

# CONFLICT AND RELIGION: THE CASE OF UKRAINE

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## Religions in Ukraine: A Brief Overview<sup>1</sup>

Ukraine is not only a multi-ethnic, but also a multi-religious country. More than 97% of the religious communities now registered in Ukraine are Christian. Dominant Orthodox Christians constitute about half of these communities; the other half is divided among Catholics and Protestants.

Orthodoxy in Ukraine is represented by three leading churches and several smaller confessions, including Old Believers and the Russian True Orthodox Church (RTOC). The three main Orthodox Churches of Ukraine are:

- Ukrainian Orthodox Church under jurisdiction of Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP)

<sup>1</sup> Or more information, see the main informational portal on religious life of Ukraine <http://RESU.org.ua>

- Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyivan Patriarchate (UOC-KP)
- Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC)

Major Catholic churches in Ukraine are represented by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), Roman Catholic Church (RCC), and Armenian Catholic Church.

Ukraine is home to quite a few Jewish and Muslim communities, also Buddhists, Jehova's Witnesses, and Neo-pagans; a number of non-traditional and new religious movements are also present, and some of them are growing dynamically.

The very diversity and complexity of religious life in Ukraine often leads to rather complicated inter-church and inter-confessional relations. This sometimes manifests itself through rivalries between different denominations, major and smaller churches, and well-established and new movements and organizations - not to mention internal disagreements. Regrettably, despite the fact that the Constitution of Ukraine clearly declares that Ukraine is a secular country with separated state and religious institutions, in reality interactions between state and different churches and denominations sometimes seem far removed from this ideal, demonstrating once again the involvement of central and local authorities in religious life in an attempt to influence it for their own political purposes and benefit.

## Legislation

The main legislative bill, regulating religious affairs and State - Church relations, "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations", still in force, was adopted in April 1991, i.e., a few months before Ukraine's independence.<sup>2</sup> The last substantial changes to it were made in December 1993, with some later insignificant modifications.

By the time of its adoption, this Law was rather advanced and providing a wide spectrum of liberties, sharply contrasting with the actual

situation with religious freedom in the still existing Soviet Union. It guaranteed each Ukrainian citizen the right to freedom of conscience, including freedom to profess, take and change religion or beliefs on one's own choice and freedom to profess any religion alone or together with others or not to profess any, to perform religious rites, to express openly and distribute freely his/her religious or atheistic beliefs. Nobody shall be forced in determination of his/her attitude to religion, profess or refusal to profess religion, in participation or non-participation in divine service, devotions and religious ceremonies, teaching religion.

Any discrimination of persons and limitation of citizens' rights and freedoms depending on their attitude to religion shall be prohibited. All religions, creeds and religious organizations shall be equal before law. Establishment of any privileges or limitations of one religion over the other shall be prohibited. According to the Law, church in Ukraine shall be separated from state, whereas the educational system shall be separated from church and have a secular character.

Subsequent attempts to introduce changes to the Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" began in 2006 due to the Presidential Decree № 39/2006 from January 20, 2006, "On the Action Plan for fulfilling the obligations and commitments of Ukraine arising from membership in the Council of Europe." The decree was prompted by Resolution of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) № 1466 (2005) "On the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Ukraine", which was passed following the Report of the Monitoring Committee.<sup>3</sup>

According to the presidential decree, the Ministry of Justice was ordered to develop and submit to the government a new edition of the Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations." The working group of the Ministry of Justice, which included

<sup>3</sup> See: Council of Europe's requirements for Ukraine's law on religious freedom: between truth and fiction by Oleksandr ZAIETS, 31 May 2011, [http://www.irs.in.ua/eng/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=245:1&catid=36:com&Itemid=55](http://www.irs.in.ua/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=245:1&catid=36:com&Itemid=55)

<sup>2</sup>Law of Ukraine of 23.04.1991 № 987-XII "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations in Ukraine" (entered into force on June 18, 1991).

representatives of the denominations, the public, and academics, prepared a new draft, which received a positive evaluation from experts of the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR. In November 2006 the draft was reviewed at a session of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. As a result of the discussion, the AUCCRO sent an address to President Viktor Yushchenko, asking to continue consultations on the revision of the concept on church-state relations and the new version of the Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” in order to reach a consensus.

