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DYNAMICS OF THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION CHANGES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS RELIGION IN UKRAINE

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Abstract

The article analyzes the results of several sociological studies on the level and nature of religiosity in Ukraine. In particular, the paper deals with the study “State and Church in Ukraine 2019: the Results of the Year and Prospects for the Development of Relations,” conducted by the Razumkov Center with the support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Representation in Ukraine; the latest wave of the World Values Survey, conducted by the Info Sapiens company (in Ukraine it was conducted by the Center for Social Monitoring), etc. The statistical data were analyzed, particularly official reports on the network of churches and religious organizations in Ukraine for the years of 2013, 2017 and 2020. The results of these studies and reports substantiate certain quantitative and qualitative changes in religiosity in Ukraine, as well as a high level of interfaith tolerance against the background of religious pluralism.

Main Part: Presentation of the Basic Material

Empirical studies of the religiosity of Ukrainians and the role of the Church in Ukrainian society have been conducted for more than three decades by many research sociological institutions, including the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), the Center for Social Monitoring, the Democratic Initiatives organization, the Alexander Razumkov Center for Economic and Political Studies (hereafter the Razumkov Center) and others. The Institute for Religious Freedom also constantly monitors changes in the religious situation in Ukraine. The website of this organization contains official statistics, particularly annual reports on the network of churches and religious organizations in Ukraine, approved by

the Orders of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine. The scrupulous analysis of these data allows us to assess the dynamics of changes in the number of religious communities in our country and, accordingly, to see the main trends in their social impact.

It should be noted that the number of religious communities in Ukraine grew at the fastest pace in the 1990s. And at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, it has almost stabilized and is now growing rather insignificantly. In particular, if in 2013 there were a total of 35,116 religious communities in Ukraine (1,879 of them were not officially registered),¹ in 2017 there were 35,919 religious communities (1,879 of them were not officially registered).¹ In 2018, there were 36,739 religious communities in Ukraine (1,329 of them were not officially registered), and according to the latest published official data, at the beginning of 2020 the number of religious organizations in Ukraine reached 36,796 (among them 1,728 religious communities operating without state registration). Therefore, during 2019, the growth of the network of religious organizations in Ukraine was generally insignificant—only 57 organizations.

However, during this time a rather significant event happened in Ukraine; there appeared a new autocephalous church, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.² Due to this development, the number of registered religious communities in Ukraine decreased by almost 400 that year. Instead, the number of religious communities operating without the status of a legal entity increased by the same amount. This situation, according to religious analyst Andriy Smirnov, is partly explained by the fact that after receiving the *Tomos*, the UOC-KP and UAOC disappeared from the Orthodox plane, and all their communities were automatically enrolled in the PCU, despite Bishop Filaret seceding and trying to revive the Kyiv Patriarchate.³ We note that during this time, the changes among other religious communities were quite insignificant.

The dynamics of religiosity of Ukrainian society and its main trends are analyzed in the nationwide study, “State and Church in Ukraine 2019: Results of the Year and Prospects for

¹ *Звіт про мережу церков і релігійних організацій в Україні станом на 01.01.2013 р.* [Report on the network of churches and religious organizations in Ukraine as of 01.01. 2017]. <https://www.irs.in.ua/ua/zvit-pro-merezhu-cerkov-i-religiinih-organizacii-v-ukrajini-stanom-na-01012017-r>. Accessed 04.24.2021.

² After the unification Council, which took place on December 15, 2018, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church legally ceased to exist, becoming part of the newly formed Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

³ *В Україні зростає кількість незареєстрованих релігійних громад – статистика Мінкультури.* [The number of unregistered religious communities has increased in Ukraine - statistics of the Ministry of Culture]. <https://www.irs.in.ua/ua/statistics-of-religious-organizations-in-ukraine-2020/>. Accessed 04.24.2021.

