimensione religiosa avrebbe potuto giocare nel conflitto interstatale, viene fornita una breve

esposizione del concetto di "diplomazia multitraccia". Quest'ultimo elemento non trova riscontro né nella letteratura esaminata né nelle dichiarazioni riportate degli intervistati, né sono stati riportati casi significativi di "de-escalation" o di "people-to-people contact" durante il periodo in esame. La Chiesa ortodossa russa è rappresentata più volte come un importante agente politico. Le autorità statali e i leader della Chiesa appaiono insieme nelle cerimonie ufficiali, il patriarca commenta le questioni politiche e la Chiesa afferma il proprio diritto e dovere di essere una voce morale sostanziale nella società. Ciò è dovuto al fatto che le Chiese ortodosse hanno contribuito in modo significativo alla costruzione di "religioni civili", presentando elementi di culti religiosi e ideologie e, pertanto, collaboratrici alla costruzione della nazione. Allo stesso tempo, può mobilitare le masse a partecipare a conflitti nazionalisti distruttivi e incoraggiare l'esclusione dell' "altro" (Cyril Hovorun, 2017, p. 253). Uno degli strumenti per adottare la dottrina della nuova teologia civile russa è quello tradizionalmente conciliare. Gli articoli del nuovo credo vengono discussi e accettati nei concili ecumenici, il cosiddetto Consiglio Mondiale del Popolo Russo (*Vsemirnyj Russkij Narodnyj Sobor*). La Chiesa ha offerto alla religione un linguaggio teologico, nel quale ha iniziato a esprimersi, non per parlare di fede, bensì di valori sociali e politici unificanti (Cyril Hovorun, 2017). In Ucraina, nel mentre, si assiste allo scontro tra due tipi di religioni civili: "quella imperialista di stampo russo", ampiamente sostenuta nella parte orientale e meridionale del Paese, e "quella nazionalista di stampo balcanico", diffusa soprattutto nella parte occidentale. La Chiesa ortodossa ucraina del Patriarcato di Mosca abbraccia in larga misura il paradigma imperiale russo, mentre la Chiesa ortodossa ucraina del Patriarcato di Kiev e la Chiesa ortodossa autocefala ucraina si affidano alla religione civile basata sulla nazione (Cyril Hovorun, 2017, p. 259).

Nonostante si sia più volte sottolineato nel corso di questa analisi, l'importanza e l'influenza che i leader religiosi possiedono in quanto fautori del "capitale sociale necessario" (P. Ferrara, 2014) alla creazione di nuove connessioni, nel caso del conflitto russo-ucraino, questo non sembra essere, o non è ancora accaduto, riportandoci così alla domanda su *come la dimensione religiosa abbia giocato un ruolo nel conflitto russo-ucraino.*

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