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# **SPECIFICS OF STATE-RELIGIOUS RELATIONSHIPS DURING COVID-19: EASTERN EUROPE VS WESTERN EUROPE**

**By Sergii Rudenko and Vitalii Turenko**

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**Abstract.** This paper highlights the peculiarities of the implementation of relations between the authorities and religious organizations in Eastern and Western Europe during the coronavirus pandemic. It has been proven that Western European countries have relatively quickly adapted to the new model of state-religious relations during the pandemic. At the same time, local protests and/or ignorance of the quarantine measures taken by the authorities of a particular country should be noted, which led to the detention of those responsible and/or an increase in the incidence of diseases among the population. It was revealed that the relationship between the authorities and religious organizations during COVID-19 in the countries of Eastern Europe is more diverse and ambiguous. As a result, there is a greater confrontation and conflicts (explicit or latent) in this region of the world than in the Western European countries. If explicit conflicts with the authorities were accompanied by the fact that divine services were held in the presence of a huge number of believers, then the latent conflicts were associated with discussions about a possible transformation of the form of participation in the sacraments, in particular the Eucharist.

**Keywords:** religious organizations in Eastern Europe, religious organizations in Western Europe, coronavirus, COVID-19, pandemic, state-religious relationships, Ukraine.

## **Introduction**

Coronavirus pandemics, which swept the whole world at the end of 2019, still remain a threat to the population of many states, including those in Europe. Natural shocks and social disasters such as a pandemic, radically affect both the public and personal life of every person. As for the public component, the consequences of the pandemic are being experienced by

various spheres of society, including religious organizations. The state authorities of virtually all European countries, both Eastern and Western, had to construct a new policy in relation to religious institutions in order to forestall mass diseases among the population and a large number of deaths.

In turn, religious organizations found themselves in a situation of a dilemma—either to submit completely to the authorities and to stop the functioning of their religious buildings, or to partially restrict the access of their believers to worship, so that no sanctions were imposed on them and to protect the population from a large number of morbidity.

Based on this, it has become important to comprehend the experience of state-religious relations during the coronavirus pandemic in Europe, in particular, to identify the specifics of the relationship between religion and power in the countries of Eastern and Western Europe, to reveal possible common characteristics of their functioning.

### **Features of Western European Experience of State-religious Relations during COVID-19: between Restrictions and Freedom**

Territorially, we will deal with the countries that are indicated in green on the map below –



First of all, it must be said that:

All EU Member States introduced physical and social distancing measures to contain the COVID-19 outbreak, including forms of the quarantine. Such measures can affect many fundamental rights, including:

- “the rights to liberty and security (Article 6),
- respect for private and family life (Article 7),
- freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 10),

- freedom of expression and information, . . .
- freedom of assembly and of association (Article 12),
- freedom of the arts and sciences (Article 13),
- freedom of movement and of residence (Article 45).’’<sup>1</sup>

As a result, restrictions to religious organizations include worship services, prayer meetings, festive, funeral, ritual acts, etc. The severity of the quarantine measures in each country was determined by a number of factors: the number of patients, the rate of spread of the coronavirus, the religiosity of the population, the approach of major religious holidays, political regime. Taking into account the experience of other countries that find themselves in the same difficult situation, we will try to make some comparative analysis. Let us consider this in more detail using the example of such Western European countries as Italy, Germany, France, Spain, and Ireland.

For example, in Italy, in-person gatherings for religious worship have been suspended and as a result, many churches broadcast Mass via online live-stream, radio, and television. Church funerals could not be held given the national lockdown. In some northern cities, the authorities had issues in dealing with the storage of the high number of coffins, and churches offered to care for them. In the towns of Seriate and Bergamo, the Italian Army volunteered to transport some of these coffins from churches and morgues to cemeteries and crematoria in other provinces.<sup>2</sup>

In Germany, the head of the Germany’s Bishop Conference, Bishop Georg Bätzing, expressed disappointment over the ban of church services being kept in place as announced on April 15 by Chancellor Angela Merkel. Bätzing emphasized religious freedom and said that he was confident that discussing the matter with the federal government “will very soon lead to a consensus that will make responsible forms of worship in our churches possible again.”<sup>3</sup>

There were small conflicts on the part of clergy and laity in Germany. In particular, in late July, a cluster of new infections emerged around a religious group in Steinsfurt. Among the 105 members of a Romanian evangelistic movement, 40 tested positive for the virus on July 28, 2020, 20 of whom resided in the Rhein-Neckar-Kreis. Some 77 other individuals were wanted for testing, but did not respond or had left Germany on vacation when local authorities

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<sup>1</sup>“Coronavirus pandemic in the EU– fundamental rights implications.” *Fra.Europa*. [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2020-coronavirus-pandemic-eu-bulletin-1\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-coronavirus-pandemic-eu-bulletin-1_en.pdf). Accessed 12.26.2020.

