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Maksym Vasin

Institute of Religious Freedom, Kyiv

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CHARACTERISTICS OF DEVELOPMENT OF INTER-CONFESSIONAL RELATIONS IN UKRAINE

by Maksym Vasin

Maksym Vasin, Master of Law degree, is Executive Director of the civil organization Institute of Religious Freedom in Kyiv. Posted on the Blog of the organization, the editors are grateful to Charles Warner for drawing it to their attention. It is published here with minimal correction of the English version (a Ukrainian version is the original) for the sake of clarity, while retaining the style. The author noted that the analysis was compiled as part of the project "Monitoring Religious Freedom in Ukraine" with the support of the democratic grant fund of the US Embassy in Ukraine.

To research the dynamics of inter-confessional relations in Ukraine observers increasingly scrutinize the situation with the help of certain classifications. Since this sphere is too delicate and sensitive it does not allow for equivalent deductions, but only to trace tendencies. In this material we glance at the development of the inter-confessional dialogue in the format of consultative-advisory organs at the Ukrainian level, collaboration with the churches and religious organizations in the limits of civil councils and commissions at the central organs of executive government, and separate significant events at the central and regional levels.

All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO)

During the course of the last several years the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) has occupied a leading place in the field for forming an inter-confessional dialogue in Ukraine. Uniting within its fold the leading Christian churches (Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant), one Judaic, and three Muslim religious unions, AUCCRO practically represents more than 90% of the religious network of Ukraine. Accordingly, the level of the dialogue, the cooperation, and the agreements reached in the field of this consultative-advisory organ, which acts on a civilian basis (without the status of a legal person), are examples of the broadest social understanding in the religious field.

Of course it cannot be said that the activity of the AUCCRO is exceptional and enabled resolution of all the conflicts which today appear at the regional level, with reference to Orthodox Churches of various jurisdictions, Orthodox and Greek Catholic communities, broader confessions, new religious trends, and so on. Nevertheless, at the same time an important significance is the fact of engaging in meetings, communication, and continuous dialogue by the heads and representatives of the mentioned religious unions, which indisputably shapes the formation of tolerant and mutual relations in the religious environment of Ukraine.

It is important to note that the example of inter-confessional understanding, which appears at the all-Ukrainian level, is gradually being inherited by the spiritual leaders of the churches and religious organizations at the regional level. In this context it is worth mentioning the consultative-advisory inter-confessional organs that function at the oblast state administrations, sometimes autonomously, or at the local councils, which will be discussed to a greater extent below.

It is necessary to observe that certain levels of trust and principles of collaboration have formed inside the AUCCRO. The effectiveness of the council lies in its active members attempting to put forth effort to search for consensus in all the questions of the day at its sessions, promoting inner consolidation and greater influence of the AUCCRO on public opinion and policy to fortify high moral standards in society and to strengthen cooperation in the execution of the social

functions of the church and religious organizations. Accordingly, the composition of the council is sufficiently fixed and slowly expands, since the candidates for membership of the AUCCRO need to assure their competency to strengthen the work of the council and to reach a systematic multifaceted dialogue. Hereby, despite the reproaches of separate reviewers, the AUCCRO cannot physically unite all the existing confessions and religious tendencies in Ukraine, thus, as past practice shows, these over-represented sessions will have little effectiveness and will lose their ability to pass important social resolutions.

The working experience of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, which began in 2005, demonstrated the positive outcomes of its emergence from the guardianship of the state organ in religious affairs. In the last four years the council displayed significant effectiveness of its work and operatively reacted to the most important social problems that were directly connected to the creation of its working organ – the Secretariat. Throughout 2009 it held five sessions of the Council of the Secretariat, as well as a series of sessions of working groups, and by the Commission of the AUCCRO, on questions of social service.