Relations.” The study was conducted by this organization with the support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Ukraine are worth mentioning.⁴ The study was conducted in 2019 in all regions of Ukraine, except for the Russian-annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the Russian-occupied districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In total, 2015 respondents aged 18 and older were interviewed. The theoretical sampling error did not exceed 2.3%.⁵

Let us analyze the results of the study conducted during 2019-2020, comparing them with the results of similar studies conducted during 2013-2018, and with some indicators of other years. As of today, the level of religiosity in Ukraine does not fluctuate significantly. The number of those who identify themselves as believers is currently 66% of the population, which corresponds to the indicator of the “pre-war” year of 2013 (then it was 67%). But, in comparison with the 2017 results, 80% of respondents considered themselves believers. The number of those who hesitate to consider themselves believers or nonbelievers is 12% (this figure has been fixed for the second year in a row and is slightly lower than the figure of 15% recorded in 2013). The number of other groups changed little during 2013-2019. Thus, the shares of unbelievers, “convinced atheists” and those indifferent to matters of faith remained insignificant in the study. The number of the first group was in the range of 5-6%, the second 2-4%, the third in the range of 5-7%. The number of those who did not decide on matters of faith was also insignificant (4-6%). The level of religiosity remained higher in the older age groups, compared to the younger ones, and among women, compared to men. Thus, the number of believers in 2019 increased from 52% among young people aged 18 to 24 to 70% in the group of people aged 60 and older; and was 58% among men and 72% among women. It should be noted that the levels of religiosity, depending on the level of education, type of settlement (city or village) and self-identification of the respondents in the parameters of certain social groups, differed only slightly.⁶

The idea of religiosity of Ukrainians is complemented by the results of the latest wave of the World Values Survey, the field stage of which was conducted in Ukraine from July 21, 2020, to August 17, 2020, by the Info Sapiens Company and the NGO “Center for Social Monitoring.” The results of the latest study allowed us to see the place of Ukraine among other countries. According to the European study in 2020, for more than half of the Ukrainian respondents (56.3%) God was important to some extent (the answers were 7-10 according to a

⁴ *Держава і церква в Україні 2019: підсумки року і перспективи розвитку відносин: інформаційні матеріали*. [State and Church in Ukraine 2019: results of the year and prospects for the development of relations: information materials]. https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2019_Religiya.pdf. Accessed 04.24.2021.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

10-point scale, where “10” was very important). At the same time, about a third of the respondents chose an extreme score of 10 points, communicating that God’s role is very significant in their lives.⁷ This disposition indicates that religion remains important in the life of Ukrainians. However, the attitude to religion as something significant in life became less common in the country in 2020 (56.3%) compared to 2011 (64%), although slightly higher than in 1996 (54%). Given these dynamics within certain values, we can conclude that in general the level of religiosity in Ukraine remains moderately high and fairly stable. And in this context, Ukraine is ahead of most Eurozone countries in terms of religiosity. Only Romania (84.3%), Greece (78.9%), Cyprus (74.4%), Poland (71.5%), Croatia (62.3%) and Italy (60.7%) have higher religiosity than Ukraine. Nevertheless, in all other EU countries, the importance of religion is less than in Ukraine.⁸

According to the World Values Survey, the share of those who do not believe in God in Ukraine today is 14.3%, which is insignificantly different from the data of the above-mentioned 2019 survey. It allows us to compare the ratio of believers and non-believers in our country with Italy (76.2% of believers, 14.1% of non-believers) and Lithuania (73.6 % of believers and 13.2% of non-believers).⁹ The disposition of atheists and believers is directly opposite only in Sweden (60.8% of atheists vs. 34.4% of believers, respectively), as well as in the Netherlands (53.0% and 41.1%), the Czech Republic (49.8% and 31.0%) and Estonia (44.8% and 37.7%).¹⁰ The analysis of this parameter (the share of those who identify themselves as atheists) allows us to see that religion as such and the attitude to God remains for Ukrainians mostly significant and important.

