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### Scholarly Study of Religion in Ukraine

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# SCHOLARLY STUDY OF RELIGION IN UKRAINE

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## Abstract <sup>1</sup>

The article analyzes the specifics of religious studies of religious minorities (RM). This religious phenomenon needs a concrete applied methodology that would make it possible to study the RM in its entirety. It is proposed to rely on the materials, which, in this case were the materials of a sociological study conducted within the project "Religious Minorities of Ukraine and State-Religious Relations" (2021), carried out by the authors of the article. As a result, it was clarified which religious organizations should be attributed to the RM, and how they differ from the religions of the majority, who have specific needs and requests. Having obtained a very real picture of the life and status of the RM in Ukraine, the researchers concluded that the RM today is an inconspicuous phenomenon of Ukrainian religious reality. Ukrainian society is aware of the existence of the RM in Ukraine. The state does not consider them as effective partners and almost does not take them into account when determining public policy in the field of religion. The religious majority, focused on its own internal problems, is at best indifferent to minorities. Journalism draws from religious reality only scandalous facts (or interpreted in this way) related to the Republic of Moldova. The authors consider it necessary to proceed from the fact that religious minorities are a historical phenomenon in Ukraine, an organic part of modern Ukrainian religious life. Despite their small number, the RM has an untapped resource in its influence and authority, which would improve interfaith understanding in the multi-religious space of Ukraine. In conclusion, the authors formulate practical recommendations for improving state-confessional relations, taking into account the interests of religious minorities.

**Keywords:** religious studies, methodology, religious minorities, poly-religiousness, religious life of Ukraine.

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<sup>1</sup> **Editor's note:** The article was written prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and reflect the conditions prior to February 24, 2022.

*Society never consists of a majority and a minority,  
it always consists of a huge number of diverse minorities.*

*(V. Pekar)*

## **1. Content of the Concept of "Religious Minority"**

Religious minorities (hereinafter RM) have been and are a component of the spiritual and social reality of Ukraine, from ancient times to the present day. They are a visible and equal component of the religious life of multi-confessional Ukraine. As a spiritual and social phenomenon, RM require the attention of society and the state, as well as in-depth study, which begins with the definition of the concept itself.

Religious minorities in scholarly discourse are defined as “such an association of believers of a certain denominational orientation, which in a country or its region, and even in the world, has a low prevalence and which includes a small number of its followers, coexisting with global religious systems.”<sup>2</sup>

The concept of RM derives from the concept of national or ethnic minorities, which are enacted in international and Ukrainian documents. In contrast, there is not a concept of RM in Ukrainian legislation, though it is used in information and scientific discourse. At the same time, RM often express the interests of a national/ethnic minority.

Besides, the concept of RM is relative. The existence of RM is possible only in relation to the religious majority. In other words, RM is considered an inextricable category from the concept of "religious majority." Determining which religious organizations should be included in RM involves evaluating what the religious majority is for a particular region or country. Defining the "religious majority" or "religious minority" of Ukraine, scholars are faced with considerable difficulties, as it is necessary to consider certain markers/contexts, such as historical, geographical, regional, and religious. Moreover, the RM is not a permanent unit. For various reasons, it may lose its minority status, because of the quantitative growth of its followers and/or territorial expansion.

Finally, the status of a religious minority in Ukraine may have an international dimension. For example, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and even Catholics and Protestants are minorities in Ukraine, while somewhere else they are religions of the majority. The representatives of RM themselves, in focus group surveys, observe the following:

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<sup>2</sup>See: *Dictionary of Religious Studies* / Ed. A. Kolodny and B. Lobovik. (Kyiv: The fourth wave, 1996), p. 275.

“... if we talk about minorities, we are not at all outraged by the idea that we are called a minority. This is not a problem for us. I believe that the concept of "religious minority" or "religious majority" is quantitative. In our understanding, we are by no means the majority;<sup>3</sup>”

“... in the context of Ukraine, of course, we are a little less than other major Christian denominations, so we belong to a minority;”

“... there are countries in the world where there are many communities of progressive Judaism, and they outnumber both Hasidim and Orthodox. Therefore, it is probably not very true to talk about a minority or a majority, and it will be more correct to say not numerous communities.”

Thus, because of the development of the scientific conceptual and categorical apparatus, religious movements are included in RM, represented by a limited number of their followers, united in small communities, and may not have an all-Ukrainian administrative center, but are in the process of institutionalization. Experts agree on the fact that RM in Ukraine are an association of followers of any religion (national or global), which quantitatively make up a very small part of the population of the country.