On July 13, 2009, a meeting was held of the heads and representatives of the confessions – members of AUCCRO – with Prime Minister of Ukraine Yulia Tymoshenko. This meeting had a practical character and assisted in the solving of important issues in church-state relations. In addition, the meeting set off an impulse to start and deepen the cooperation of the churches and religious organizations with the various central organs of the executive government of Ukraine.

On 19-20 October the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations for the first time in its history held a session outside of Ukraine, which, by the invitation of the deputy head of the council, Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine Yaakov Dov Bleich, was held in Jerusalem (Israel). Despite the new format of the process, the program of the traveling session of the AUCCRO included a significant number of formal events at the highest level.

At the beginning the AUCCRO delegation held a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel Avigdor Lieberman. Afterward a working session was held of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, during which were raised the most important issues in the sphere of raising the morality in society, the harmonization of church-state relations in Ukraine, and the confirmation of an open appeal to the Ukrainian population and organs of government about security of travel. In addition, the spiritual leaders of Ukraine took part in a luncheon with the Religious Services Minister of Israel, Ya'akov Margi, where they had the chance to share their experience in inter-confessional cooperation. The members of the delegation of the AUCCRO also took an excursion to Bethlehem, participated in a festive evening with the participation of VIP guests, and completed a joint pilgrimage to prominent Jerusalem sanctuaries.

According to the policy of the All-Ukrainian Council of Church and Religious Organizations, at its sessions the members of the council preside in turn, and at the conclusion of the events in Jerusalem the president of the Union of Judaic Religious Organizations Yaakov Dov Bleich passed the functions of the head of the council to Bishop Markian Trofym'yak, who is responsible for external relations of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine.

On October 28 President Viktor Yushchenko met with representatives of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. President Yushchenko focused his attention on the conduct of the election process in the country and touched upon a series of important questions about the social importance of the activity of religious organizations.

In order to characterize the results of the cooperation of churches and religious organizations within the format of the AUCCRO throughout 2009, during this period the council

worked on its own positions for the text of the Constitution of Ukraine in the context of civil discussion on this question. It published a series of joint appeals to the Ukrainian citizenry – regarding the traffic safety (“Eight Rules of a Driver”) and the recent Appeal to the Ukrainian people on the occasion of the presidential elections.

One of the main results of the work of the AUCCRO consists of the presence of a constant and constructive dialogue between the confessions, which allows the council as a whole to come forward with one united voice and with a common position in church-state relations, which in its turn helps to raise the authority and influence of the inter-confessional institutions in society. In the dialogue with the bodies of the state government the AUCCRO consistently defends its position regarding the approaches to improve the current legislation of Ukraine in the sphere of freedom of conscience and the activity of religious organizations. Also, the heads of the churches and religious organizations are united in questions about protecting and confirming the morality of the society, including, the necessity of protecting children and adolescents from immoral propaganda, irresponsible behavior, and indecency in the mass media, and declaring a negative attitude toward the phenomenon of homosexuality and the attempts to legalize so-called same-sex “marriages.” At the same time the representatives of the confessions – members of AUCCRO – have an understanding to work at the composition of civil councils at the central bodies of executive power, which actively functioned this year at the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Defense.

It is necessary to point to the work of cooperation between the confessions by means of the Commission of the AUCCRO on questions of social service. During the year 2009 the commission held a series of educational seminars and other events directed at strengthening the cooperation between churches and religious organizations, especially at the regional level, in counteracting the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In particular, in this regard five inter-confessional regional meetings were held – in Donetsk, Sevastopol, Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk, and Odesa, and by the end of 2009 two more meetings are planned in Poltava and Kharkiv. The commission continues to foster its Conception and Strategy statement, for the participation of the churches and religious organizations of Ukraine in the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which was approved at the session of the AUCCRO on December 2007.

