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# NON-RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE ON UKRAINIAN SOCIETY

By Bogdan Synchak, Maksym Balaklytskyi, and Volodymyr Dudarets

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## Annotation

The relevance of the study is provided by the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, more specifically, the hybrid nature of the war that Russia has been waging against Ukraine since 2014. The use of information technologies along with military force, among other things, provides for the involvement of the churches of the Moscow Patriarchate as an additional tool for the spread of destructive ideological influence in Ukraine. Attention to the non-religious influence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) on Ukrainian society is being updated against the background of the ideological confrontation between the Russian and Ukrainian worldview systems in the religious plane. The article presents the factors initiating the distribution of the Orthodox Patriarchate in independent Ukraine, highlights the elements of fundamental differences for Ukraine between the Orthodox Church of the Ukraine (OCU) and the UOC-MP, and considers the actual ways to eliminate problems associated with the functioning of the UOC-MP in Ukraine during the current Russian-Ukrainian war. In addition, some facts of collaborationism carried out by representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine since the annexation of Crimea and the territories of Donbass since 2014 have been studied. A parallel is drawn between the facts of cooperation with the invaders during the full-scale war of 2022 and the statements of Russian priests who give a public assessment of Russian military operations in Ukraine.

**Keywords:** Russian-Ukrainian information war, Orthodox Church of Ukraine (UOC-MP), ideology of UOC-MP, religious confrontation between Ukraine and Russia.

## Formulation of the Problem

On February 24, Russia invaded Ukraine under the guise of a “special operation,” launching a full-scale war in an unprecedented act of disregard for European values and fundamental human rights. The religious question also has its place in this process. As of the 37th day of the war (April 1), UNESCO confirmed damage to at least “53 Ukrainian historical sites, religious buildings and museums,” most of them (29) are religious objects.<sup>1</sup> However, the place and role of religious activity during the war is not limited to this; there is a hidden shadowy side that is quite informational. A characteristic feature of the Russian-Ukrainian war since 2014 (Donbass and Crimea) is the hybrid use of information technology along with military force. An underestimated part of the information war against Ukraine is the religious component, namely the non-religious influence of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine, which is ideologically contrary to the interests of an independent state.

## Analysis of Recent Publications

When considering the issue of religious influence in the information war, scholars view the problematic phenomenon in different ways. For example, V. Lastovsky notes that “the use of ‘soft power’ by the Ukrainian authorities, and not the cardinal cutting of the Gordian knot, can be explained by attempts not to violate the basic principles of constitutional law, among which one of the most important is the observance of human rights.” According to this scientist, “the second path led to the creation of the OCU (Orthodox Church of Ukraine) in late 2018–early 2019. Acquisition of the OCU canonical status in the Christian world undermined the possibilities of the UOC-MP.”<sup>2</sup> Here we are talking about the religious issue after the start of Russian aggression in Ukraine since 2014. Scientists I. Yakovlev, and V. Reutsky suggest that “if V. Yushchenko had managed to create a local autocephalous church on the territory of Ukraine in 2008, it might have been possible to avoid the annexation of the Crimean peninsula

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<sup>1</sup> “Внаслідок російського вторгнення в Україні постраждали щонайменше 53 об’єкти культури – ЮНЕСКО,” Hromadske, 2022, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/vnaslidok-rosijskogo-vtorgnennya-v-ukrayini-postrazhdali-shonajmenshe-53-obyekti-kulturi-yunesko>. [“As a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, at least 53 cultural objects were affected - UNESCO,” Hromadske, 2022,]

<sup>2</sup> В. Ластовський, “Національна безпека, церковна політика та права людини: співвідношення пріоритетів в українській реальності,” in *“Незалежність України: права людини та національна безпека”*: збірник матеріалів Першої міжнародної науковопрактичної конференції (Львів, 2021). [V. Lastovsky, “National Security, Church Policy and Human Rights: Correlation of Priorities in Ukrainian Reality,” in “Independence of Ukraine: Human Rights and National Security”: Proceedings of the First International Scientific and Practical Conference (Lviv, 2021).]