## **2. Quantitative and Qualitative Measurements of the Presence of Religious Minorities in Ukrainian Society**

By taking into account the above definition of RM, representatives of the following religious minorities were involved in the project "Religious Minorities in Ukraine and State-Religious Relations":

- Religions (religious organizations) of national minorities (Judaism, Karaite religion, Islam, the Armenian Church, German Lutherans, Old Believers, etc.).
- New religious formations: neo-Christian movements, orientalist religions, esoteric associations, neo-pagan beliefs, synthetic neo-religions, Scientology movements, etc.
- Regional religious minorities of the dominant denominations in Ukraine (for example, communities of Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, Orthodox Church of Ukraine, etc. in the

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<sup>3</sup> Here and further the open answers of representatives of religious minorities are represented in this format. They used to illustrate the directions of recommendations development. For a full report see: N. Dudar, “Report on the results of a sociological survey” within the project "Religious Minorities of Ukraine and State-Religious Relations," implemented by the Ukrainian Association of Religious Studies with the support of the Human Rights Fund of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in partnership with the All-Ukrainian Council Department of Religious Studies of H. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

eastern regions of Ukraine or the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of (Moscow Patriarchate) in Galicia).<sup>4</sup>

According to expert assessments based on official statistics of the state authority on religious issues, and our own long-term observations, the number of communities and the number of followers of RM make up no more than 5% of the total religious network and the number of believers in Ukraine. But it is thanks to the existing RM that the religious plurality of Ukrainian society is formed, in which, in addition to traditional Christian churches (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant), there are various branches of Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, natives, etc.

As of 2021, statistically and regionally, some of RM involved in the project are present on the map of Ukraine<sup>5</sup>.



In their analysis of the situation with RM, the researchers relied on the statistical report of the State Service for Ethno-politics and Religious Freedom (Form 1. Report on the network of churches and religious organizations in Ukraine as of January 1, 2021),<sup>6</sup> where a significant part of RM fall

<sup>4</sup> N. Pivovarova, "Report on the results of a sociological survey" within the project "Religious minorities of Ukraine and state-confessional relations", implemented by the Ukrainian Association of Religious Studies with the support of the Human Rights Fund of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in partnership with the All-Ukrainian Council of Religious Associations.

<sup>5</sup> Not all RM are marked on the map, not even all those involved in the RM project. The full presentation of RM in the cartographic image is limited by official statistics and insufficient description of the existing religious organizations belonging to RM in Ukraine. They are 1) Religious organizations of Progressive Judaism 2) Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine (UMMA); 3) Religious organizations of the Baha'i faith; 4) Religious organizations of the Native Ukrainian national faith; 5) Religious center of the Ukrainian Association of Buddhists of the Karma Kagyu school; 6) Apostolic Orthodox Church; 7) Spiritual Administration "New Generation" of Christian churches of Ukraine; 8) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; 9) Seventh-day Adventist Church of the Reformation Movement in Ukraine; 10) Religious organizations of the Krishna Consciousness Society; 11) German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ukraine; 12) Ukrainian Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Report of the State Service of Ukraine for Ethno-politics and Freedom of Conscience on the Network of Religious Organizations as of January 1, 2021. <https://dess.gov.ua/statistics-2020/>.

into the “Others” category.<sup>7</sup> It is worth detailing the "Others" category by the joint efforts of secular public servants and experts as well as religious ones.

We consider the stability of the statistics when it mainly comes to the religions of national minorities (Armenians, Jews, Karaites, etc.), Muslims, and partly pagans. The abandonment of the accounting practice of previous years to detail information on the emergence and spread of new religious movements with small numbers of followers complicates the analysis of religious processes in RM. Differentiation of religious organizations in statistical reports will provide an opportunity to obtain more comprehensive indicators of changes in the religious network in the country, better understand the dynamics of RM, and adjust policies in the field of state-confessional relations.