<sup>2</sup>“In Italy and beyond, churches grapple with coronavirus.” *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/coronavirus-church-online-live-stream-congregation/>. Accessed 12.25.2020

<sup>3</sup> “German bishops criticize continued church service ban.” *Catholic News Agency*. <https://catholicphilly.com/2020/04/news/world-news/german-bishops-criticize-continued-church-service-ban/>. Accessed 12.25.2020.

started the investigation. By August 5, the number of active cases in Rhein-Neckar-Kreis had dropped from 20 to 4, with the authorities judging that the outbreak had been contained within the community.<sup>4</sup>

This kind of local disobedience of religious organizations to the authorities could be observed in Spain and France. On March 6, the Spanish Episcopal Conference indicated that churches should remove the holy water from the pillars, avoid the gesture of shaking hands as a way of giving peace, and not kiss religious images, a typical gesture in Lent.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, many masses were suspended. The National Police agents evicted twenty churchgoers from the Granada Cathedral on Good Friday (10 April).<sup>6</sup>

In France, a religious week in Mulhouse that took place from February 17-24, 2020, was involved in the rapid spread of the virus to eastern France and beyond. Linked cases developed from early March in Orléans, Besançon, Saint-Lô, Belfort, Dijon, Mâcon, Agen, Briançon, Paris, Corsica, and French Guiana. The annual gathering of the Christian Open Door Church between February 17 and 24 in Mulhouse, which was attended by about 2,500 people, became a significant cluster in the spread of the coronavirus in France. Alerted by a parishioner and by 18 family members, who tested positive on March 1, the pastor notified the health authorities.<sup>7</sup>

Hence, we can see that the religious organization becomes a very powerful factor in the perception of believers; this situation is completely different than among other ordinary citizens.<sup>8</sup> For example, religious organizations in the crisis situation of the fight against the coronavirus were able to sacrifice the most important—public worship, which is the basis of the life of believers in all confessions and religions. For the majority, this refusal was a test of strength, since the absence of joint prayers in person is the disunity of members of religious communities, the termination of the activities of individual parishes, as well as the deprivation

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<sup>4</sup>C. Beck. “Aktuell nur noch geringes Infektionsgeschehen (Update).” *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*. [https://www.rnz.de/nachrichten/sinsheim\\_artikel,-flaechentestung-in-sinsheim-aktuell-nur-noch-gering-es-infektionsgeschehen-update-\\_arid,526938.html](https://www.rnz.de/nachrichten/sinsheim_artikel,-flaechentestung-in-sinsheim-aktuell-nur-noch-gering-es-infektionsgeschehen-update-_arid,526938.html). Accessed 11.27.2020

<sup>5</sup> “Indicaciones de la CEE ante el coronavirus.” *conferenciaepiscopal.es*. [https://conferenciaepiscopal.es/indicaciones-de-la-cee-ante-el-coronavirus/?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=indicaciones-de-la-cee-ante-el-coronavirus](https://conferenciaepiscopal.es/indicaciones-de-la-cee-ante-el-coronavirus/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=indicaciones-de-la-cee-ante-el-coronavirus). Accessed 11.25.2020.

<sup>6</sup>J.Ossorio. “El 'limbo' de ir a misa: el estado de alarma lo consiente "con medidas" y la Policía lo desmiente.” *El Español*. [https://www.elespanol.com/espana/20200411/limbo-misa-alarma-consiente-medidas-policia-desmiente/481702245\\_0.html](https://www.elespanol.com/espana/20200411/limbo-misa-alarma-consiente-medidas-policia-desmiente/481702245_0.html). Accessed 11.25.2020.

<sup>7</sup> “La majorité des personnes étaient contaminées: de la Corse à l'outre-mer, comment le rassemblement évangélique de Mulhouse a diffusé le coronavirus dans toute la France.” *Franceinfo*. [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/sante/maladie/coronavirus/video-coronavirus-le-nombre-de-contaminations-lors-du-rassemblement-evangelique-de-mulhouse-a-ete-largement-sous-evalue\\_3889133.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/sante/maladie/coronavirus/video-coronavirus-le-nombre-de-contaminations-lors-du-rassemblement-evangelique-de-mulhouse-a-ete-largement-sous-evalue_3889133.html). Accessed 11.25.2020.

