

Church, State, Society, and Religious Freedom: The Case of a Nation at War

By Dr. Viktor Ielensky
Parliamentary Member of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine
President of the Ukrainian Association for Religious Liberty

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1. Russia's aggression against Ukraine, its annexation of Crimea, and its war in Donbas, along with Russian citizens' efforts to establish quasi-states in this region, have radically changed security in Ukraine. According to the United Nations, as of June 2017, 10,090 people had been killed and 23,966 had been injured in the ongoing violence in eastern Ukraine. Nearly 2 million people have been forced to leave their homes, more than 1.1 million have been internally displaced, and more than 760,000 people have fled to other countries.
2. Russian leaders, state-controlled media outlets, and the Moscow Patriarchy place great importance on the authority of Russian Orthodoxy in their hybrid war against Ukraine. Patriarchal speakers have become mouthpieces for the anti-Ukraine campaign, and they have even tried to sanctify Russia's actions in the nation. They have also lashed out against the pro-European Union movement in Ukraine, and are calling for action that will keep this country within the so-called "Russian world".
3. Russia's annexation of Crimea led to the harsh religious persecution of Protestant pastors, Islamic activists, and priests from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate. In addition, the "Yarovaya package" was implemented in Crimea, which essentially banned all missionary activity, except for the efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.
4. Religious persecution in the occupied territories of Donbas is even harsher than in Crimea. Asserting that Russian Orthodoxy is irreconcilable with all other religions, pro-Russian separatists are kidnapping non-Orthodox pastors throughout the region. Many of these pastors are beaten, and some have even been murdered. On June 8, 2014, after the festive Trinity Sunday service at Transfiguration Church in Slovyansk, pro-Russian gunmen detained four of the church members. These men were brutally beaten and killed. Their bodies were later found in a mass grave after the pro-Russian separatists were driven out by the Ukrainian army. Additionally, dozens of Baptist, Pentecostal, Adventist, Jehovah's Witness, and Mormon churches, along with many school buildings, have been confiscated by pro-Russian separatists.
5. In the midst of this turmoil, the Ukrainian government has made many positive changes, including legal amendments that have substantially improved religious freedom. Parliament passed a Law on Prison Chaplaincy, issued a Government

Decree on Military Chaplaincy, and recognized theology as an educational discipline. The amendments made to the nation's education law allow churches and religious organizations to establish public schools and universities, and special tax exemptions for religious organizations allow them to save money on electricity and gas. It should also be noted that the Ukrainian government allows people to conscientiously object to serving in the army based on their religious beliefs, and provides alternative ways that civilians can serve their country.

6. Terrorists and invaders do not respect the resolutions of roundtable discussions, the prayers of monks, or pictures of children who dream of peace for their country. They only respect cruelty, tanks, and guns. But just as my generation saw the fall of the Berlin Wall, so every other great empire must collapse. That is why I do believe in the success of our roundtable discussion. I believe in peace on earth and this biblical prophecy: "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore," Isaiah 2:4, ESV.