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Double identity of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy

Dear participants of this meeting,

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

Many thanks for inviting me to this meeting. First of all I would like to express my personal respect to the keynote speaker Metropolitan Hilarion. I know him personally since the time of my studying at the St.-Petersburg theological seminary almost 20 years ago as he held an open lecture for the students. Moreover, I use his texts in my lectures for the courses I teach at the Kiev theological academy. Even more, his method of contextual analysis was very important for the conceptualization of the theological thought of Metropolitan John Zizioulas during my doctoral studies at the Heidelberg University in Germany.

That is why the thoughts I formulate here may in no way be understood as critics of his person or of his theological works. Instead I would like that we reflect together on the history and contemporary situation in Ukraine and of the Orthodox Church in our country. I would like to stress that I am a member of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that is in connection to the Moscow Patriarchate. I teach at the Kiev Theological Academy and work for Department for external church relations of my Church. After this explanation I would like to propose you my reflections on the topic I was asked for.

Last week in Kiev I was invited to celebrate 450-year anniversary of the Union of Lublin. This political agreement was concluded in the year 1569 and started existence of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Large territories of Ukraine including Kiev became a part of this new state. As the history textbooks tell us, one of the main political and military reasons for this state was rivalry against the Moscow state of that time. During the celebration I have mentioned there were voices of foreign guests that called to unite forces in the struggle against the dangerous neighbor state on the eastern borders of these countries.

If we take another example from Ukrainian history, we can remember another large Union 85 years later – the so called “Pereyaslav Council” of 1654. It was concluded between Hetmanate of Ukraine and the Moscow state of that time. This is assessed on the one side as "re-unification of Ukraine with Russia" or even as “re-unification of the three East Slavic nations: Russia, Ukraine and Belarus”. On the other side the history tells us that the eventual consequence for the Hetmanate

with the leading role of the Cossack was the dissolution of their center and the imposition of serfdom in the region, as well as a systematic process of Russification.

The memory on these two Unions of the 16-th and 17-th centuries is important for interpretation of the history of the Ukrainian nation. I mean existence of Ukrainian identity after the dissolution of the Kiev Russ under the attacks of Tatars in the middle of the 13th century. Two main versions of continuation of the history of the Ukrainian people are connected with the Kingdom of Galicia-Volhyn under the Lithuanian state in the north-west and with the Moscow state in the north-east. Both of these versions are trustworthy and their assessment is more connected with the preferences and motivation of a concrete person.

These two identities that are historically connected with Central Europe and with the Russian empire were confirmed in the history of Ukraine in the 20th century. Only in 1939-1940 the western regions of Ukraine that were under Polish, Hungarian and Romanian authority were united to the Soviet Union. If we remember the persecutions – both on ethnical and religious grounds, we can understand why Ukrainian identity is divided between the East and the West. The persecutions of the Soviet time were first of all connected to the imperial and ideological consciousness and were not the result of ethnical discrimination.

We can remember that in the late Soviet time thousands of Ukrainians were invited to work in Moscow and in other large cities. Even nowadays thousands of people of Ukrainian origin work in different parts of Russia. On the other side, the main persecutor in the 1930-40th was Joseph Stalin that was of Georgian origin. Despite the ethnical factor I know not much of his popularity in Georgia but much more in the contemporary Russian Federation. While in Russia he is praised for the victory in WW-II and other military achievements¹, in Ukraine we remember him first of all thanks to the Holodomor that by many countries is recognized as genocide of the Ukrainian nation.

As a whole the mentioned examples show us that through the centuries of its history Ukrainian identity was connected to different empires and was understood as defense against this imperial oppression. As a result even now there is prejudice that Ukrainian language is the mother tongue for rural population while in the cities people prefer Russian language. For them this is a symbol of belonging to the higher culture. But it is a large question what is relationship between Russian culture in a broad sense and Russian imperial consciousness.

For the older generation of the Ukrainians their lives in the late Soviet Union remain mostly in positive memoirs. There is even a joke about the Soviet Union: in the leadership of this country there were one Georgian, four Ukrainians and the only one but the last of them of Russian origin that destroyed the country.

¹ Cf. statistics of the Russian surveys - <https://www.levada.ru/2019/04/16/dinamika-otnosheniya-k-stalinu/>

Ukrainian independent state exists mostly since 1991 with a short period at the beginning of the 20th century. For some people mostly in western Ukraine this independence means first of all freedom from the imperial soviet ideology. On the other side a kind of nostalgia is presented by many Ukrainians that remember political, economic and ethnical stability of the late Soviet Union. Besides, there are thousands or even millions of personal connections to the relatives and friends in the Russian Federation and in other newly established countries of the former Soviet Union.

I was invited to speak here not only in the name of Ukrainian Orthodox Church but as a whole from the perspective of Ukrainian national identity. It gives me opportunity to remember about the Ecumenical concept of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church that was published in 2015. In the text of this document there is a very clear idea of the identity of this Church as counterbalance to two main challenges. On the one side it was latinisation from the Roman-Catholic Church in its Polish implementation. On the other side it was the trend of unification with the Russian orthodox tradition. The most known example of this kind was the Lviv council of 1946 that in Ukraine is mostly known as “pseudo-council”.