An important sign of the transformation of religiosity within the country is the assessment of the level of interfaith tolerance. In this context, Ukraine has always had a high level of tolerance, which is due to the spread and a long-standing coexistence of various Christian denominations in the country. Thus, more than a half of Ukrainians, both in 2011 and now, in 2021, do not agree that the only acceptable religion is their own religion (60.1%). However, more than a third of the respondents believe so. This level of tolerance is similar to the level of tolerance in Romania. In this context, compared to other Eurozone countries, Ukraine has a relatively high level of interfaith tolerance.

⁷Світове дослідження цінностей, 2020. [World Values Survey, 2020]. :<http://ucep.org.ua/doslidzhennya/world-values-survey-2020-in-ukraine.html>, 135. Accessed 04.24.2021.

⁸ Ibid., 138.

⁹ Ibid., 139.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Regarding the assessment of the level of actual religiosity, an important marker here is the stability and frequency of involvement in religious, ritual, and ceremonial practices. It should be clarified here that a distinction must be made between factual and declarative religiosity. And if the declarative religiosity is fixed simply by the respondents' definition of their confessional affiliation and an affirmative answer to the question of faith in God, the marker of the actual religiosity is the participation of a person in the religious life of the community of his denomination. In this context, it is interesting to note that in 2020, compared to 2011, participation in religious services and involvement in religious practices slightly increased from 81.4% to 83.3%. However, the number of people involved in such activities has increased significantly. So, the percentage of permanent parishioners increased from 24.1% in 2011 to 33.8% in 2020, which is a significant growth and indicates an increase in the share of real, actual, rather than declarative believers.

Compared to other countries in the Eurozone, Ukraine in terms of attendance at church services, according to 2020, shows indicators that are closest to the positions of Lithuania and Croatia. In this context, Ukraine also has a fairly high level compared to most European countries. Speaking about the role and importance of religion in society, majority of the population of Ukraine believes that religion is designed to do good to others (77.4%), and not just to follow religious norms and ceremonies (22.6%). However, if we compare such data with 2011, we will see a decrease in the number of supporters of the first statement (in 2011–83.7%). However, the majority of the respondents both in 2011 (83.3%) and in 2020 (82.4%) believe that religion allows us to understand the meaning of life in this world, i. e. before death, not after it. This perception of religion prevails in four EU countries, with which we have already compared the survey data in Ukraine in 2020. In addition, it should be noted that this position is most shared in Germany (86.9%) and in Greece 91.1%.¹¹

An important indicator of actual religiosity and active religious life in Ukraine is not only the confessional affiliation of citizens to equal denominations, but also the membership of citizens in various religious organizations. In this context, concerning the issue of increasing the membership of Ukrainians in various religious organizations, the study records a significant increase in involvement (from 11.9% in 2011 to 28.1% in 2020).¹² It should be noted, however, that in general the country has intensified public activity over the years and, accordingly, the

¹¹ Ibid., 140.

¹² Ibid.

involvement in public organizations as such, be it educational, cultural, etc. According to the level of membership in religious organizations, Ukraine is close to Cyprus (24.3%).

Summing up our analysis, we will outline its main key points. Religiosity as such has not decreased in Ukraine, on the contrary—an increase in the number of actual rather than declarative believers indicate strengthening of the position of the institution of religion. However, the nature of religiosity is changing, namely, the number of those who do not belong to any denomination, identifying themselves as “just a believer” or “just a Christian,” is not decreasing, but increasing. Thus, a certain reduction (from 64% to 56.3%) in the proportion of those who think that God is important in their lives, “...may, according to the authors of the European study, indicate a decline in spirituality, rather than an impact of religion on life.”¹³ An important marker of the increase in declarative and secular believers is the decrease in the percentage of those who pray several times a week or more often from 42.2% to 38.5%. As for the place of Ukraine among other Eurozone countries, Ukraine has the closest results in total with Croatia and Bulgaria.