The Council of Representatives of Christian Churches of Ukraine & other Inter-Confessional Institutions

In addition to the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations other consultative-advisory bodies function at the national level, which at various levels promote inter-confessional dialogue. Among them are the Council of Representatives of Christian Churches of Ukraine (Council of Churches), the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches of Ukraine (CEPCU), the Ukrainian Inter-Church Council (UIC), the All-Ukrainian Council of Christian Churches (AUCCC), and the Council of Representatives of Spiritual Directorates and Centers of Muslims of Ukraine of the State Committee on Nationalities and Religions.

The Council of Representatives of Christian Churches of Ukraine in 2009 was a co-organizer of the round table on the theme “Ukraine between Chaos and Dictatorship: Does a Christian answer exist?” which took place on March 16 in the Ukrainian House in Kyiv. Also, the hierarchs which compose the Council of Churches, on October 14 issued a joint appeal to the Supreme Council of Ukraine regarding the situation of Ukrainian labor migrants. The appeal addressed also all the members of the parliamentary hearings on the theme “Ukrainianness Abroad: the contemporary condition and perspectives for cooperation,” which was conducted by

the Committee on Human Rights, National Minorities, and International Relations.

In the Council of Churches, similar to that of the AUCCRO, there is established a rotating order chairmanship by each of the members of this interdenominational institution. Today, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate heads the Council of Churches.

Leaders of the Spiritual Directorate of Crimean Muslims, the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Ukraine "Umma," and the Religious Directorate of Independent Muslim Communities of Ukraine "Kyivan Mufti" joined the council of representatives of the Spiritual Directorates and Centers of Muslims of Ukraine, which on April 15, 2009, was established as part of the State Committee on Nationalities and Religions. It is important to note that the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Ukraine and the Spiritual Center of Muslims of Ukraine is not part of this council, but they together with the Spiritual Directorate of Crimean Muslims belong to the AUCCRO.

In line with the position of the Council of Muslims, the head is chosen by the members of the council for one year. Representatives of the one Spiritual Directorate or Center cannot lead the council for two years after completing a term of authority in the council. The main form of work of the Council of Muslims is the sessions which take place when there is the need, but no less than once a quarter. For the organizational guarantee of its work the council can create a working body – the Secretariat.

This year the Council of Spiritual Directorates and Centers of Muslims of Ukraine was entrusted with preparation for the Hajj – the pilgrimage to the most sacred site in Islam, the Kaaba, in the city Mecca – which foresaw the coordination of Ukrainian quotas with the Ministry of Affairs of the Hajj of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to organize the Hajj of Muslims from Ukraine.

The activity of other inter-confessional bodies in 2009 was not very significant. On the one hand, the majority of members of the Council of Churches and the CEPCU belong to the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organization, and thus meet the needs of the inter-confessional dialogue. On the other hand, the UIC and the AUCCC usually include representatives of Protestant unions, mostly of the Pentecostal Charismatic Movement, which makes the activity of these bodies limited in confession, but is also needed for the review of the importance of the inter-church dialogue.

The Activity of Civil Councils and Commissions of the Central Bodies of the Executive Government

It is worth mentioning that throughout 2009 cooperation of the churches and religious organizations continued by means of consultative-advisory bodies of the ministries and departments.

The Civil Council of the Ministry of Education on questions of cooperation with the churches and religious organizations sufficiently actively continued its work, which was directed by its head, the national deputy of Ukraine Volodymyr Marushchenko (Christian Democratic Union). This year the Civil Council led a few thematic sessions – in April, June, and October where a series of practical resolutions were passed, which attests to the systematic approach and purposefulness in their work. In addition to scholars, experts, political activists, and authorized members of the Ministry of Education, the Civil Council includes representatives of various confessions, delegated interested members of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations.

On April 29 a constituent session of the council of affairs of pastoral guardianship of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine took place. It was created with the purpose of mending the close cooperation of the ministry with the Ukrainian churches and religious organizations to meet the

needs of military workers and the spiritual, moral-aesthetic, military-patriotic education of the personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The council of affairs of pastoral guardianship of the Ministry of Defense in June, September, and November of this year held working sessions, and by the end of the year planned to develop a new important document – the Conception of Pastoral Guardianship for Military Personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The composition of the council was expanded by representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine, and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, the Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine, and the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Ukraine.