and military conflict.”<sup>3</sup> Such statements are conditioned by the language issue, because, with the right approach from 2008 to 2014, it would be possible to avoid Russia's formal pretext regarding the “protection” of Russian-speaking priests and believers. According to P. Protsenko, “Orthodox Christianity is a nation-forming religion for Ukrainians.” This is indirectly confirmed by Russia's destructive actions to use the potential of Orthodoxy in preparing for a war with Ukraine in the East. In the ideology of the “Russian world,” the author notes that “before granting the *Tomos* of autocephaly to the OCU,” the use of the UOC-MP in the information war was more covert.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the intensification of anti-Ukrainian activities of representatives of churches encourages researchers to, once again, pay attention to the problematic phenomenon. Foreign scientists pay much less attention to religious issues in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian information war, but are interested in certain elements of this issue. For example, J. Rogoża cites the data of the “RatingGroup survey, according to which 63% of respondents are in favor of breaking ties between the UOC-MP and the Russian Orthodox Church, while among the respondents of the Moscow Patriarchate this figure is 52%.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the author notes the potential of resistance from the Ukrainian population against the ideological influence of Russia through the religious plane. At the same time, the scholar A. Bahemuka considers “the UOC-MP as Russia's soft power against Ukraine.” The author notes that the UOC-MP helps Russia spread disinformation in Ukraine.<sup>6</sup> An analysis of recent publications that are contextually involved in the stated issues demonstrates the general attention of scientists to the problematic phenomenon. However, the comprehensive non-religious influence of the UOC-MP has not been studied. That is why the purpose of this study is to find ways to solve the problem by studying the features of this phenomenon.

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<sup>3</sup> І. Яковлев and В. Реутський, “Релігійний фактор в зовнішній політиці України,” *Scientific and Theoretical Almanac Grani* 24, no. 9 (2021): 65–69. [I. Yakovlev and V. Reutsky, “Religious factor in the foreign policy of Ukraine,” *Scientific and Theoretical Almanac Grani* 24, no. 9 (2021): 65–69.]

<sup>4</sup> Павло Вадимович Проценко, “Можливості для застосування інституту релігії з метою відновлення україноцентризму православних українців Луганської і Донецької областей. Новий курс ПЦУ на Сході України,” in “*Трансформація соціальних інститутів в інформаційному суспільстві*”: IV Конгрес Соціологічної асоціації України (Харків, 2021), 380–82. [Pavlo Vadymovych Protsenko, “Opportunities for the use of the institution of religion in order to restore the Ukrainian-centrism of Orthodox Ukrainians in Luhansk and Donetsk regions. New course of the PCU in the East of Ukraine,” in “Transformation of social institutions in the information society”: IV Congress of the Sociological Association of Ukraine (Kharkiv, 2021), 380–82.]

<sup>5</sup> J. Rogoża, “OSW Commentary-Ukrainian Society Rallies against the Aggressor-Defence across Divides,” Policy Commons, 2022, <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/2284779/osw-commentary/3044867/>.

<sup>6</sup> A. Bahemuka, “Importance of Ecumenical Dialogue in Shaping Peacebuilding Processes in Ukraine,” ResearchGate, 2021, [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Augustine-Bahemuka/publication/353399962\\_IMPORTANCE\\_OF\\_ECUMENICAL\\_DIALOGUE\\_IN\\_SHAPING\\_PEACEBUILDING\\_PROCESSES\\_IN\\_UKRAINE/links/60fa42ff1e95fe241a810d15/IMPORTANCE-OF-ECUMENICAL-DIALOGUE-IN-SHAPING-PEACEBUILDING-PROCESSES-IN-UKRAINE.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Augustine-Bahemuka/publication/353399962_IMPORTANCE_OF_ECUMENICAL_DIALOGUE_IN_SHAPING_PEACEBUILDING_PROCESSES_IN_UKRAINE/links/60fa42ff1e95fe241a810d15/IMPORTANCE-OF-ECUMENICAL-DIALOGUE-IN-SHAPING-PEACEBUILDING-PROCESSES-IN-UKRAINE.pdf).