<sup>8</sup>*Religious Fundamentalism in the Age of Pandemic*. Ed. Nina Käsehage, (Transcript Verlag, 2020).

of part of their income. People who do not go to churches and mosques do not bring donations either. Although in many churches (among Catholics, and among Protestants in almost all churches in Russia and Europe, among Orthodox to a lesser extent), the practice of online donations is already common, which can be made without leaving your home on the website of a religious association. In general, all religions and confessions can be called law-abiding. Christians, Muslims, Jews took the necessary measures, according to the recommendations of the national authorities. The question of the attitude towards the conduct of divine services and the partaking of the sacrament has become a kind of test for “tradition” in various European countries, in particular Western European.<sup>9</sup>

It is also important to note the experience of such a Western European country as Ireland in the studied problems. The authorities of this country have developed a resilience and recovery 2020-2021 plan for living with COVID-19 – Restrictions. It also concerns the functioning of religious organizations. According to these Restrictions, it was established that in the case of a high incidence rate among the population of the country, the number of people in religious buildings cannot exceed 10 people, if the average level, then up to 25 citizens, and when it is low, then up to 50.<sup>10</sup>

We can conclude that religious-state relations in the Western European countries were not always harmonious. We can state the presence of both implicit and explicit protests against the restrictive measures of the authorities of this or that country in relation to the functioning of certain religious activities. At the same time, it should be emphasized that protests and conflicts mainly came from representatives of the middle clergy and laity, while the higher clergy (for example, bishops, cardinals, etc.) noted the urgent need to comply with all quarantine restrictions.

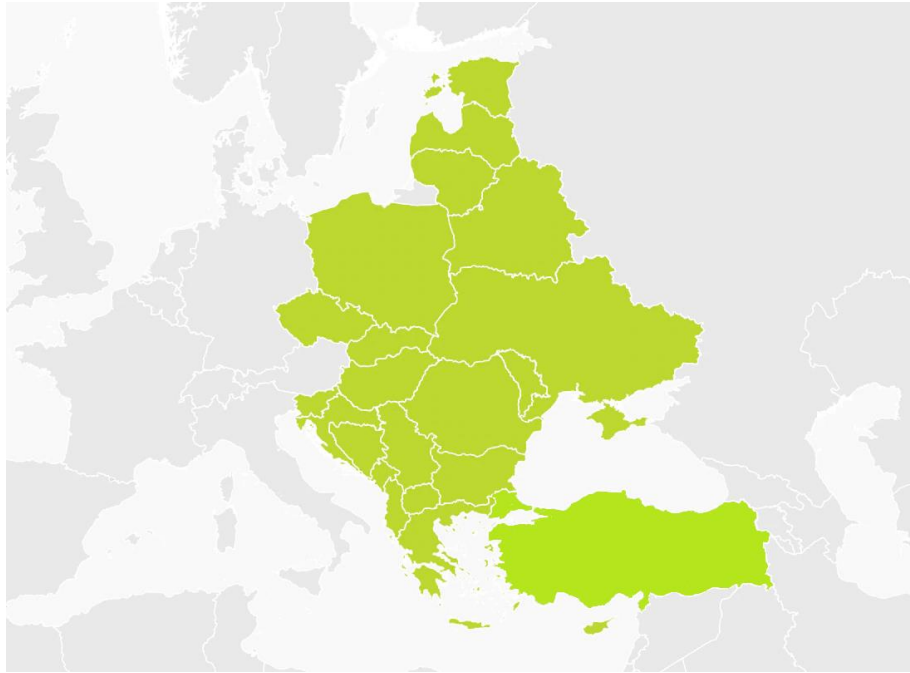
### **Eastern European Experience of State-religious Relations during COVID-19: between Restrictions and Freedom**

Territorially, we will deal with the countries that are indicated on the map below –

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<sup>9</sup> Y.Kharkovshchenko, O.Predko and V Turenko. “Pandemic as a Challenge for Future of Humanity: Philosophical and Religious Studies Aspects.” *Future Human Image*, (2020, Vol. 14): 18.