This year the Civil Council of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine on the question of cooperation with the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations also began its work. On June 4 in the session hall, the board of the Ministry of Health, with the participation of the Ministry of Defense Vasyl Knyazevych, conducted its constituent session, during which the leadership of the Civil Council was elected and a plan of action for 2009 was established. At the working session in September, representatives of the confessions and of the medical communities examined the ways of perfecting the process of vaccination in Ukraine, discussed the project of the Ethical Codex of Doctors, and addresses questions of constricting the practice of abortions.

On September 24 took place the first session of the Commission on Guaranteeing the Realizations of rights of religious organizations of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, which was created as a regularly acting consultative-advisory body in June 2009 – after the first meeting of Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko with members of the AUCCRO. To the composition of the Commission, which is led by Vice Prime Minister Ivan Vasiunyk, was added the head of the State Committee on Nationalities and Religions, deputies of many ministries, and representatives of departments, and also authorized representatives of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations – from Christian churches (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant), Judaic, and Muslim religious societies.

In October of this year, as part of carrying out the points of the Memorandum about the Cooperation between the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations with the National Experts Commission of Ukraine, on questions of protecting social morality, an Educational-Consultative Council on questions of religions and nationalities was created to work on the problematic questions regarding the necessity to analyze publications and other materials on the subject of sparking religious or national animosity, offenses to the religious sentiments of faithful, and so on. Interested representatives of churches and religious organizations are invited to take part in this council of the commission.

Significant Events at the Central and Regional Levels in 2009

Inter-Orthodox Relations

Already at the beginning of 2009, the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyivan Patriarchate (UOC-KP), Patriarch Filaret (Denysenko), declared that in Ukraine tendencies are strengthening which attest to the fact that Ukrainian society wants to have its own independent autocephalous church. In this context he mentioned positive steps that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) is taking, and the position of its bishops on the eve of the National Sobor of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Patriarch Filaret added that the distancing of the UOC-MP from Moscow will assist as fast as possible the unification of the Orthodox Churches of Ukraine into one national church.

On July 28, on the second working day of the National Sobor of the ROC, its delegates passed a working statute for the ROC, in which was included the definition of the status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as a self-governing church with rights of wide autonomy, which eliminates the UOC from the list of other self-governing churches in the composition of the Moscow Patriarchate, which do not have broad rights. During the press conference in Ukraine the head of the UOC-MP, Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan), answering a journalist's question about the possibility of renewing the patriarchal throne in Kyiv, did not deny the possibility. However, he noted that this has to come in due time, thus in his opinion, the ordinary faithful are today worried and do not entirely positively accept changes in church administration.

According to the results of the Ukrainian Democratic Circle's Ukrainian public opinion poll, which was taken between January 30 and February 5, 2009, which was ordered by the Institute of Politics, 39% of those questioned believe that in Ukraine there should exist a single national Orthodox church subordinated to the Kyivan Patriarchate, and 24% feel that the UOC should be part of the Russian Orthodox Church, bound with the Moscow Patriarchate. More than one third of the respondents (35%) were unsure of their position toward this question.

On March 12 according to the resolution of the Synod of the UOC-KP, 33 parishes of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) in the Ternopil Oblast were accepted into the composition of the UOC-KP. For the organization of the further status of these parishes the synod passed a resolution about the creation of a separate Ternopil-Terebovlyanskyj Eparchy of the UOC-KP. Herewith, in the Kyiv Patriarchate it was declared that this process will happen entirely voluntarily and by the initiative of the parishes, and the UOC-KP in its turn is further ready for the unification process and corresponding negotiations at the level of the episcopate of the UAOC.