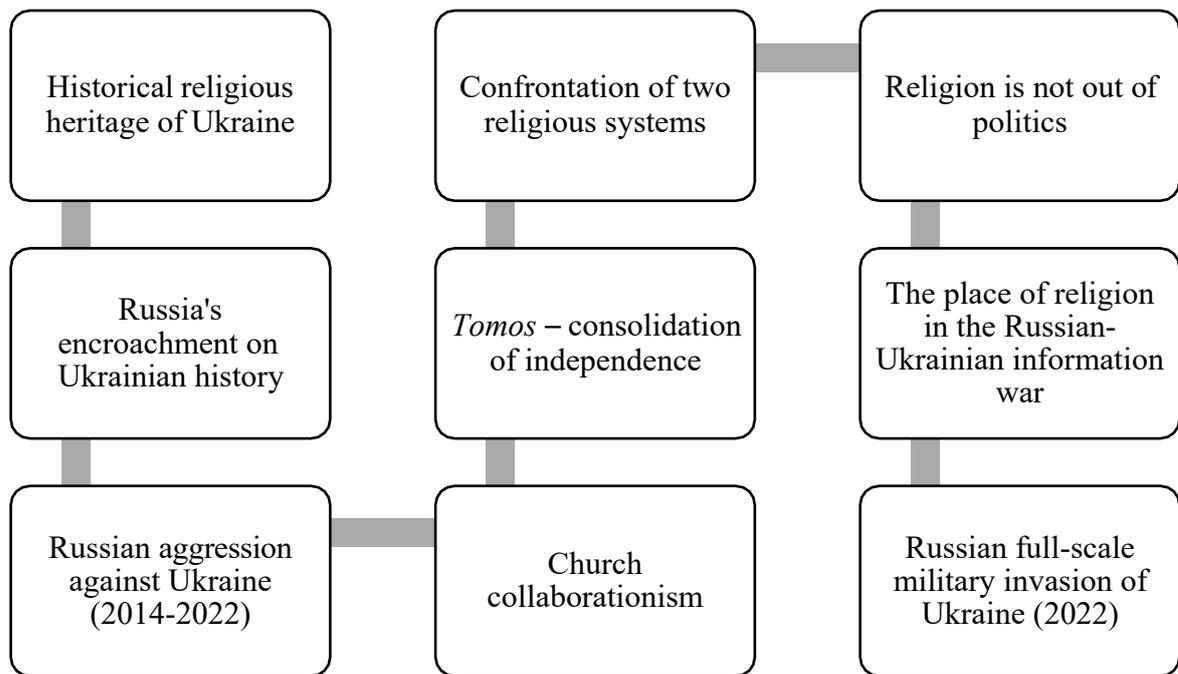
## Main Part

Christianity in Ukraine occupies an important role as a nation-creative factor. With its help, certain values, customs, and traditions are fixed in the mentality of generations. According to the Razumkov Center, “in the period from 2010-2020, the proportion of believers among adult citizens of Ukraine averaged 70%.” This highlights the impact of religious denominations on society. Sociologists note that since “2014, there has been an increase in the number of believers compared to the ‘pre-war’ 2013, from 67% to 76%, which is typical for a society that finds itself in a stressful situation.”<sup>7</sup> The above dynamics of religiosity indicates that, of course, in the context of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the number of believers is predictably expected to increase as well. This imposes a special responsibility on religious organizations, because no matter how they declare the separation of religion from politics, during the war “allies” and “enemies” are in different social institutions. The main claim against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) is that any organization that submits to Russia as an aggressor country is dangerous for Ukraine. This issue was raised long before the start of the war, but against its background, it was able to be resolved positively for Ukrainians by obtaining Autocephaly for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2018 (OCU). In 2021, sociological research data shows that “39% of Orthodox Ukrainians are parishioners of the OCU, and 16% are parishioners of the UOC-MP. Does not belong to any of the dioceses 43%.”<sup>8</sup> Obviously, it is for these indefinite 43% that an information war is being waged on a religious plane. However, the reasons for initiating the distribution of the Orthodox Patriarchate in independent Ukraine should be sought in a comprehensive manner. The Russian-Ukrainian war that began in 2014 became a catalyst for the changes that have taken place since 2018, and that are taking place now (see Fig.1).