In 2008-2010 work on the new draft Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” was carried out by the State Committee on Nationalities and Religions. But the draft was not submitted to the government to be reviewed by the parliament because the AUCCRO and a number of other religious organisations and associations expressed objections to the draft.<sup>4</sup>

After Victor Yanukovich became the next President of Ukraine as a result of presidential elections-2010, the general situation with human rights and freedoms, including freedom of conscience, deteriorated. After Victor Yanucovich, newly elected President of Ukraine, issued on December 12 the Decree No. 1085/2010 “On the Optimization of the System of Central Executive Agencies”, the central governmental body responsible for regulating many aspects of religious life, was liquidated, and its functions were divided between the reorganized Ministry of Culture of Ukraine and the newly created State Registration Service of Ukraine.

According to the President’s Decree, only one of these functions will be carried out by the State Registration Service which will be responsible for registering not only religious, but also civic and charitable organizations, while all others will fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture. This false step obviously violated legislation in force, because Article 30 of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations stipulates the functioning of a State body on religious affairs responsible for many important tasks, including

promotion of mutual understanding and tolerance between different faiths and denominations;

## Muslims<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to most Western European countries where Muslim communities are constituted by a few generations of immigrants, Ukraine belongs to those European countries which have their own native Muslim population. Although Islam in Ukraine has more than a thousand years of history, this religion was repressed by Soviet regime and almost extinguished; religious and cultural revival of Islam believers has become possible after Ukraine gained independence in 1991.

Some Muslim leaders of Ukraine declare that there are two million Muslims in the country; however, estimates by the government and independent researchers provide the number at approximately 500,000, thus constituting about 1.1 percent of the total population. The majority of Ukrainian Muslims are Crimean Tatars numbering over 250,000, whose return to their homeland after forceful mass deportation of 1944 started only in late 80s.

Islam is far from monolithic in Ukraine. Currently, there are five Islamic religious “umbrellas” indicating the disunity among the mainstream Muslims: the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Ukraine (DUMU), the Spiritual Administration of Crimean Muslims (DUMK), the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine “Ummah” (DUMU-Ummah), the Religious Directorate of Independent Muslim Communities of Ukraine “Kyivan Muftiyat,” and the Donetsk-based Spiritual Centre of the Muslim Communities.<sup>6</sup> The Interregional Association of Public Organizations, Ar-Raid, could also be mentioned. It is a confederation of 11 organizations from various regions of Ukraine.

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see Islam in Ukraine, <http://islam.in.ua>

<sup>6</sup> RESURGENCE OF FUNDAMENTALIST AND RADICAL ISLAMIC IDENTITIES IN CRIMEA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL SECURITY IN POST-SOVIET UKRAINE by Idil P. Izmirli. SCHOLAR RESEARCH BRIEF, George Mason University, August 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The three major and most influential of them are:

DUMK, established in 1991, comprises approximately 70% of all government-registered Muslim communities in Ukraine. Being the spiritual centre of the Crimean Tatar people, it is working in close cooperation with the Crimean Tatars' self-governmental bodies - central and local Mejlises. The DUMK runs its own spiritual school, publishes its own literature and a newspaper "Hidiaet,"

DUMU, established in 1992 in Kyiv, seeks to unite Muslims of different nationalities, regardless of their cultural differences. It has representative offices in 10 regions and has the second-largest number of Muslim communities in Ukraine. It runs the Islamic Institute in Kyiv and publishes a Russian-language newspaper "Minaret."

The Donetsk-based Spiritual Centre of the Muslim Communities of Ukraine was registered in 1994. It is comprised of Muslim communities of predominantly Tatar nationality and is thus known as a national-religious organization operating in 12 regions. In 1997 the centre founded the Party of Muslims of Ukraine.<sup>7</sup>

DUMU-"Ummah" was officially registered in September 2008. According to Mufti Said Ismagilov, the need for establishing this new association was rooted in "a kind of depression in religious life [of Muslims] of the country", and since Ukrainian Muslim community is still young, "stagnation may affect it adversely". There are 10 communities from different regions of Ukraine connected by the joint activities; this new religious administration works in cooperation with Ar-Raid Association.<sup>8</sup>