<sup>10</sup> “Resilience and recovery 2020-2021: Plan for living with COVID-19-Restrictions.” *Citizen Information*. [https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/covid19/living\\_with\\_covid19\\_plan.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/covid19/living_with_covid19_plan.html). Accessed 11.27.2020.



For example, on March 11, 2020, the Government of Romania published a list of fifteen guidelines regarding the “responsible social behavior in preventing the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19).” The authorities have imposed a ban on sports, scientific, religious, and cultural or entertainment events with over 100 participants in closed spaces until March 31.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time Eastern European Catholics supported measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, but for some the pandemic “revived painful memories of communist rule.”<sup>12</sup> In particular, Polish radio presenter Glabisz-Pniewska described the sight of empty church “terrifying,” drawing a parallel between the situation and the hypothetical Catholic Church today “if past anti-Catholic hostilities had prevailed.”<sup>13</sup> Romanian bishop Virgil Bercea, from a church who experienced persecution under communist régimes, said that although church closures were questioned in Romania, he predicted that most critics would have a different reaction if their own families were affected by COVID-19. “We've experienced this before, when having nothing was normal. At that time, it was communism, and now it's the coronavirus. The situation is different, but the realities are much the same.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A. Diochețanu. “Toate evenimentele cu peste 100 de persoane în spații închise sunt interzise! Inclusiv, slujbele din biserici.” *Ziare.com*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200312163942/http://www.ziare.com/stiri/coronavirus/toate-evenimentele-cu-pest-100-de-persoane-in-spatii-inchise-sunt-interzise-inclusiv-slujbele-din-biserici-1601168>. Accessed 11.29. 2020.

<sup>12</sup> J. Luxmoore. “East European Catholics draw lockdown parallels with communist rule.” *National Catholic Reporter*. <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/east-european-catholics-draw-lockdown-parallels-communist-rule>. Accessed 11.28. 2020.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

As for Poland, it should also be added the conclusion of G. Ignatowski and L.Sulkowski that “the Churches are able to limit or suspend their religious services and encourage the faithful to stay at home. The positions taken by the churches in this respect do not differ from the standards adopted in many other countries. Despite this, they keep in touch with the faithful using modern technologies. However, they are not able to change or depart from their religious principles determining their identity.”<sup>15</sup>

We also see the need to preserve traditions and the immutability of divine services in the context of the consideration of Orthodox Eastern European countries, namely Greece and Ukraine. In particular, a discussion arose in these countries about the form and type of participation in the Eucharist.

In March 2020, “the Standing Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, the country's established Eastern Orthodox Church, discussed the coronavirus epidemic and issued an encyclical that was sent to the dioceses of the Church of Greece. Having stated that the Holy Eucharist could by no means be a way of transmission of diseases, the Standing Synod decided to continue offering and receiving the Holy Eucharist. The Synod's decision sparked controversy. The Synod's stance prompted criticism from the opposition Syriza party, with former Prime Minister Alexi Tsipras criticising the hierarchy, as did former health minister Pavlos Polakis. Some high-profile Greek medical doctors publicly supported the continuation of practicing Holy Communion, drawing criticism from the Greek Association of Hospital Doctors.”<sup>16</sup>

It should be noted that unlike the Greek Orthodox Church, The Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople issued a worldwide suspension of all “divine services, events, and rites, with the exception of private prayer in churches that will remain open, until the end of March.”<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, in Ukraine a discussion arose about the possible transformation of the form of sacraments. Therefore, it is appropriate to note the opinion of the famous religious studies scholar T. Derkach:

The history of the Church has many references to non-standard, non-linear situations faced by believers or bishops in antiquity or the Middle Ages. The Church has never

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<sup>15</sup> L.Sulkowski and G.Ignatowski. “Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on organization of religious behaviour in different christian denominations in Poland.” *Religions*, 2020, 5(11) doi:10.3390/rel11050254. Accessed 11.23.2020.

<sup>16</sup> “COVID-19 pandemic in Greece.” *Wikipedia*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19\\_pandemic\\_in\\_Greece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_Greece). Accessed 11. 24. 2020.