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<sup>7</sup> “Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного. Самовизначення громадян. України: тенденції 2000- 2021рр.,” Центр Разумкова, 2021, [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [“Features of religious and ecclesiastical-religious. Self-determination of citizens. Of Ukraine: trends of 2000-2021, “Razumkov Center, 2021,]

<sup>8</sup> “39% православних українців є прихожанами Право”славної Церкви України.,” Ukrainian Institute for the Future, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/UkrainianIF/posts/4876629055732484>. [“39% of Orthodox Ukrainians are members of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.”, Ukrainian Institute for the Future, 2021]



**Figure 1. Factors initiating the distribution of the Orthodox Patriarchate in independent Ukraine**

Figure 1 shows the factors influencing the distribution of Orthodox patriarchate in Ukraine. The historical and religious heritage of Ukraine is unique. Recall that Kyiv is more than 1,500 years old, and given the age of the oldest temples, Christianity in Ukrainian lands is no less.<sup>9</sup> The most famous religious sites under the protection of UNESCO are: “Sophia Cathedral, or St. Sophia of Kyiv, erected by Prince Yaroslav the Wise in the 11th century, shortly after the baptism of Russia,” “Kiev-Pechersk Lavra – a monastic complex used by the UOC, founded in 1051,”<sup>10</sup> and many other churches are evidence of the antiquity of Christian traditions in Ukrainian lands. Accordingly, the independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as an organization has quite natural grounds. Regarding Russia's encroachment on Ukrainian history, according to the National Institute for Strategic Studies, “the historical memory of the Ukrainian people has long been a field of information wars by Russia.” Numerous “interpretations of history take place in order to legitimize their policy aimed at the destruction of Ukrainian national identity, the split and destruction of the Ukrainian state.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> С. Цалик, “1982 рік: як рахували вік Києва,” BBC News Україна, 2016, [https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/blogs/2016/05/160528\\_kyiv\\_tsalyk\\_az](https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/blogs/2016/05/160528_kyiv_tsalyk_az). [S. Tsalyk, “1982: how the age of Kyiv was calculated,” BBC News Ukraine, 2016,]

<sup>10</sup> “Які об’єкти охороняє ЮНЕСКО в Україні?,” Ukrainer, 2020, <https://ukrainer.net/unesko-v-ukraini/>. [“What sites are protected by UNESCO in Ukraine?” Ukrainer, 2020,]

<sup>11</sup> “Інтерпретації історії у політиці Російської Федерації як загроза національній безпеці України”. Аналітична записка,” НІСД, 2015, <https://niss.gov.ua/doslidzhennya/gumanitarniy-rozvitok/interpretacii->

Russia's claims to the Ukrainian historical past are also determined by Soviet ideology, which interpreted the history of enslaved peoples in its own way. According to historian K. Galushko, "Putin's theses that Russians and Ukrainians are one people are very old and are not at all something original." Until 2012, the Soviet scheme of history worked in Russia, in which the Ukrainians were "a separate people, reunited with the Russians." After 2012, they returned to the old imperial scheme, in which Great Russians, Little Russians and Belarusians are part of one Russian people."<sup>12</sup> In this paradigm, there are also interreligious disputes. The common efforts in the Russian-Ukrainian war are aimed at artificially constructing an ideological system in which all fraternal peoples are temporarily not sub-Russian republics. We have seen examples of the implementation of such imperial ambitions in Ukraine in the Donbass and in Crimea since 2014, and also in the self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics (L/DPR). It was the annexation of these territories that led to a sharp confrontation between the Ukrainian and Russian patriarchates. In July 2017, "The Ministry of Culture of Ukraine accused the UOC-MP of collaborating with the militants of the L/DPR."<sup>13</sup> Against this background, there are also known cases of prosecution against priests of the UOC-MP for such cooperation with militants in the occupied territories. "The cleric organized the blocking of the road to Luhansk, preventing the movement of forces and means of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) to the area of the anti-terrorist operation (ATO)."<sup>14</sup> Such cases testify to the church collaborationism of the UOC-MP, which confirms the connection of the religious organization with politics. Against the background of the receipt by the Kyiv Patriarchate of *Tomos* (2018), autocephaly for the OCU (which indicates its locality in the territories of Ukraine and consolidates its independence from Russia), there was a frank confrontation between the two religious systems. Thus, the attitude of representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate towards the Russian-Ukrainian war became evidence that such a religion does not exist separately from politics. The place of religion in the Russian-Ukrainian war is really 'soft power' in supporting