There were several attempts to unite Muslim organizations and their associations, or at least closely coordinate their activities. One example is the Council of Representatives of Spiritual Directorates and Centres of Muslims of Ukraine that was formed, at the initiative of the State Committee on Nationalities and Religions, on April 15, 2009. All spiritual managements operating in Ukraine were

invited to the meeting; however, only three of the five main Muslim associations - namely, DUMK, Spiritual Administration of the Kyivan Muftiat and the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims "Ummah" - arrived, whereas DUMU and the Spiritual Centre of Muslims of Ukraine (Donetsk) did not. After discussing the draft agreement, three spiritual managements signed the document confirming the creation of the Council which becomes the advisory-representative body of Muslims of Ukraine affiliated with the State Committee of Ukraine on Affairs of Nationalities and Religions. Into the structure of the new Association entered not only Muftis, but also two representatives from each spiritual management - three persons from each association, in total. For this reason, the association which originally had to be called the Council of Muftis of Ukraine was named the Council of Representatives of Spiritual Managements and Spiritual Centres of Muslims of Ukraine.

## Religious Knot in Crimea

In Crimea, the number of registered religious organisations after Ukraine's independence has been rapidly growing, increasing forty-fold and being thus far ahead of any other region. The most dynamically developing religion in Crimea is Islam.

It should be noted that among all of the contested issues in religious life of Ukraine, the most difficult, diverse and controversial processes are taking place in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. This particular region differs from the rest of Ukraine by several characteristics:

- Ethnic Russians constitute the majority of local population;
- Russia continues to see Crimea as an inalienable part of the "Russian world", an important element of which is Russian Orthodoxy;
- Because of this, religious life of Crimea is dominated by the UOC-MP, whereas all other confessions and denominations face sometimes insurmountable difficulties and obstacles for their activities;

<sup>7</sup> [http://old.risu.org.ua/eng/major\\_religions/muslims/](http://old.risu.org.ua/eng/major_religions/muslims/)

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Mufti of the Religious Administration of the Moslems of Ukraine Ummah Said Ismagilov [http://islam.in.ua/5/eng/full\\_articles/3038/visibletype/1/index.html](http://islam.in.ua/5/eng/full_articles/3038/visibletype/1/index.html), QHA, 10.06.09.

- Crimean Tatar repatriates, now amounting to 13% of local population, are indigenous people and traditionally, Muslim believers;
- Along with the traditional Crimean Islam which is an essential element of the Crimean Tatar identity, a number of different Islamic groups and communities were formed mostly by missionaries penetrating the peninsula from Arabic countries, Russia, and Turkey. These “autonomous communities” (not subordinated to DUMK), create additional tensions among Crimean Muslims, thus increasing the conflict potential in the ARC.<sup>9</sup>

Initially, the attempts to restore the attributes of Islam in Crimea, almost completely eradicated after forceful deportation of 1944, evoked a kind of a “cultural shock” among the predominantly Slavic population identifying themselves with Russian Orthodoxy. In the beginning of 90s, many regional authorities, media representatives and ordinary people asserted that for them, the very prospect of having mosques and hearing muezzin’s voice in their native localities seemed absolutely unacceptable. However, a number of emerging conflict situations were settled by peaceful means, and step by step, the environment has become less hostile towards the Muslim believers.

Nevertheless, multiple acts of vandalism, targeting Muslim cemeteries, and other potentially dangerous conflict situations continued.<sup>10</sup> In 2011, non-traditional Crimean Muslims claims to be

discriminated against because of the prohibition for their women to take photos for passports, driver’s licenses and other documents while wearing hijab, added to the existing tensions. (The hijab is the traditional Muslim women’s headdress covering the ears, neck and part of the face).<sup>11</sup>

Potential of the interfaith conflict sharply aggravated in early 2000s after Archbishop Lazar of the Crimea and Simferopol ruling to erect 1,000 worshipping crosses in the Crimea to commemorate the 2,000th Anniversary of the Birth of Jesus Christ and the millennium of the baptism of Kyivan Rus’. Crimea was proclaimed a “cradle of Christianity”; responding to these developments, the Crimean Mufti declared that such unilateral attitude toward the peninsula’s religious history was offensive to local Muslims. In a gesture of protest, he withdrew from the Interfaith Council, set up in middle 90s.<sup>12</sup>

One of the most acute conflicts triggered by the erection of such crosses took place near Morskoye, a village located in the vicinity of Sudak, a city on the eastern coast of Crimea. On October 25, 2000, a group of Crimean Tatars (who claimed that this place accommodated an ancient Muslim cemetery) destroyed the cross. This met a sharp response from the local Christian community; a crowd numbering 400 gathered and situation moved close to fist fighting. Intervention of village authorities helped to prevent further escalation; they convinced the disputing parties to conduct negotiations, for which ten delegates from each side was appointed.