In the context of understanding the trends of transformation of religiosity in Ukraine, the issue of a confessional self-determination is important. The distribution of religious affiliation has not changed much since the beginning of the monitoring until recent years. As before, the majority (about 65%) of the Ukrainian citizens consider themselves Orthodox, but this number depends significantly on the regions and ranges from 74% of the residents living in the center of Ukraine to 47% of the residents from the western part of the country. At the same time, the total number of people who identify themselves as Orthodox fluctuates significantly. For example, their number decreased from 71% in 2013 to 65% in 2019, but, on the other hand, this figure is approximately equal to the figure in 2000 (then there were 66%).¹⁴

It is noteworthy mentioning that there is a large group of citizens who consider themselves believers, but do not belong to any of the religions (their number varies in recent years from 20% to 22%). Interestingly, majority of the respondents (59%) agree that “a person can simply be a believer and not profess a particular religion.”¹⁵ But the percentage of the support for this position among representatives of different denominations varies significantly. This is the opinion of 54% of the Orthodox believers (here we take into consideration, first of

¹³Ibid., 18.

¹⁴ *Держава і церква в Україні 2019: підсумки року і перспективи розвитку відносин: інформаційні матеріали*. [State and Church in Ukraine 2019: results of the year and prospects for the development of relations: information materials]. https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2019_Religiya.pdf. Accessed 03.17.2021.

¹⁵ *Держава і церква в Україні 2019: підсумки року і перспективи розвитку відносин: інформаційні матеріали*. [State and Church in Ukraine 2019: results of the year and prospects for the development of relations: information materials]. https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2019_Religiya.pdf. Accessed 03.17.2021.

all, the faithful of the newly formed Orthodox Church of Ukraine (at the time of the poll of the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate)) and 79% of “just Christians.” The exception is the group of believers of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, where the votes have been divided as the following: 49% of the respondents support the possibility of “just believing,” and 47% of them insist on the obligation of a confessional determination. We observed the greatest negative attitude towards Protestants in 2019 among Orthodox who belonged to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (23.9% of them had a negative attitude). The least negative and, accordingly, the most positive attitude is observed by those who identify themselves as “just Christians” without a specific adherence to a denomination, or “just Orthodox” (without belonging to a particular patriarchate).

The number of people who, according to the Razumkov Center, identify themselves with Protestants in Ukraine has an undulatory dynamics (ranging from 2% in 2000 to 0.8 in 2013, and again to 2.2% in 2018). The number of Protestants in Ukraine is unevenly distributed among the regions. Most Protestants are in the Center and East of Ukraine (2.2% each) and the least of them are in the West (1.1%) and South (1.7%), respectively.¹⁶

An important marker is the gradual change in attitudes toward Protestantism in Ukraine. Thus, if in 2000 only 13.5% of the respondents were positive about Protestantism (44.5% were indifferent, and 14.3% were negative), in 2019 we saw a significant increase (22.8%) in positive attitudes towards Protestantism. At the same time, the negative attitude decreased to 11.6%. The share of those who did not hear anything about this religious movement also decreased significantly (from 8.1% in 2000 to 1.8% in 2019). The most positive attitude to Protestantism is recorded in the West (27.1%) and in the Center (26.7%) of Ukraine; the least positive is the attitude in the South and East. The fact that Protestantism is relatively less widespread in Western Ukraine, but nevertheless meets with a more positive attitude, is related to the specifics of this region, where religiosity in general is much higher than in other regions. However, the more traditional Ukrainian denominations (Orthodox and Greek Catholics) are prevalent there, which in turn is explained by the relatively shorter period of persecution of religion in those areas by the atheistic Soviet authorities during the Soviet era.

Conclusions

Thus, it is obvious that Ukraine is a country with a high level of religiosity, in which favorable conditions for the development of both traditional and non-traditional religions have

¹⁶ Ibid.

been recreated. According to the results of a number of opinion polls, there is a high level of religiosity combined with religious pluralism and tolerance, which has been demonstrated by Ukrainian society. Against the background of the post-secularity of the post-Soviet era, this promotes the active integration of religious organizations into civil society. Currently, the social inclusion of religious movements and churches in political and national processes is noticeable, which contributes to an internal dialogue and consolidation of society.

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