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[istorii-u-politici-rosiyskoi-federacii-yak](#). ["Interpretations of history in the policy of the Russian Federation as a threat to Ukraine's national security." Analytical Note,"NISS, 2015]

<sup>12</sup> "Путін назвав росіян і українців одним народом. Історики пояснюють, чи це так," BBC News Україна, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-51596469>. ["Putin called Russians and Ukrainians one people. Historians explain whether this is so,"BBC News Ukraine, 2020,]

<sup>13</sup> "Міністерство культури звинуватило УПЦ МП у співпраці з бойовиками 'ЛНР' та 'ДНР,'" Zaxid.net, 2017, [https://zaxid.net/ministerstvo\\_kulturi\\_zvinuvatilo\\_upts\\_mp\\_u\\_spvpratsi\\_z\\_bojovikami\\_lnr\\_ta\\_dnr\\_n1431077](https://zaxid.net/ministerstvo_kulturi_zvinuvatilo_upts_mp_u_spvpratsi_z_bojovikami_lnr_ta_dnr_n1431077).

[“The Ministry of Culture accused the UOC-MP of collaborating with the militants of the ‘LPR’ and the ‘DPR,’ Zaxid.net, 2017]

<sup>14</sup> "Священника УПЦ МП засудили через співпрацю з бойовиками 'ЛНР,'" Hromadske, 2019, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/svyashenika-kolishnoyi-upc-mp-zasudili-cherez-spvpracuju-z-bojovikami-lnr>. ["Priest of UOC-MP convicted for cooperation with militants of "LPR,"Hromadske, 2019,]

the implementation of the information war. That is why the issue of permits for the activities of the UOC-MP acquired a new resonance in connection with the start of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Despite the official statements of the church leadership about the condemnation of the war, facts of cooperation between the servants of God and the occupiers are recorded. For example, in February, according to Bellingcat, “a saboteur caught near Gostomel turned out to be an archpriest of the UOC-MP.” Detained near a downed Russian helicopter, he “tried to impersonate a Ukrainian. Records and special devices were found on him, indicating that he was collaborating with enemy troops.”<sup>15</sup> Also in March, another clergyman of the UOC-MP was detained in Kyiv, “during a search in his phone, correspondence was found with representatives of the aggressor country, in which the future attack of the enemy on Kyiv was discussed.”<sup>16</sup> Such facts indicate the cooperation of the UOC-MP with the invaders. However, all this has its own logical reasons, because the Kyiv and Moscow patriarchates have significant differences in subordination (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Elements of fundamental differences for Ukraine between the OCU and the UOC-MP**

№	Orthodox Church of Ukraine	UOC Moscow Patriarchy
1.	“The OCU is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and inalienable one with the Mother of the Great Church of Christ in <b>Constantinople</b> and through her with all other Orthodox Autocephalous Churches.” (I.1.) <sup>17</sup>	“The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is self-sufficient and independent in its administration and structure. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is united with the Local Orthodox Churches through the Russian Orthodox Church.” (I.1.) <sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> “Затриманий під Гостомелем диверсант виявився протоієреєм УПЦ МП, – Bellingcat,” Фокус, 2022, <https://focus.ua/uk/voennye-novosti/507790-zaderzhannyi-pod-gostomelem-diversant-okazalsya-protoiereem-upc-mp-bellingcat>. [“The saboteur detained near Gostomel turned out to be the archpriest of the UOC-MP - Bellingcat,” Focus, 2022,]

<sup>16</sup> “У Києві затримали священика за співпрацю з окупантами,” Слово і діло, 2022, <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2022/03/16/novyna/suspilstvo/kyievi-zatrymaly-svyashhenyka-spivpracyu-okupantamy>. [“A priest was detained in Kyiv for cooperating with the occupiers,” Word and Deed, 2022,]

<sup>17</sup> “Статут Православної Церкви України. Православна Церква України,” Православна Церква України, 2018, <https://www.pomisna.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/statut-ptsu.pdf>. [“Statute of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Orthodox Church of Ukraine,” Orthodox Church of Ukraine, 2018,]