<sup>17</sup> “Ecumenical Patriarchate orders churches to halt services until end-March.” *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-patriarchate/ecumenical-patriarchate-orders-churches-to-halt-services-until-end-march-idUSKBN21617C?edition-redirect=uk>. Accessed 11.24.2020.



had quiet periods when it was possible to serve liturgies, baptize, ordain, and receive communion with full confidence in the future. The church was not a conveyor belt for performing the same rituals day in and day out. Certain external or internal circumstances changed—the Church changed both the practice of worship, and was forced to improve the doctrine of both God and itself. But there were also extraordinary situations when it was necessary to make unique decisions quickly. In jurisprudence, this is called *ad hoc*—a way to solve a specific problem or task, which can not be adapted to solve other problems and which does not fit into the overall decision strategy (exception, nowhere else applicable). By the way, there were many such *ad hoc* in the Church, but for some reason they were used as precedents when it was profitable.<sup>18</sup>

The coronavirus infection, as well as powerful scientific and technological progress prompted the development of potentially new forms of participation in the sacraments, including remotely, “online.” This is due to the fact that a direct participation can lead to an increase in the number of patients among the population of a particular country. Therefore, the possible transformation of the sacraments can guarantee the safety and health of the citizens of the state.<sup>19</sup>

However, such a question prompted a heated discussion, especially after the “online-Eucharist” by representatives of the OCU—priests Igor Savva and Dmitry Waisburd. The first priest before the situation of online communion was the parson of the church in Zaporizhia, and the second – in Cherkasy. After they performed the sacrament of the Eucharist in this way, both of these priests were removed by the ruling bishops from the state of the dioceses. So, after that, a series of reflections (statuses) was published on the Facebook page of the Archbishop of the OCU Eustratiy (Zorya).

‘Firstly, as Dmitry Gorevoy notes, in his letter he states that it is impossible to celebrate the Eucharist remotely, because you can not eat and drink remotely [the comparison, in our opinion, is manipulative, because people take Eucharist physically, and it is a remote consecration, and not consuming the Eucharist itself—authors’ comment]. The second argument is that the form of the Eucharist cannot be changed because it was established by Jesus Christ himself. Further, Archbishop Eustratiy argues that the logic of online-Eucharist excludes, in the absence of necessity, both the priest and the Liturgy itself, leaving only God

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<sup>18</sup> Т. Деркач. “Онлайн-причастия: Кінець світу чи початок богословської дискусії?” *Церкваріум*. [Т. Derkach. Online Eucharist: The End of the World or the Beginning of Theological Discussion?]. <https://duhovnyfront.com.ua/2020/05/16/onlain-prychastia-kinets-svitu-chy-pochatok-bohoslovskoi-dyskusii>. Accessed 11.25.2020.

<sup>19</sup> Л. Виговський. “Пандемія коронавірусу (covid-19) як чинник процесу модернізації українського православ'я.” *Hmelnytsky University of Management and Law*, [Л. Vyhovsky. Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) as a factor in the process of modernization of Ukrainian Orthodoxy]. [http://www.univer.km.ua/doc/tezi/t\\_Vigovskiy\\_L.A.pdf](http://www.univer.km.ua/doc/tezi/t_Vigovskiy_L.A.pdf). Accessed 11.28.2020.

and the human, and since God is in the soul, it will suffice to meditate. The bishop also believes that the online broadcast is a contemplation of the sacrament, not participation in it, and the Liturgy involves participation. Here is the obvious dispute between Archbishop Eustratiy and Archpriest Igor Savva, when in fact a person participates in the Liturgy—when he is physically present in the church, but does not hear the Eucharistic prayers (and often does not even guess about their existence), or when he is physically absent but remotely hears and sees the fulfillment of the Eucharistic canon?<sup>20</sup>

In our opinion, if we introduce innovations in the performance of worship, in accordance with the recommendations and restrictions imposed by the authorities, including those relating to participation in the sacraments, it is necessary to be very careful, in accordance with the minds of believers, both globally and locally. Because avoiding the danger in terms of health, you can meet the other side of the religious danger— conflicts and clashes between supporters of different views on this issue. Thus, the main task is not so much to introduce new forms of sacraments in the Orthodox Church, but to protect oneself from potential religious conflicts that may arise, depending on which radical decision can be made or rejected.

Therefore, given this discussion, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine proposed such an algorithm for the gradual resumption of systematic and full-fledged religious activities.