After intensive and heated discussion within the promptly established Reconciliation Commission, also as a result of confidential negotiations between Metropolitan Lazar and Mufti of Crimean Muslims hadji Emirali Ablayev, a

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed analysis of the four main Islamic branches in Crimea, see “Four Lions in Crimea’s Savanna” by Ali Tatar-zade, 7 July 2011, Crimean Politics and Security Bulletin, available at <http://maidan.org.ua/2011/07/islamski-levy-u-krymskij-savanni/> (in Ukrainian). See also: Mejlis and its opponents have different views concerning hijab (in Russian). By Vlad Smirnov, 1-ya Krymskaya, N 328, 11 - 17 June 2010, <http://1k.com.ua/328/details/6/3>, and Islam, Orthodoxy, and the State in Crimea. October 09, 2007, [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=events.print&event\\_id=279606&stoplayout=true](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=events.print&event_id=279606&stoplayout=true).

<sup>10</sup> Muslim cemeteries in Crimea attacked. By Arzy Emirova in Simferopol, Crimea, Ukraine and Ahmed J Versi in London, 30 May 2008 <http://www.muslimnews.co.uk/paper/index.php?article=3504>; Hundreds of Muslim gravestones defaced in Ukraine’s Crimea region. “Earthtimes,” February 11, 2008, at <http://wwwrn.org/articles/27736/?&place=belarus-ukraine&section=islam>; and Crimea: Balancing between crisis and conflict. By Patrick Greenberg, 21 July 2008, at [Crimea: Balancing between crisis and conflict - New Europe](http://www.neurope.eu/articles/88895.php#ixzz1NqoobEg4) <http://www.neurope.eu/articles/88895.php#ixzz1NqoobEg4>.

<sup>11</sup> Crimean authorities prohibit hijab for driver’s license photos. 8 September 2011, [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/other\\_confessions/islam/44260/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/other_confessions/islam/44260/).

<sup>12</sup> Crimea faced with imminent threat of religious conflict By Mykyta KASIANENKO, Simferopol “Den”, №31, 7 November 2000, <http://www.day.kiev.ua/290619?idsource=266643&mainlang=eng>.

compromise solution was eventually found, and it was decided that the cross will be built in another, neutral place instead of the contested one.

The most recent example of this “war of religious symbols” occurred in 2011 near the city of Feodosia. The story has begun on 4 May, when a group of Cossacks erected the worship cross without permission of either local authorities or Crimean Council of Ministers, or blessing from Metropolitan Lazar (UOC-MP). This action was declared by Cossacks as not only establishing one more Orthodox symbol but being also dedicated to 9 May (the day of victory in WWII) celebrations. It actually violated the agreement reached earlier between Metropolitan Lazar and Mufti Emirali Ablayev, and thus ensued discontent of local Muslim community that addressed the Major of Feodosia with a letter of protest. Negotiations between Cossacks, local authorities and municipal Interfaith Council lasted the whole day of May 5, but turned unsuccessful - the Cossacks refused to dismantle the cross, even temporarily, or shift it to another place until the necessary documentation would be obtained.

These events were widely covered by Crimean, all-national and Russian printed and electronic media. Although the whole spectrum of opinions and assessments can be easily identified,<sup>13</sup> the majority of both Crimean and Ukrainian experts considered the story as a conscious provocation, having a clear-cut political colouring and directed not so much against local Muslims but, rather, against “new” Crimean power-holders (the so-called “Djarty’s team” that arrived after presidential elections-2010 to replace local establishment). Indeed, a number of Crimean political analysts accused authorities of persecuting and discriminating against Crimean ethnic Russians and Orthodox faithful people, giving in under the pressure from the Mejlis of Crimean

Tatar people.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, it is interesting to note that the leadership of the “Russkoye Yedinstvo” (Russian Unity) political party - the only pro-Russian political force represented in the regional parliament - officially condemned the actions undertaken by the Cossacks and those party members who took part in the events.<sup>15</sup>