<sup>18</sup> “Статут про управління Української Православної Церкви (МП),” Українська православна церква, 2007, <http://orthodox.org.ua/article/statut-pro-upravli%D1%96nnya-ukra%D1%97nsko%D1%97-pravoslavno%D1%97-tserkvi-1>. [“Statute on the Management of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP),” Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 2007,]

2.	The OCU is “Autocephalous—an independent local church, a <b>self-governing part of the Ecumenical Orthodox Church.</b> ” <sup>19</sup>	“The UOC-MP is a <b>self-governing</b> part of the <b>Russian Orthodox Church.</b> ” (ROC) (I.5.) <sup>20</sup>
3.	This status was granted “in accordance with the <b>Patriarchal and Synodal Tomos</b> , by which she was granted autocephalous status <b>on January 6, 2019.</b> ” She is the “ <b>spiritual daughter</b> ” of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. <sup>21</sup>	The Charter of the Russian Orthodox Church states that “the autonomous and <b>self-governing Churches</b> that are part of the Russian Orthodox Church <b>canonically constitute the Moscow Patriarchate.</b> ” (1) <sup>22</sup>
4.	“ <b>The Metropolitan</b> of Kyiv and All Ukraine is elected for life and bears canonical responsibility for the pastoral administration of the people of God in his own hierarchical region.” (VII.1.) <sup>23</sup>	“ <b>The primate</b> of the UOC-MP is elected for life by the episcopate of the UOC-MP and is <b>blessed by</b> His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.” (V.2.) <sup>24</sup>

Table 1 shows a number of significant differences for Ukraine between the OCU and the UOC-MP. These data explain the thesis that any organization controlled by Moscow can threaten the national security of Ukraine, especially in times of ongoing full-scale war. Under such circumstances, there are several ways to solve the problem (see Fig. 2).

<sup>19</sup> “Патріарший і Синодальний Томос надання автокефального церковного устрою Православній Церкві в Україні,” Православна Церква України, 2019, <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/document-post/patriarshyj-i-synodalnyj-tomos-nadannya-avtokefalnogo-tserkovnogo-ustroyu-pravoslavnij-tserkvi-v-ukrayini/>. [“Patriarchal and Synodal Tomos granting autocephalous ecclesiastical organization to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine,” Orthodox Church of Ukraine, 2019]

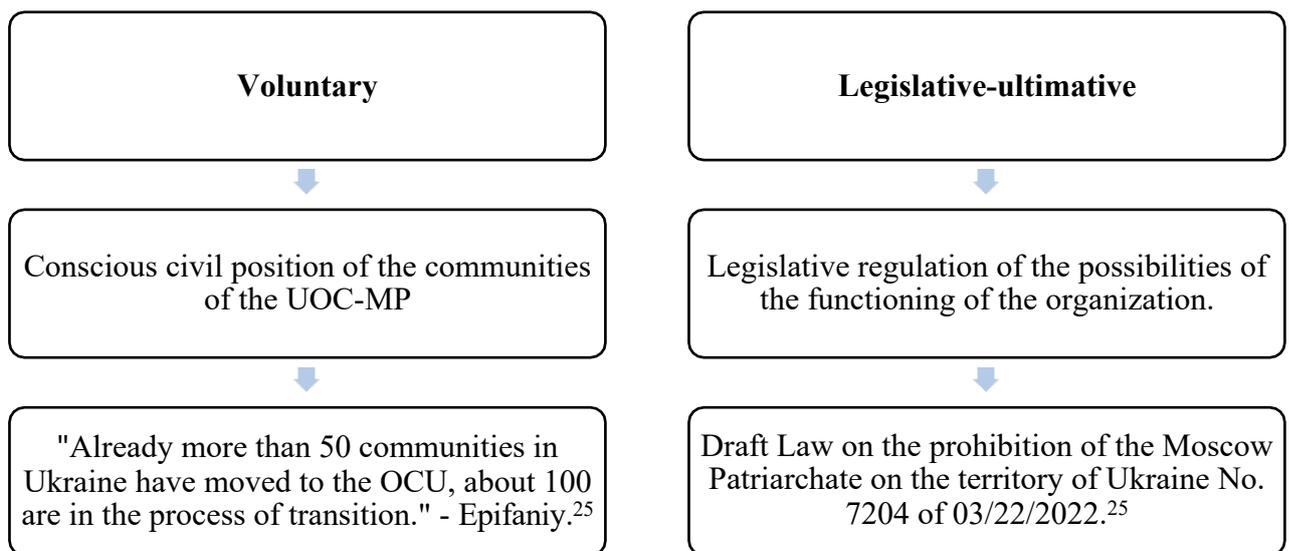
<sup>20</sup> “Статут про управління Української Православної Церкви (МП),” Українська православна церква, 2007, <http://orthodox.org.ua/article/statut-pro-upravl%D1%96nnya-ukra%D1%97nsko%D1%97-pravoslavno%D1%97-tserkvi-1>. [“Statute on the Management of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP),” Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 2007,]