On March 25 the Synod of the UOC-MP at its session passed a resolution about the official invitation of the head of the ROC Patriarch Kirill to realize his pastoral visit to Ukraine. Along with this the members of the synod expressed their expectation that "this visit will help strengthen church unity and the overcoming of the church divisions in Ukraine."

At the same time, no matter how the observers, who talk about the political implications of separate declarations, view the visit of the newly-elected head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch of Moscow Kirill, in Ukraine, which took place from July 27 to August 5, 2009, there is already an evident influence of this event on the animation of the inter-Orthodox dialogue in Ukraine. The motives of animating this dialogue can be various, but the results of the visit of Patriarch Kirill became a strengthening among Orthodox Churches of Ukraine of the feeling of the need to hear one another and search for a way to understanding.

On August 26 the Hierarchal Sobor of the UAOC at its session examined the church-confessional situation in Ukraine, which unfolded after the visit of Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine. As a result of the discussion the hierarchs of the UOAC accepted the appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in which they asked for his blessing for the entrance of the UAOC under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with rights of autonomy. This step of the episcopate of the UAOC was characterized in the appeal as "medicine that can heal the wounds on the body of the Ukrainian Church."

Notably, shortly after, on September 9 at the session of the Synod of the UOC-MP its members passed a resolution about renewing the activity of the Synodal Commission of the UOC-MP in the dialogue with the UAOC, and also to create a working group responsible for the preparation of a dialogue with representatives of the UOC-KP. From its side, the Kyiv Patriarchate positively evaluated the indicated resolution and declared its intention to form an analogical working group.

It is necessary to note that UOC-MP has led a dialogue with the UAOC since 1995; however, with the UOC-KP there was not a single conversation, at least on the official level. Therefore, the resolution attests to a new stage in inter-Orthodox relations in Ukraine, which does not promise to be simple; however, hope is established for a gradual nearing toward understanding.

On October 2 in the St. Dormition of the Kyiv Cave Monastery was the first meeting of the working group of the UOC-MP for the preparation of a dialogue with representatives of the UOC-KP with their working group. In comments to the press the leaders of both groups noted that overall they are satisfied with the results of the meeting. According to them, the meeting gives grounds to expect a positive conclusion of the work and that the future dialogue will help overcome the church division in Ukraine. Commenting on the results of the first meeting, the representatives of the UOC-MP and the UOC-KP agreed that the overcoming of the church division in Ukraine is extremely important, so far as the division “brings the least amount of harm to the Orthodox mission in contemporary Ukraine and helps to spread among the population new religious movements of destructive character,” herewith “in the society spiritual secularism and consumerism is spreading more and more.” Both sides feel the church division is one of the reasons for societal resistance, and thus they want to focus on overcoming the division.

Returning to the letter of the Hierarchal Sobor of the UAOC to Patriarch Bartholomew, the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate reviewed this appeal during its session which took place on September 28-30 in Constantinople (Istanbul). As a result, for the detailed study of the situation in Ukraine a special commission of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was dispatched. The delegation from Constantinople, led by Metropolitan Emmanuel, visited Kyiv October 4-5, where it met with the head of the UAOC Metropolitan Mefodiy, the head of the UOC-MP Metropolitan Volodymyr, and the head the UOC-KP Patriarch Filaret, and also the President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko.

It is notable that the delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate positively evaluated the meeting with the working groups of the UOC-MP and the UOC-KP, which took place on the eve of its visit to Kyiv. The members of the delegation also stated that the goal of their visit to Ukraine was to assist in overcoming of the division. However, it was stressed that the Ecumenical Patriarchate is not going to act in this question in a one-sided direction, but only cooperate first of all with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is understood from the view of the natural desire of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to maintaining friendly relations with the Moscow Patriarchate.

The dialogue and the understanding among the Orthodox Churches of Ukraine is also urgent because it will help overcome the local conflicts among the citizens of various Orthodox jurisdictions, which from time to time arise, mostly from property arguments: in particular, in 2009 in the Sumy region, in the Rivne region, in the village Zhuklyia in Chernihiv region, and surrounding the St. Michael Church in Kyiv.