### **3. Specifics of the Religious Situation in Ukraine: Historical Origins and Current Situation**

Noting Ukraine's poly-denominationalism as a clear religious pluralism, the famous American sociologist of religion J. Casanova noted, “Ukraine has formed the most diverse and transparent competitive religious system in Europe... Ukraine is the only European country approaching the American model of denominationalism.” Religious pluralism in Ukraine is also ensured by RM. However,

disputes over property, asset parishes and religious buildings, competitions for support from local authorities and administration, attempts to redistribute resources and statuses for their own benefit, etc. are becoming indispensable features of the multi-confessional environment. At the same time, denominations seek not only to distance their adherents from the influence of other religions, but also to consciously take the initiative into their own hands, actively and sometimes violently resist, “carrying out both territorial and a kind of spiritual expansion.”<sup>8</sup>

Under such conditions, representatives of RM are perceived as “foreigners” and not “others” who also have the right to their religions.

The origins of this attitude should be sought in the history of the formation of the religious landscape of Ukraine, which has never been homogeneous—only Orthodox or even Christian. This poly-denominationalism was due to a number of factors, including:

- Ukraine's demarcation between the Christian and Muslim worlds, Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and empire states (Muscovy, Poland, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire).

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<sup>7</sup> V. Tytarenko. *From Prophecies in Religion to Prediction in Religious Studies: History, Theory, Perspectives*. (Kyiv: Center of Europe, 2017), p, 154.

<sup>8</sup> L. Volova, *Interfaith relations as a phenomenon of modern culture*. (Zaporozhye: Prosvita, 2002), p. 31.

- The economic development needs of Ukraine, which led to the emergence of foreign colonists and introduced migrants of various Protestant movements (Mennonites, Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals, etc.);
- The tolerance of Ukrainians in relation to followers of other religions (resettlement of Socinians and anti-Trinitarians from Poland to Volyn, settlement of Old Believers and Molokans, emergence of Hasidism, etc.)<sup>9</sup>
- And the hybrid influence of neo-imperialism on the political and religious situation in the country.

In the past, due to religious diversity, and also to the presence of RM, concepts existed of *inovirtsi* (“adherents of a different/another faith”) and/or *inoslavtsi*. These terms originated in Orthodoxy, where all non-Orthodox believers were named thus. Ukraine, being a part of other states throughout its history and contending with the dominance of ethnic and religious archetypes essential in those states, partially inherited discriminatory norms of attitude to RM from those situations, reflected in the current level of Ukrainian society’s tolerance.

Ukraine’s independence opened a new page in religious history, intensifying the activities of RM. In the realities of Ukraine, the religion of the "third millennium" has not remained on the margins, limited to the private sphere, but rather significantly impacts public life. Churches and religious organizations of Ukraine (both of religious minorities and the religious majority) are not passive observers of current processes. They communicate their opinions and positions in a way that is accessible, or that they consider appropriate.

Of course, the contribution of RM communities to the development of democratic Ukraine depends on their resources, which are inferior to the capabilities of the religious majority, but this does not diminish the importance of such activities (volunteer, social, etc.). Assistance of the state in the field of building interreligious relations (through the creation of additional platforms, including joint educational and social projects) would significantly increase awareness of the importance of contributing to the social development of RM. But the state as a whole has been indifferent to RM, as it was forced to focus on the complex problems of the religious majority. The new government, according to some experts, has stopped considering the religious factor in the context of its mobilization potential,<sup>10</sup> although this

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<sup>9</sup> A. Kolodny, *Confessional diversity of Ukraine: formation and state. History of religion in Ukraine*: In 10 vols. Vol. 7. *Religious minorities of Ukraine* / Ed. prof. A. Kolodny; Editorial Board: A. Kolodny (chairman) and others. – (Kyiv, 2011), pp. 40-42.

<sup>10</sup> “The religious factor in the conflict: A study of the peace-building potential of religious communities in Ukraine”. [https://risu.ua/shcho-take-mirobudivnichij-potencial-religijnih-gromad-ukrayini-i-de-jogo-shukati\\_n122234](https://risu.ua/shcho-take-mirobudivnichij-potencial-religijnih-gromad-ukrayini-i-de-jogo-shukati_n122234).

potential persists because it has never been fully exploited. Frequent changes in the political situation (now we have the 24th government) do not contribute to the stability and heredity of state-confessional relations. As a result, it is difficult to predict the realization of the potential of RM, especially in situations of aggravation of socio-political processes. In the realities of Ukraine, religion, in its ideological and institutional dimensions, proved that it can perform the functions of an instrument of both social consolidation as well as deconsolidation, and political activation as well as inertia.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the role played by the religious factor in modern conditions, when Ukrainians build their civil society, becomes noticeable; that is, the degree of religion presence in the public sphere is increasing, and the activity of religious institutions, organizations, denominations and communities is intensified (statements, actions, speeches of leaders, interviews, various meetings, etc.). It is important that the voice of RM is also heard and considered. The events on the Maidan, Russian aggression in the south-eastern regions of the country, and the annexation of the Crimea led to the transition of Ukrainian society to a state of a more complex evolutionary hierarchy, where the influence of religious organizations is not homogeneous. The dichotomous church-state relationship has been transformed into a church-state-society triad. RM are sure to be components of these models, where the decisive factor is relations with the state, largely affected by the disposition the state demonstrates towards religious organizations: partnership, hostility, or indifference (as defined by L. Vladychenko).<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. “Religious Minorities - State” Relations**