<sup>21</sup> “Що таке томос і автокефалія – пояснюємо популярно,” Радіо Свобода, 2021, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29697267.html>. [“What is tomos and autocephaly - we explain popularly,” Radio Liberty, 2021,]

<sup>22</sup> “Устав Русской Православной Церкви,” Русская Православная Церковь, 2017, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/133115.html>. [“Charter of the Russian Orthodox Church,” Russian Orthodox Church, 2017,]

<sup>23</sup> Статут Православної Церкви України. Православна Церква України,” Православна Церква України, 2018, <https://www.pomisna.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/statut-ptsu.pdf>. [Statute of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Orthodox Church of Ukraine,” Orthodox Church of Ukraine, 2018]

<sup>24</sup> “Статут про управління Української Православної Церкви (МП),” Українська православна церква, 2007, <http://orthodox.org.ua/article/statut-pro-upravl%D1%96nnya-ukra%D1%97nsko%D1%97-pravoslavno%D1%97-tserkvi-1>. [“Statute on the Management of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP),” Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 2007,]



**Figure 2. Actual ways to eliminate problems associated with the functioning of the UOC-MP in Ukraine during the current Russian-Ukrainian war**

Figure 2 simulates voluntary and legislative ultimatum paths to eliminate problems associated with potential threats to Ukraine from the actions of the UOC-MP. The first is already reinforced by the fact that “almost a hundred Moscow communities are ready to switch to the OCU.”<sup>25</sup> This trend indicates the disagreement of a certain number of churches of the UOC-MP with the criminal actions that Russia is committing in Ukraine. The second way to eliminate the Moscow supervision of the UOC-MP is more severe, but in wartime it has every reason to be implemented. At the end of March, a draft law providing for the prohibition of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine was submitted to the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine. The explanatory note states that “since 2014, cases of assistance to occupiers and Russian agents, hiding them in church buildings and monasteries, have been regularly recorded. Anti-state propaganda is pouring through the ‘church media.’ The situation became especially aggravated with the start of Moscow’s full-scale aggression on February 24, 2022.” The purpose of this

<sup>25</sup> “Вже понад 50 громад УПЦ МП приєдналися до ПЦУ–Епіфаній,” Hromadske, 2022, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/vzhe-ponad-50-gromad-upc-mp-priyednalisya-do-pcu-epifanij>. [“More than 50 communities of the UOC-MP have already joined the PCU--Epiphanius,” Hromadske, 2022]. “Проект Закону про заборону Московського патріархату на території України,” Верховна Рада України, 2022, <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/39276>. [“Draft Law on the Prohibition of the Moscow Patriarchate on the Territory of Ukraine,” The *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine, 2022]. “Перейти до ПЦУ готові майже сто громад – Епіфаній,” Укрінформ, 2022, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3442486-perejti-do-pcu-gotovi-majze-sto-gromad-epifanij.html>. [“Almost a hundred communities are ready to join the PCU - Epiphanius,” Ukrinform, 2022]