- Opening churches for individual visits by believers and for private prayers (but not during traditional services by representatives of the clergy without the presence of believers and with the participation of no more than 10 people), in compliance with all the rules of conduct in public places during quarantine (in particular, in compliance with the requirement, so that the occupancy rate of temples provides for one person per 10 sq. m. of the room). It may be possible if, for 10 consecutive days, the percentage of detected cases of the disease among all tested daily decreases, and the daily number of people who recovered is stable or growing.
- Worship services in the presence of a limited number of believers in the temple (prayer house) in compliance with all quarantine rules, including the use of PPE and physical distance between those present, may be possible when during 10 consecutive days the number of new unrelated cases is daily less than 5 per area.
- Conducting routine services involving a significant number of believers in traditional rituals, such as mass communion, with the observance of personal hygiene by clergy and believers, in particular with the use of PPE, may be possible when in Ukraine only a few cases of infection are recorded. COVID-19.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Д. Горевой. “Чи можливо причастя онлайн? Як на це відреагували в середовищі ПЦУ?” *Церкваріум*. [D.Gorevoy. Is it possible to take Eucharist online? How did the OCU react to this?] Available at: <https://cerkvarium.org/spetstemy/tserkva-i-koronavirus/chi-mozhливо-prichastya-onlajn-yak-na-tse-vidreaguvali-v-seredovishchi-ptsu>. Accessed 11. 25.2020.

<sup>21</sup> “Рекомендації щодо етапів виходу релігійних організацій з карантину.” *Міністерство культури і інформаційної політики*. <https://mkip.gov.ua/news/3755.html>. [Recommendations for the steps to be taken by the quarantine authorities]. <https://mkip.gov.ua/news/3755.html>. Accessed 11.27.2020.

As a result, we can make sure that

The need for social distancing and the implementation of worship practices online have initiated a discussion that may affect the future of religious practice of the religious organizations in Ukraine. Thus, the most controversial moment for the Orthodox and Catholic churches was the administration of the sacraments of Confession and Communion during the pandemic. The process of modernization of ritual practice for some churches is painful, due to the rigidity of the ritual tradition, the low quality of education of the clergy, the priority of rites over values. Online worship poses new challenges to the traditional religions, of which the sacred space of the house of worship is an integral part of the religious practice.<sup>22</sup>

However, the most extraordinary position in this context is the state power of the Republic of Belarus, because only the authorities of this country in Europe has not yet introduced any restrictions to counter the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. The rate of infection in Belarus is similar to that in Ukraine. On April 21, the World Health Organisation called on the Belarusian authorities to at least take measures to distance themselves from people. Accordingly, there were no restrictions on religious activity in the country. President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, personally considers the talk about the special danger of COVID-19 an “injection of passions.” At Easter, the head of state and his youngest son visited the Church of the Annunciation in the village of Mali Lyady. He thanked the parishioners who attended the service and said that he did not welcome those “who blocked the way to the church.”<sup>23</sup>

On March 29, 2020, the government of Latvia adopted a number of strict regulations. Foremost, everyone had to maintain a 2-meter distance and observe epidemiological safety measures in private and public events, as well as during public indoor and outdoor activities. Exceptions were given for 2 people, those living in the same household or parents and their minor children if they did not live in the same household. New restrictions also prohibited all private arrangements (except funerals), public events, meetings, processions, pickets, indoor sports, and religious activities.<sup>24</sup>

The municipalities of Lithuania starting October 26 were divided into one of three “risk zones.” Municipalities that are placed in the “red zone” would have to enforce municipal

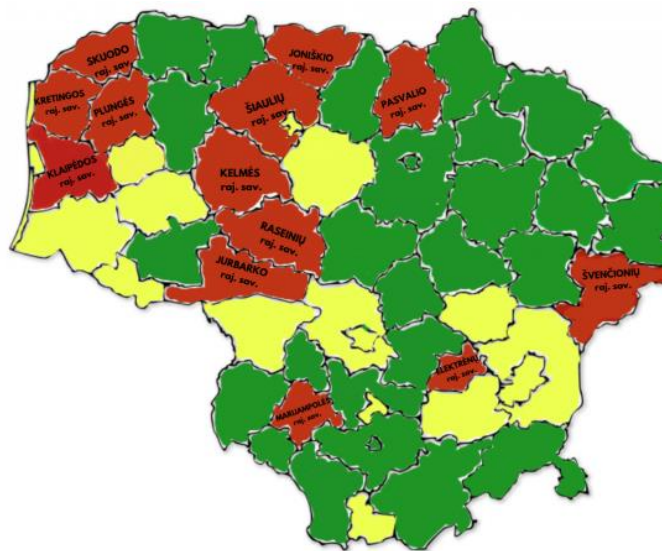
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<sup>22</sup> P.Kraliuk, I.Bogdanovskiy, and K. Yakunina. “Religious Organizations under Quarantine: Ukrainian Realities.” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, 2020, Vol. 40: Iss. 7, Article 5. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss7/5>. Accessed 11.28.2020.