Not to go further to the exhaustive chronicle of conflict-generating events and situations, it should be noted that throughout 2000s, interfaith tensions and conflicts of different degree of scope and danger continued in Crimea. Of them, the most acute one, that in Bakhchesaray of summer 2006, is usually mentioned. An important historic Crimean Tatar cemetery and a pilgrimage site there were used by local Slavs for commercial market on top of the holy site; this becomes a source of a prolonged conflict between Crimean Tatars and ethnic Russians. The climax occurred when a group of Russian ultra-nationalists and so-called “new Cossaks” arrived armed with self-made weaponry to disperse a group of Crimean Tatars. When local administration and a security officer attempted to mediate, the response was: “We came to fight.” The Mejlis together with security forces and armoured cars sent by Kyiv managed to stop violence; eventual solution was found later, when it was decided to transfer the market from this place to another.<sup>16</sup>

Several attempts to fuel anti-Islam passions by radical Cossaks organisations occurred also in 2010 and 2011. One of them is worth of special attention, because it clearly shows the extremely negative role that regional, national, and, in the particular case of May 2011 (see below), international media has played in inter-religious conflict escalation.

<sup>13</sup> Hundreds clash in Ukraine over Orthodox cross. 03 July, 2011, <http://rt.com/news/cossacks-cross-ukraine-clash/>; The bloody fighting in the Crimea: Berkut beaten with batons Russian Cossacks, <http://newsforall.org/archives/4443>, see also <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/24255491.html>, <http://crimea24.info/2011/07/04/u-odnogo-iz-iniciatorov-feodosijsk>, <http://www.kianews.com.ua/node/34857>, <http://crimea24.info/2011/07/03/dzharty-obeshhaet-adekvatno-otvetit>, <http://novoross.info/ecskluziv/8441-mitropolit-lazar-krest-svyatyny>, <http://www.nr2.ru/crimea/338007.html>.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, <http://novoross.info/8436-krymskaya-vlast-nachala-voynu-protiv-russkih-politolog.html>, 4.07.2011

<sup>15</sup> See “Russkoye edinstvo” otkrestilos ot svoeyego deputata za podderzhku kazakov Feodosii. (“Russian Unity” dissociate themselves from its deputy for his support of Cossacks of Feodosia). 04.07.11, <http://www.nr2.ru/crimea/338007.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Islamic Organizations and Challenges in Crimea: An Interview with Dr. Alexander Bogomolov. By Laryssa Chomiak and Waleed Ziad, 18 April 2008, <http://www.iccrimea.org/scholarly/bogomolovinterview.html>

On May 18, the body of the 19-year-old girl Katya Koren was found in a forest near the village Sovetskoye. Immediately, Crimean, Russian and some Ukrainian media reported that she was stoned to death according to Sharia law because of her participation in a beauty contest. Law-enforcement officials in Crimea have responded to the reports of Korin's killing by saying the tragedy was a "routine crime" having nothing to do with either stoning, or Sharia law, or any religious motive. Her classmate has been detained and charged with premeditated murder, according to law-enforcement officials quoted by Ukrainian media.

Despite the police statements, those false interpretations were further spreading, attracting also wide international attention after publication of the story in the British Daily Mail.

In Ukraine, some analysts describe it as a campaign to incite religious hatred against Crimean Tatars. A possible role of Russian media allegedly, seeking to manipulate religious sentiments to destabilize Crimea, was actively discussed.

The story then spread to media in Russia and was picked up by international outlets, including "The Daily Mail", thus making it more "credible" "The Daily Mail" did not respond to requests for comment, but on June 2, the original story on its website was replaced, and its name changed to suggest that "a stalker" might be responsible for the killing. But by that time, the story went full-circle, with Russian and Ukrainian news outlets citing "The Daily Mail" initial report. Remarkably, nobody in this chain of misinformation checked the basic facts of the tragedy. It should be noted that local residents, although shocked by this brutal crime, don't link it to religion.

## Intra-Islamic splits and tensions

Recently, increasing attention of politicians, journalists and expert community has been drawn to those "radical" Islam groupings and communities - first and foremost, Hizb-ut-Tahrir and so-called "Wahhabits" - that are not subordinated to DUMK and are often regarded as a serious threat to public order and regional security. In reality, the situation is much more complicated and multifaceted; current

intra-Islam situation and interrelationship between different Islam teachings, groupings and communities was recently presented in many details.