If we speak about the orthodox context, we should remember first of all about the schisma in the Ukrainian Orthodoxy. Since 1992 there was a conflict because of establishment of the “Kiev Patriarchate”. Substantially its identity was based on the anti-Russian ideas. But from my point of view important here was contradiction not to the Russian cultural achievements but to the Russian imperial idea. In any way for a quarter of century in the world Orthodoxy this structure was considered as a schismatic group on the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church. At the beginning of this year the autocephalous status of the newly established “Orthodox Church of Ukraine” was given by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

If you were reading the church news from Ukraine in the last weeks you may know about the problems that were caused by the voluntarism behavior of the former Metropolitan Filaret that for 20 years had been on the top of the unrecognized church structure. On the other side I can give you a number of supporters of the idea of church independence. The sociological surveys of the last week speak about the almost 50% support of the newly established “Orthodox Church of Ukraine”. At the same time in public opinion the support of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in connection to the Moscow Patriarchate is three time less – about 15%².

Many of you have heard about the conflicts on the parish level, about the changes of belonging and even captures of the church buildings from our Church to the newly established church structure. The conflicts exist mostly between the territorial and religious communities. It means that in most cases the core of the parish with the priest remain faithful to the old canonical

² Cf. <https://www.unian.net/society/10558521-opros-pochti-polovina-ukraincev-prichislyayut-sebya-k-pcu-k-upc-mp-tolko-14.html>

Ukrainian Orthodox Church. At the same time the large majority that visit church services only irregularly and is influenced by the state and nationalistic propaganda of the time of Presidency of Petro Poroshenko express their preference for the newly independent Church.

Another example of the division in the Ukrainian society is geographical distribution of these changes in the church belonging to the newly established church structure. We can compare Volyn region and Dnipro region. One is in the north-west part of Ukraine, another in the south-east part of our country. By the approximately 650-670 parishes of our Church in every of these regions there is almost 120 parish conversions in Volhyn region and only 3 conversions in the Dnipro region. In percentage this is almost 18% and under 0,5% respectively³.

It shows us not only support of the state bodies on the local level but first of all cultural differences in Western and Eastern Ukraine. The fight for autocephalous church in the last years is connected first of all with nationalistic idea. In its turn it is the result of the military conflict in the Donbas region that is usually connected to the imperial ideology of our neighbor state that is usually called “Russkiy mir”.

What can be the conclusions from this bright perspective of the Ukrainian situation? I suppose that the main question is the attractiveness for the Ukrainians of the civilizational development that can improve the intra Ukrainian situation. Ukraine is not ready for development on the basis of nationalistic ideology. It became clear after the results of election campaign of the last months.

Ukraine is open for the close cooperation with the neighbor countries. But the main feature for this rapprochement should be the idea of soft power. We need cultural cooperation, exchange of ideas and young people for the mutual enrichment in humanitarian sphere. Instead of that from the Russian mass media in many cases we see aggressive rhetoric against the rotted Western civilization. Often they are opposed to the hypocritical praise of conservative values that rarely can be confirmed in the reality.

In my report several times I have mentioned the double identity in the cultural development – that is of the West and the East. It is connected with the Lublin and Pereyaslav Unions in the history and with the gathering of Ukrainians into one country in the 20th century. The challenge of contradiction to the former Soviet empire is important for the consciousness of believers both of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and for newly established Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Political memory is rather a dividing factor for Ukrainians. The conflict in Donbas showed us that support of

³ Cf.

https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9F%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%85%D1%96%D0%B4_%D1%86%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%85_%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%B4_%D0%B4%D0%BE_%D0%9F%D0%A6%D0%A3

the military struggle and ideological confrontation instead of influence in the form of soft power leads to the deep division in the society.

What could be the position of my Ukrainian Orthodox Church in this situation? When I read the sociological surveys of the last year about the religious identity of Ukrainians⁴ I was glad to see that large groups of Ukrainians declare the values that mostly coincide with the position of the leadership of our Church. First of all only 33% of the believers suppose that Churches should be nationally oriented. We can combine it to the question of the trust: almost 60% of the citizens have trust to the Church as a whole and 45% consider the Church as moral authority in the society. In my opinion it means that our people do not want to see the close cooperation of the Church hierarchs with the state ideology – both of pro-Russian and anti-Russian orientation. Religious sphere should be separated from the nationalistic or imperial ideas of state building.

This role is confirmed by the data on the attitude to the “state Church” in Ukraine. The most people vote against this tendency with 56% “against” and only 12,4% “for” it. The same conviction can be seen through the answers on the question on church support of the relationships between the citizen and the state. Only 6,3% consider that the Church should actively support the state authority with 54% that are sure that Church should not interfere in the relationship between the citizen and the state authorities⁵.

It means that the Church in the consciousness of our citizens has a large potential but in its activity it should avoid close cooperation with the state in the building ideology – both of nationalistic and imperial forms.

⁴ Cf. Peculiarities of religious and church self-identification of Ukrainian citizens: 2010-2018 trends, April 2018. This brochure exists both in Ukrainian and English.

⁵ The used data are on pp. 20, 23, 25, 29 and 35.