Inter-Confessional Events at the Central and Regional levels

In the region of Donetsk on January 8, 2009, by the initiative of the Senior Bishop of the Ukrainian Christian Evangelical Church (UCEC) Leonid Padun, took place an inter-confessional meeting of pastors and leaders of churches of the city of Donetsk and the oblast. During the meeting and festive Christmas lunch, the pastors conversed in an unconstrained and friendly atmosphere and discussed themes which today worry Ukrainian Christians. This dialogue was continued during a special gathering on the theme “The Role of the Church in the Development of Society and the State” as part of the annual all-Ukrainian conference of the UCEC, which took

place in the Donetsk Stadium Friendship from September 24 to 27. The heads and hierarchs of the churches of the Donetsk region discussed the question of the development of spirituality in Ukraine, the unity among Christians, and cooperation in serving the Ukrainian people.

On March 16 in the Ukrainian House in Kyiv took place a round table on the theme "Ukraine between Chaos and Dictatorship: Does a Christian answer exist?" The organizers of the event were the Commission of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in affairs of the laity and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the co-organizer was the Council of Representatives of Christian Churches of Ukraine. The discussion in the format of a "round table" united the heads and representatives of Ukrainian churches, civil activists, parliamentarians, and scholars around vital questions regarding today's conditions and perspectives of development of the social-political situation in Ukraine.

From September 23 to 25 in Odesa was held an international conference "The Churches in Ukraine during Contemporary Social Crises," which was organized by the international working group "Reconciliation" as part of the project "Reconciliation in Europe – the task of the Churches in Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, and Germany." During the conference there was a plenary session and discussion in the format of a "round table," in which took part representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Germany, Ukraine, Belarus), the Polish, Ukrainian, and Belarusian Orthodox Churches, and Roman Catholic Church (Ukraine, Poland, and Belarus), and the Ukrainian and Belarusian Greek Catholic Churches.

On October 18 in the stadium Ukraine in Kyiv, by the initiative of the bishop of the Evangelical Christian Church of Ukraine Mykhailo Panochka, took place an all-Ukrainian thanksgiving in honor of the Lord, which united representatives of many Ukrainian churches. Close to 4,000 faithful from all regions of Ukraine took part in the celebration, along with the president of the All-Ukrainian Union of Societies of Evangelist Christians Baptists V'yacheslav Nesteruk, Senior Bishop of the UCEC Leonid Padun, senior presbyter of the Evangelical Christian Union of Free Churches Vasyl Raichynets, Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine Markian Trofym'yak, the head of the administration of the Patriarchal Curia of the UGCC Bishop Bohdan Dziurakh, the president of the Ukrainian Bible Society Hryhorij Komendant, and others.

Also, in almost all the oblasts of Ukraine there continues to be development in inter-confessional dialogue in the form of independent institutions, and on the "grounds" of regional councils of churches and religious organizations of the oblast state administrations. A majority of the latter were created by the fulfillment of the order of the president of Ukraine from July 8, 2005. Herewith, only in a few regions of Ukraine (Dnipropetrovsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kirovohrad, and Kyiv oblasts, and the city of Sevastopol) are these regional councils of churches and religious organizations absent, and in a few oblasts they were created only formally, which in its turn does not assist the harmonization of inter-confessional relations on these territories.

Noticeable is the activity of the Volyn Council of Churches, the Spiritual Council of Christians of the Odessa Oblast, and the Association of Christian Churches of the Kherson Oblast. Earlier only the activity of the Inter-Confessional Council of Crimea "Peace is a Gift of God" was evident.

Overall, all the regional councils of churches and religious organizations in a small or large measure help refurbish inter-confessional relations and create a dialogue at the local level. However, in the opinion of observers, most of their activity is only just starting and still has not reached its full potential to have a real and positive influence on the inter-confessional situation and to solve urgent problems in the regions.