Ukraine is among secular states with a constitutionally legalized separation of Church from State and School from Church. The Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations,” a basic legal act in the field of ensuring freedom of conscience, religion, and relations between the state and religious organizations in Ukraine, was adopted in 1991. According to its provisions, all churches of both relative majorities and minorities have the same legal status and are equal. But the separation of the church from the state does not entail its separation from society, and the declared equality of denominations is not always

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<sup>11</sup> L. Fylypovych and V. Tytarenko, “Internal and external risks in interfaith relations and socio-political situation in Ukraine” / Public policy in the field of religion in Ukraine: historical experience, challenges, and prospects: Analyst. ext. / S.V. Geraskov and others; For the general ed. S.V. Geraskov, A.M. Fesenka. (Kyiv: НАДУ, 2020), p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> L. Vladychenko, “Theoretical and methodological bases of research of relations between the state and religious organizations” / The first Tancher readings "Methodological problems of modern religious studies": International scientific conference. October 26, 2015: Materials of reports and speeches / Editor.: A.Ye. Konversky [etc.]. (Kyiv: 2015), pp. 59-61.



ensured. The act states: “The participation of churches in state events, prayers, worship services at state and local events ...is unconstitutional. [T]he church is separated from the state, and therefore taking joint state and church actions is unconstitutional.”

In 2020, 71% of respondents<sup>13</sup> agreed with the thesis that "there is complete freedom of conscience and equality of religion before the law in Ukraine," according to opinion polls conducted by the Alexander Razumkov Center. Assessment of the reality of equality of all religious associations (measured on a 5-point scale) by participating leaders of RM communities indicates that this right is best exercised in free access to various types and levels of secular education (3.8), participation in charity (3.7), pilgrimage (3.7), activities throughout Ukraine (3.6), acquisition and use of religious literature and religious objects (3.6) and obtaining spiritual education (3.6). Representatives of RM have the lowest assessment of the realization of their property rights (2.4), the use of the media to promote their activities, education, missionary activity (2.8), and meeting believers' religious needs.<sup>14</sup>

Insufficient levels of legal support and even insignificant restrictions of religious freedom of RM, in turn, can determine the tendency to their social isolation, and further them even to functional collapse. In their efforts to socially reintegrate, RM can provoke conflicts in society.

“In one form or another ... high school teachers, priest, sometimes brought by teachers to secondary schools, ... sometimes Protestant movements conduct so-called "Christian ethics" lessons at school. Sometimes there are attempts to Christianize secondary special education by Christian organizations. Public authorities assist Christian religious organizations in this.”

“Introducing Christian ethics lessons in schools is a violation of the Constitution of Ukraine.”

Teaching Christian ethics is not imperative in Ukraine as a secular state. The Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” guarantees the separation the school from the church (Article 6), but, among RM, such cases, if they occur in the regions, cause disapproval. As an alternative, project participants make proposals to teach secular subjects and disciplines, such as the history of religions, study of religion, etc. in educational institutions of different levels.

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<sup>13</sup> Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: tendencies of 2000-2020: Information materials. P. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Dudar, *op.cit.* Report on the results of a sociological survey.

## 5. Religious Minorities and Ukrainian Society

Society demonstrates different attitudes towards people of different faiths. This is a particularly pressing issue for RM who are sensitive to such things, as it significantly affects their sense of security and safety. The results of the surveys show that the overall average score for the feelings of security and safety in religious communities of RM is 3.1 points (according to the 5-point scale), a rather low figure. Thus, competent construction of state-confessional relations with RM, educational work, and information support of state-confessional cooperation with RM can strengthen the sense of security, change and/or improve public perception, promote protection, and guarantee the rights and freedoms of RM.