<sup>23</sup> В.Токман. “Релігійні організації в умовах пандемії Covid-19: інформаційно-аналітичний матеріал.” [V.Tokman. Religious organizations in a pandemic condition COVID-19: information and analytical material]. <https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2020-04/relegiyni-organizatsii-covid.pdf>. Accessed 11.25.2020.

<sup>24</sup> “Latvian government steps up restrictions with two-person, two-meter rule.” *Public Broadcasting of Latvia*. <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/health/latvian-government-steps-up-restrictions-with-two-person-two-meter-rule.a353788/>. Accessed 11.23.2020.

lockdowns by limiting public transport intensity, public gatherings up to 5 persons, the number of customers in retail spaces, make masks mandatory both inside and outside, governmental and municipal institutions would have to work remotely or partially-remotely, prohibit patient visitation in hospitals, limit religious ritual gatherings. Municipalities in the “yellow zone” must be on alert, but limitations and restrictions do not apply, whereas in the “green zone” municipalities have no restrictions.<sup>25</sup> This can be seen on the map below –



In addition to the aforementioned Greece and Turkey, a few words should also be said about other Balkan countries, namely Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The Albanian authorities have also given instructions to restrict access to worship. As a reaction to this, the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church announced on March 12 the suspension of all services until April 3, except for the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, in which it encouraged followers to come for “healing” but keep a distance from each other; the Church also encouraged believers to observe rites at home, with the Church's radio station “Ngjallja” (“Resurrection”) broadcasting services, although churches would remain to serve those who wished to perform personal prayer while keeping a distance from others.<sup>26</sup> The Catholic Church suspended all diocesan and parish activities, all liturgical celebrations including the Holy Mass, all catechisms, all educational courses at community centers, and all other parish and diocesan activities. Churches remained open for personal confessions done at a distance,

<sup>25</sup> “Patvirtinta: nuo šiol savivaldybės pagal sergamumą koronavirusu bus skirstomos į šviesoforo spalvų zonas.” *Sam.Lrv.Lt*, <https://sam.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/patvirtinta-nuo-siol-savivaldybes-pagal-sergamuma-koronavirusu-bus-skirstomos-i-sviesoforo-spalvu-zonas>. Accessed 11.22.2020.

<sup>26</sup> “Kisha Ortodokse pezullon shërbesat e përbashkëta ditore deri në 3 prill.” *Vizionplus.tv*. <https://www.vizionplus.tv/kisha-ortodokse-pezullon-sherbesat-e-perbashketa-ditore-deri-ne-3-prill/>. Accessed 11.23.2020.

as well as personal prayer done at a distance from other people, while observing the recommendations of the authorities. The Albanian Evangelical Church likewise transmitted services online<sup>27</sup> and the Bektashi Global Kryegjyshata suspended all religious activities in its *tekkes* on March 12 as well.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, in Croatia we can see disambiguation. In particular, the archbishop of Zagreb Josip Bozanić supported the removal of holy water from church entrances and handshakes from the Mass, and recommended believers to receive the communion bread from priests into their own hands instead of directly into their mouth. He also recommended the believers who had symptoms of a respiratory system infection, had visited affected areas, had been in contact with a carrier of the virus, and were elderly or suffered from chronic illnesses not to attend the Mass.<sup>29</sup>

On April 9, on Maundy Thursday, the Civil Protection Directorate allowed the inhabitants of the island of Hvar, which had no active cases, to hold five centuries old night procession *Za križem* under the condition that only fifteen people take part in it. Groups of fifteen cross carriers exchanged between the settlements of Jelsa, Pitve, Vrisnik, Svirče, Vrbanj, and Vrboska.<sup>30</sup> On July 1, the brotherhood of Jelsa that organizes the procession presented the Prime Minister Plenković with a thank you note for allowing them to preserve the annual tradition.<sup>31</sup>

Also, a relatively soft policy can be observed in Montenegro. There the local authorities allowed the functioning of religious organizations, but with the obligatory observance of the following points:

- A maximum of one person per 10m<sup>2</sup>, inside the religious edifice;
- People must maintain a minimum of two meters distance between themselves;
- The maximum number of people allowed inside must be posted at the entrance;
- Everyone except for the religious leader giving rites must wear masks;

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<sup>27</sup> “Kisha katolike dhe ajo ungjillore pezullojnë meshat, mesazh besimtarëve: Gjithçka do të transmetohet online.” *Gazeta Tema*. Available at: <http://www.gazetatema.net/2020/03/12/kisha-katolike-pezullon-meshat-mesazh-besimtareve-gjithcka-do-te-transmetohet-online/>. Accessed 11.24.2020.