Several studies, using, in particular, "field research" methods were undertaken to get a deeper insight into the conflict potential of different branches of Crimean Islam and in particular, to assess its actual - or perceived - danger to societal security. Of them, publication of the Ukrainian Association of Middle East Studies (AMES) is worth special mentioning. The authors conducted a number of personal interviews with leaders of various ethnic and religious communities in Crimea. Summarizing the findings, they characterise most of inter-religious or even "inter-civilizational" conflicts mostly as a struggle for symbolic (also financial and material) resources, often used for political purposes, and indicate that a common denominator that makes the region so volatile is actually the unsettled dispute over group identities. In order to overcome negative consequences of the existing multiple ethnic and religious societal divisions, the authors recommend that "community leaders and public officials should learn to appreciate the value of cultural diversity and realise that competing groups interests should not necessarily be advanced in the form of a zero sum game".<sup>17</sup>

Taking into consideration that traditional Islam is an important, inalienable element of the Crimean Tatar identity, continued concerns of Crimean Muftiyat (DUMK) and Mejlis over the unity of the Crimean Tatar nation as being endangered by the activities of newly emerged Islamic communities and their leaders, look quite understandable and justified.<sup>18</sup>

After positive decision on giving permission to build the Congregational Mosque at 22

<sup>17</sup> Islam and idewntity Politics in Crimea: from War of Symbols to the Acceptance of Cultural Diversity. By Oleksandr Bogomolov, Serhiy Danylov and Ihor Semivolos. Kyiv, "Stylos" Publishing House, 2009 (in Ukrainian).

<sup>18</sup> See also Reflecting on Destiny of Muslims of Crimea by Seyran ARIFOV, Master of Shariat Sciences. 16.05.2011, available at [http://islam.in.ua/4/eng/full\\_articles/6453/visibletype/1/index.html](http://islam.in.ua/4/eng/full_articles/6453/visibletype/1/index.html)

Yaltinskaya Str. of Simferopol, on 3 March 2011 a solemn ceremony of placing the first stone to its foundation was conducted, bringing together high-rank officials of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Mejlis of Crimean Tatar people, the heads of all major religious confessions, media and representatives of CSOs. Descriptions on that first stone were engraved in three languages - Crimean Tatar, Ukrainian and Russian; capsule containing a Message to Descendants was fixed within.<sup>19</sup> According to eye-witnesses and the participants of the event, this day has become a festive occasion, largely contributing to interethnic and inter-religious peace and accord on the Crimean peninsula.

## Conclusions

Despite numerous conflict-generating factors and general complexity of the religious life in Ukraine, clashes between believers of different religious denominations over church buildings and properties, distinctive in early and middle 90s, with time calmed down and practically disappeared.

Rather liberal legislation of Ukraine allowed for peaceful co-existence of numerous and diverse traditional and non-traditional confessions and faiths; a dialogue between such (often conflicting) religions as Christianity and Islam, Islam and Judaism is established, developing mutual tolerance and understanding and helping to counteract together such negative phenomena as radicalism, extremism and acute forms of xenophobia.

Notwithstanding the rather active position of Ukrainian CSO, supported by international community, manifestations of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia continued and even exhibited certain trends of becoming more pronounced, in particular, on the side of the far-right political parties like "Svoboda". Printed and electronic media in Ukraine, in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, also those coming from Russia, often play quite negative role

by fueling inter-faith conflicts, aggravating the existing tensions and disseminating distorted and biased information.

In Church-State relations, the main problem consists in the insistent attempts to ensure the dominance of only one major confession - Ukrainian Orthodox Church subordinated to Moscow Patriarchy - over all other religions and religious organizations. Such attitudes and unbalanced policies of the incumbent Ukrainian Government are detrimental to interfaith harmony and equality of rights of all believers, proclaimed by the Constitution and specific laws of Ukraine.

Often repeated fears and warnings of the threat of "Islamic radicalism" on the Crimean peninsula are largely exaggerated, are often based on ignorance and widespread negative stereotypes and/or politically motivated.

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<sup>19</sup> 3 May 2011, <http://www.ark.gov.ua/blog/2011/03/03/vasilij-dzharty-prynal-uchastie-v-zakladke-kapsuly-na-meste-stroitelstva-sobornoj-mecheti-v-simferopole/>. See also CRIMEA: QUO VADIS? (Crimea & Security of the Black Sea region) by Natalya Belitser. Crimea Policy Dialogue Project, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, 22 March, 2011, available at <http://www.bigyalta.com.ua/story/30812>.