In Ukrainian society, in the conditions of religious pluralism, RM have also intensified interfaith competition in the religious environment, especially on the part of religious majority, which show a certain prejudgment towards RM, and often perceive their presence and activity as: 1) apostasy from the correct (or true) faith, 2) the “religious expansion” of the West, or 3) annexation of religious and canonical territory.

The all-Ukrainian level of opinion polls shows that the majority of citizens (76%) are tolerant, supporting the opinion that “any religion that proclaims the ideals of goodness, love, mercy, and does not threaten the existence of another person has the right to exist” (45%) or that “all religions have the right to exist as different paths to God” (31%). 7% supported the statement, “only the religion I profess is true,” and 15% supported the statement, “only the religions traditional for our country have the right to exist,” i.e., a total of 22%.<sup>15</sup> In general, the attitude of citizens to the most widespread religions in Ukraine remains mostly positive, and, to the less widespread and well-known, mostly indifferent; negative attitudes towards any of the religions or religious currents do not prevail.<sup>16</sup> Instead, a sociological survey within the project showed that the lowest assessment of the perception of tolerance towards the faithful of RM communities came from the RM leaders themselves. It is only 2.9 points (on a 5-point scale).<sup>17</sup> New religious formations such as neo-Christian movements, orientalist religions, esoteric associations, neo-pagan beliefs, synthetic neo-religions, Scientology movements, etc. received a lower rate of 2.8 points, respectively. The leaders of RM, in turn, rated the attitude toward the “just Orthodox” (they call themselves Orthodox, without specifying the denomination) as 4.1 points. Some participants observed:

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<sup>15</sup> Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: tendencies of 2000–2020. P. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> N. Pivovarova, *op. cit.* “Report on the results of sociological research.”

"The media and Orthodox churches (being more widespread) do not provide very accurate and correct information, thus often forming a negative attitude towards religious minorities."

"There are stereotypes and, in the future, discriminatory vocabulary and discriminatory behavior towards religious minorities."

"There exists deliberate formation of a negative image of religious minorities by members of the religious majority, usually by ordinary members of the priesthood."

## **6. The Role of Public Organizations in the Life of Religious Minorities**

RM, including ethno-religious ones, face challenges of self-determination, with each minority answering these differently. To "diagnose" positions of "isolationism," social frustration is one possible cause, especially in relation to the activities of public institutions, including the Ukrainian Association of Religious Studies, the Ukrainian Association for Religious Freedom, the Institute for Religious Freedom, the Center for Religious Information and Freedom, the Round Table "Religion and Power in Ukraine: Problems of Relationship," which constantly operate at the Razumkov Center, etc.

A certain indicator of the state of RM is a powerful public association such as the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (UCCRO), which has separate communities of RM in its representation. There are complaints from the vast majority of RM--Protestants, Jews, Muslims and others – that, in attempting to become recognized members of the UCCRO, they are rejected. "The idea of creating a religious council that would unite religious associations active in the public space of Ukraine was born a few years ago, when it became clear that the UCCRO has no intention of expanding. Any attempt by other religious associations to become a member of the UCCRO, for objective or subjective reasons, was doomed to failure."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the need to form dialogue platforms for RM led to the creation of UCRA--the All-Ukrainian Council of Religious Associations.

The lacunas in the activities of state structures are partially overcome by the activity of public organizations, through scientific and practical conferences, seminars organized in Ukraine on the initiative of the International Academy of Freedom of Conscience and Religion, with the participation of the Ukrainian Association of Religious Studies, Department of Religious Studies, etc. Empirical experience of communication, including observation and literary studies, have provided an

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<sup>18</sup> O. Sagan, All-Ukrainian Council of Religious Associations as a Component of the Civil Society of Ukraine. <https://vrro.org.ua/about.html>.

opportunity to objectively inform the public about the latest processes in the religious sphere and the status of RM, to conduct a dialogue with them on their socialization, thereby preventing undesirable, socially negative consequences and interreligious conflicts.

“All religious organizations should join the dialogue. Unfortunately, even at the level of the Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, not all religious organizations are allowed to take part in the dialogue. Therefore, in fact, there is practically no dialogue with RM as such.”

## **7. Aspects of Problems of Religious Minorities**

Among the problems faced by RM in its existence and activities are legal, social, humanitarian (including educational), economic (property, financial), and international barriers. The most fundamental problems are the legal aspects related to legislation, such as state registration, acquisition of legal entity status, and obtaining or acquiring land for use or construction of a religious building, among others.