<sup>28</sup> “Baba Mondit thirrje bektashinjve: Të ndalohen veprimtaritë fetare.” *Gazeta Tema*. Available at: <http://www.gazetatema.net/2020/03/12/baba-mondit-thirrje-bektashinjve-te-ndalohen-veprimtarite-fetare/>. Accessed 11.24.2020.

<sup>29</sup> Palatinuš V. Polšak “Stigle preporuke oko koronavirusa s Kaptola: Miče se sveta voda, pričest samo na ruku; nema zabrane misa, ali.” *Tportal*. <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/stigle-preporuke-okoronavirusa-s-kaptola-mice-se-sveta-voda-pricest-samo-na-ruku-nema-zabrane-misa-ali-20200311>. Accessed 25.11.2020.

<sup>30</sup> Banje K. Marić “Hrvati su opet veći katolici od Pape. Procesija na Plenkovićevom i Beroševom Hvaru dobila je dozvolu.” *Slobodna Dalmacija*. <https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/dalmacija/otoci/hrvati-su-opet-veci-katolici-od-pape-procesija-na-plenkovicem-i-berosevom-hvaru-dobila-je-dozvolu-bi-li-je-u-ovo-vrijeme-dobio-i-gay-pride-1015225>. Accessed 11.27.2020.

<sup>31</sup> Z.Grund. “Premijeru su na Hvaru uručili zahvalnicu jer ih je pustio da u karanteni organiziraju procesiju.” *Telegram.hr (in Croatian)*. Available at: <https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/premijeru-su-na-hvaru-urucili-zahvalnicu-fer-ih-je-pustio-da-u-karanteni-organiziraju-procesiju/>. Accessed 11.27.2020.

- A hand disinfectant must be provided at each entrance and exit, and should be used by all who enter the rooms;
- The maximum number of individuals gathering in people's homes is 20 persons.<sup>32</sup>

The Serbian authorities imposed strict quarantines in mid-March, and eased them in May, allowing football matches, religious events, parties, and private gatherings to be held. However, this kind of action led to the death of a number of authoritative hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church, in particular, Patriarch Irenaeus. The reason for this was that he attended and led the funeral service for Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović of Montenegro, who also died of COVID-19. In general, these funerals were held in a complete violation of the state restrictions, especially with regard to social distancing. As a result, Patriarch Irenaeus, the head of the Church died from COVID-19 on November 20, 2020.

As we have seen from a brief analysis, in Eastern Europe, the view of state-religious relations during the coronavirus pandemic is more diverse than in the Western European countries. Here you can see both complete freedoms in the functioning of religious organizations and tough measures against violators of quarantine measures.

## **Conclusions**

Having analyzed and disclosed the features of the functioning of state-church relations in the countries of Eastern and Western Europe, we can draw the following conclusions:

1.The Western European countries adapted relatively quickly in the context of a new model of state-religious relations during the pandemic. At the same time, local protests and/or ignorance of the quarantine measures taken by the authorities of a particular country should be noted, which led to the detention of those responsible and/or an increase in morbidity among the population. In our opinion, this is due to the fact that most of the religious leaders of Western Europe called for the strict implementation of the quarantine measures imposed by the authorities of a particular country. If there were Covid-dissidents, it was not from the higher clergy (as in some countries of Eastern Europe), but among the middle clergy and laity.

2.The relationship between the authorities and religious organizations during COVID-19 in Eastern European countries is more diverse and ambiguous. This is due to the decisions of the authorities of this or that country, especially in Belarus. At the same time, we can speak about a greater confrontation and conflicts (latent or explicit) in this region of the world. There is a difference in the basis of these conflicts. In Catholic countries (ex. Poland) the protest was

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<sup>32</sup> "COVID-19\_pandemic\_in\_Montenegro." *Wikipedia*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19\\_pandemic\\_in\\_Montenegro](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_Montenegro). Accessed 11.30.2020.

associated with memories of the recent atheist past, when churches were closed. In Orthodox countries (ex. Ukraine, Greece) this was manifested in a possible transformation of the (sometimes radical) form of participation in the sacraments, especially with regard to the Eucharist.

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