law is to protect the national security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine, prevent collaborationism, stop inciting interreligious hatred and destabilize the religious environment in Ukraine.<sup>26</sup> Considering the above facts, such a wording is quite justified for Ukrainian realities. This study found that Russia has been systematically using religious organizations belonging to its jurisdiction during the war with Ukraine since 2014. Now Russian priests also confirm solidarity with some Ukrainian colleagues. Archpriest A. Tkachev, after the outbreak of the war against Ukraine in 2022, justified the Russian attack with the following words during a sermon: “If they hadn’t done anything, they would have flown here in two years, without any mercy, without warning. And if they entered here, they would cut us with you and smear the roofs with blood.” Another archpriest A. Vladimirov went further, during a sermon he stated that it was necessary to prepare for the moment when all Great and Little and White Russia would be able to march from Vladivostok to Kaliningrad with the only immortal regiment. The priest also expressed hope that “Moldova, Kazakhstan, unfortunate Ukraine will join Russia in the near future, Georgia is on its way. Well, what will happen to the Baltic States—you can guess for yourself. Today they supply weapons for the extermination of the Slavs.”<sup>27</sup> And these are just published fragments of some statements of preachers who regularly perform ‘worship’ in Russian churches. Against the background of the production of such information, the ideological confrontation between the Russian and Ukrainian worldview systems in the religious plane is obvious. The independence of Ukraine should not be questioned by any of the confessions, because this is an unconditional constitutional legislative right, which Ukrainians are now defending on the battlefield. The context is unfortunate, according to which military aggression by Russia threatens not only Ukraine, but also other independent states. Russia's position in this war openly states that “this is not about Ukraine. This is the culmination of the course that the West has pursued since the early 90s after it became clear that Russia would not be obedient, and Russia has its own opinion.”<sup>28</sup> This “own thought” is nothing but the Kremlin’s imperial ambitions, which have manifested themselves in relation to Ukraine

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<sup>26</sup> “Проект Закону про заборону Московського патріархату на території України,” Верховна Рада України, 2022, <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/39276>. [“Draft Law on the Prohibition of the Moscow Patriarchate on the Territory of Ukraine,” The *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine, 2022]

<sup>27</sup> “‘Не можете сказать правды - просто помолчите’. Ракетные и словесные удары по Украине заставляют УПЦ все больше отдаляться от Москвы,” BBC News Русская служба, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-60655883>. [“‘You can’t tell the truth – just shut up.’ Rocket and verbal attacks on Ukraine are forcing the UOC to move further and further away from Moscow,” BBC News Russian Service, 2022]

<sup>28</sup> “Лавров обвинил Запад в появлении украинского кризиса,” Газета.ру, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-60655883>. [“Lavrov blamed the West for the emergence of the Ukrainian crisis,” Gazeta.ru, 2022]

throughout the history of the notorious “neighborhood.” “Russian Patriarch Kirill blesses the military for the war against Ukraine, presenting the icon to the commander of the Russian Guard, V. Zolotov,” who promises to “break Ukraine’s resistance as soon as possible.” At the same time, Metropolitan Onufry, subordinate to him, opposed the war. This points to problems between the Ukrainian and Moscow churches of the identical patriarchate. Such a religious ideology should not have a place and tools to influence society in a warring state. Now the course of Ukraine in a completely opposite direction from Moscow is obvious; this is a matter of the survival of the nation and the preservation of statehood. The religious plane as a nation-creating institution should have a vector of development joint with the people's interests and the opposite participation in the information war of religious activity.

### **Conclusions**

The activities of the UOC-MP in Ukraine require a thorough review in order to eliminate contradictions related to state interests. The post-religious influence of the UOC-MP against the background of the ideological confrontation between the Russian and Ukrainian worldview systems is carried out within the framework of the Russian-Ukrainian information war. The facts of the collaborationism of the priests of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine contradict the official position of the church, which condemns the war. Statements of condemnation and requests to stop the war, compared with cases of cooperation with the occupiers, are not enough to offset the destructive influence that Moscow patronage has. The actual ways to eliminate the problems associated with the functioning of the UOC-MP in Ukraine during the current Russian-Ukrainian war are voluntary and legislative ultimatum. The first one is already actively functioning and has its results, the second one needs to be approved by the deputies of the *Verkhovna Rada*. Therefore, religious organizations should not be allowed to promote any anti-Ukrainian political narratives, mixing them with religious activities, to take a direct part in the war on the side of the enemy, to represent the enemy’s interests and to carry out any other forms of collaborationism. In difficult times for the state, religion is called upon to heal and strengthen society, and not to divide it.

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