According to the current Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations,” the legal status of RM is identical to the one of any religious organization. The document states, “this Law has not been substantially revised since 1991, except for the change in the procedure for registration of religious organizations as legal entities in 2019, and many of its declarative provisions need to be specified in order to create legal mechanisms for their implementation.”<sup>19</sup> But we must admit that

during 1991-2021, 20 changes and amendments were made to the text of the Law, given the dynamic nature of the sphere of state-confessional relations in Ukraine. Most of these changes were technical. Among the innovations related to topical issues of the state-religious complex are normalization of the possibility of alternate use of religious buildings; improvements of the registration procedure for the statutes of religious organizations; opportunities for religious communities to change jurisdiction; issues related to the notification of holding peaceful gatherings of a religious nature; changes in the charter (position/provision) of a religious organization, the directing centre (management) of which is located outside Ukraine in the country that carried out military aggression against Ukraine, etc.<sup>20</sup>

As of 2021, the changes concerned the subordination of religious organizations and the procedure for state registration of religious organizations as a legal entity.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> M. Vasin, “Legal Status of Religious Minorities of Ukraine and Monitoring of Laws in the Context of Religious Minorities” within the Project “Religious Minorities of Ukraine and State-Religious Relations.”

<sup>20</sup> L. Vladychenko, On freedom of conscience and religious organizations: Law of Ukraine. <https://is.gd/Oiy935>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

In addition to the basic law, dozens of other acts of legislation regulate specific aspects of the believers' life and the religious organizations' activities. But many practical issues remain within the competence of local governments, whose decisions often reflect the interests of the religious majority. In view of this, it is at the local level that RM may experience difficulties in exercising their rights to the full and may not always find support from local authorities compared to members of the religious majority.<sup>22</sup>

"Public authorities--both central and local--should be more concerned with the problems of the people, the state, the economy, culture, sports, etc., rather than dealing with issues of support for their Christian religious majority."

"There is insufficient involvement of representatives of religious minorities by government officials in meaningful dialogues, and lack of communication."

"It is not possible to exercise the right to use or own a land plot or premises to meet the ritual and household needs."

"[Needed] (V. T.) ...the same rules for accounting and reporting of religious organizations, registration in government and administration, equal opportunities in the social space, subject to registration with the proper authorities."

The social sphere of activity of religious organizations is a potential "space of unity" for RM and the religious majority. In this context, the activity of rehabilitation centers, where asocial persons are taken care of, is critically important.

According to the Center for Mental Health and Monitoring of Drugs and Alcohol of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, there are up to 500 rehabilitation centers in Ukraine. In fact, there may be many more, because some of them have the status of ordinary public organizations. For several RM, the functioning of such centers is an integral component of their activities, which is the basis of evangelical ministry. But the presence of rehabilitation centers, in which there are mostly asocial people near ordinary settlements, is perceived negatively by the local authorities and the residents. In addition, the numerous cases of government interference in the activities of Christian rehabilitation centers, the related bureaucratic red tape of state structures, as well as intrusions and provocations by law enforcement agencies, corroborate the need to resolve these issues at the legislative level.

"[There are] (V. T.) attacks on rehabilitation centers for alcohol and drug addicts."

"...in the context of the state [there is] (V. T.) pressure from law enforcement agencies, ethnic profiling, unauthorized document checks... abduction of political refugees by individual Ukraine's Security Service officers."

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

“[Necessary] (V. T.) meetings with advisers, deputies, scientists, experts, public servants on social activities.”

Reality indicates the pertinence of the issue of rehabilitation centers and the need to establish regulatory environments through the legislative consolidation of this form of social service, as well as the support of national minorities and RM through grants, financial assistance, and more. For its part, the consolidation of interfaith, interreligious efforts to establish social services will contribute to the settlement of other issues (such as medical, military chaplaincy), which require additional research and more in-depth analysis to develop specific recommendations.

Religious expertise will also contribute to the balance of policy in the sphere of state-confessional relations.

"When involving experts, it is necessary to pay attention to the composition and activities of religious organizations, because there can be registered organizations under their names that are not religious by nature."

The above answer of the representatives of RM illustrates their fear that an institution far from religion may register under a religious organization. Confusion and chaos in registration can provoke the spread of false information (defamation), which, by expanding to other RM, can degrade their honor and dignity and damage their business reputation. Therefore, the development and coordination of mechanisms for conducting religious expertise, the status of which has not yet been agreed upon, will help increase the degree of validity of management decisions.

The issue of constituting religious expertise in Ukraine has been raised repeatedly in the expert community. Discussion of the provisions of the religious examination was to end with the adoption of the “Regulations/Provisions,” their legislative consolidation. However, this process has since been suspended, which has a negative impact on the structuring of a holistic, developed expert environment in Ukraine. The current legislation does not clearly define the grounds and specific procedure for evaluating religious expertise, does not define the range of persons authorized to conduct direct examination, and does not legally establish what constitutes expert opinion. In practice, religious studies were performed by the Department of Religious Studies of H. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine throughout the period of its existence and up to now. Moreover, the examination was carried out by the Expert Council on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations of the Department for Religions and Nationalities of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine. About 40 meetings were held, and more than one hundred issues

important for both the executive structures and society as a whole were discussed. Based on the decisions and resolutions adopted by the Expert Council, legislative initiatives were proposed, some of which have been successfully implemented. The Council ceased to exist in 2020 due to the reorganization of the State Department for Religions and Nationalities, under which it had operated. The newly established State Service of Ukraine for Ethno-politics and Freedom of Conscience (SSUEFC) initiated the creation of an advisory body--the Expert Council on Freedom of Conscience. However, the question of the formation and functioning of a professional religious expert community remains open. Therefore, the developments carried out during the project “Religious Minorities of Ukraine and State-Religious Relations” can act as a catalyst for intensifying the work of the Department for Cooperation with Religious Communities of SSUEFC in implementing its monitoring, analytical, mediation and educational functions in the field of freedom of conscience.

The cooperation with RM within the framework of the project proved their readiness for dialogue and outlined the range of internal "growth problems" that may hinder their integration into society.

"Public authorities should make more efforts to create confessional forums or round tables for a unifying religious atmosphere in the regions. There are many things that unite religious denominations, namely the well-being of the Ukrainian people. "

"At the state level [it is necessary] (V.T.) to establish committees that would be engaged in educational activities... as for a particular religious minority. Then people would better understand each other, know who surrounds them, how to communicate with them and how to react to certain activities ... "

“There is lack of state volunteer programs where both the [religious] (V.T.) majority and the religious minority could participate...”

“There is weak public awareness of minority religions and related prejudices.”

“[Required] (V.T.) more attention from the state to the preservation of religious heritage.”

As indicated by the statements of the respondents, without expert support for the development of a state strategy in religious matters, it is difficult to resolve problematic aspects in the relations of RM with society and the state. The level of management decisions depends on the readiness of academic science to function effectively in the new environment. Consolidated efforts of the religious expert community can influence the culture of strategic thinking among the political elite in making decisions as far as the religious life of Ukrainian

society, the formation of public and state "demand" for religious analysis, and the development of effective functioning of professional staff for socio-religious relations.

Representatives of RM themselves voice such important needs for them as:

“... holding religious meetings of all-Ukrainian scale.”

“To provide equal attitude of state authorities to all religions and denominations.”

“... create a committee, in which will be present both the religious majority and RM.”

“... create a TV channel for interfaith communication.”

“... More joint interfaith activities.”

“All denominations should work in the same direction, with the same goals and values -- love, family. We should work together to avoid a 'consumerist attitude' towards society and religious communities.”

In modern realities, the issues of realization of RM rights and freedoms remain important for Ukrainian society. Lack of a well-developed state policy in the religious sphere on RM slows down the process of Ukraine's integration into the European international community, strengthens the marginalization of RM, and provides grounds for the conflict in society complicating the participation of RM in interreligious and state-religious dialogue.

## **8. Recommendations**

As the realization of the rights and freedoms of RM requires cooperation of experts, public servants, mass media, and representatives of RM, the following consolidated recommendations on improving the state-confessional and interfaith relations are proposed to the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience.

### **Regulatory Level**

- To intensify work on the Concept of State-Religious Relations, developing conceptual principles on which the state will ensure the realization of rights and freedoms of religious minorities in all spheres of public life, with the involvement of representatives of line ministries and departments, specialists of the National Institute for Strategic Studies, H. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, experts from non-governmental think tanks, and representatives of religious organizations
- To develop a Code of Minority Rights (based on the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities)



together with representatives of the religious expert community to implement formal and de facto equality between religious minorities and the religious majority.

- To increase the level of education of the population, in particular young people, on the multi-religious specifics of Ukraine, and to initiate the introduction of religion study disciplines in the secondary and high schools through the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine
- To promote awareness of the importance of preserving the historical and cultural heritage of RM (synagogues, madrassas, mosques, sacred places of prayer, burial, etc.), appeal to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine to strengthen legal liability for the use of Ukrainian religious holy sites, sacred things, prominent religious buildings, spiritual, literary, and artistic values, etc. (with its further legislative consolidation)
- To apply to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine with a proposal to redistribute the information space, taking into account the representation of RM in it for their self-presentation
- To engender partnership between institutions of state power and RM on a contractual basis (with the Ministries of Education, Culture and Information Policy, Social Policy, Defense, and agencies)
- To take a legislative initiative to strengthen the responsibility for cases of defamation, the dissemination of false information that degrades honor and dignity and damages the business reputation of RM
- To develop and submit to the Parliament a bill regulating the activities of non-governmental rehabilitation centers for alcohol and drug addicts, which are maintained by RM in Ukraine, as well as amendments to legislation regarding alcohol and drug addicts, to provide them with further assistance in rehabilitation centers.

### **State and Public Level**

- To increase the representation of religious organizations involved in national and public events with representatives of RM.
- To promote dialogue among representatives of RM and representatives of religious majority, to overcome contradictions and develop mutually beneficial cooperation in social, educational, and other projects

- To actively communicate with RM, and monitor cases of violations and/or oppression of their rights and freedoms at various levels (national, regional, local).

### **Expert-Advisory Level**

- To legally substantiate the grounds, the authorized circle of persons, the procedure and conditions establishing religious expertise
- To intensify the work of the advisory body, that is the Expert Council on Freedom of Conscience, with the opportunity to study the results of experts' analytical work
- To create an open register of religious communities, including RM, with key information, based on the database collected under this project
- To improve the annual reporting, and provide mechanisms for verifying the compliance of registered statutes of RM with existing religious communities
- To increase cooperation with religious experts to jointly develop criteria for classifying religious communities in the "Others" category in reports on the network of churches and religious organizations in Ukraine, and expand reporting through analytical support in detailing the "Others" category
- To provide expert and advisory legal support to RM on the registration of statutes by improving and supplementing information on the procedure for the registration of religious communities on the principle of transparency (indicating the responsible person, contacts, status of documents, reasons for refusal, etc.)
- To develop unified methodological recommendations for local authorities on the registration of religious organizations
- To increase the professional level of civil servants to intensify cooperation with experts (lawyers, scholars of the religion, journalists, theologians, etc.), and jointly develop a strategy for improving public administration and its implementation through various forms of education, such as lectures, seminars, trainings, etc.
- To prevent discrimination against RM, to recommend the implementation of state policy in the field of religion on the ground without preferences to certain religious organizations, in particular in matters of land acquisition, rent, maintenance and preservation of religious buildings, religious needs, etc.

### **Information Level**

- To update the state information policy on the activities of RM in society, using the media content created during the project
- Keeping in mind the cultural and religious peculiarities of RM during the implementation of the state policy in the field of religion, to encourage RM to participate in regular dialogues, with the involvement of religious experts, to discuss society's current issues
- To increase the level of tolerance in the regions and prevent possible tensions in interreligious relations, to promote more active involvement in the resolution of problematic issues of advisory associations of the regional and local levels
- To overcome the tendencies of social isolationism among RM in order to expand educational activities, with the involvement of religious experts, to inform the local population about the peculiarities of the minorities present in their territory.

### **Advice for Religious Organizations and their Associations:**

- To intensify the creation and work of inter-religious associations of different levels -- all-Ukrainian, regional, local -- both on a permanent and situational basis, for example, to respond to cases of violation of religious rights and freedoms of RM
- To increase cooperation with the mass media, to prevent tendencies of isolationism and the distortion of information about RM, to quickly record their activities and objectively inform the society about the peculiarities (religious, ritual, socially effective, etc.) of RM
- To be more actively involved in the work of advisory bodies of various levels (all-Ukrainian, regional, local)
- To consolidate the efforts of RM in the implementation of interreligious social, volunteer, educational programs, etc.
- To increase the level of legal literacy of the RM faithful in the field of ensuring the rights and freedoms of religious organizations
- To organize and establish cooperation between religious and secular educational institutions through joint activities, participation in projects, inviting guest lecturers, etc., to overcome existing stereotypes of students in the field of religious life, and to establish tolerant relations between representatives of different religions and worldviews.