Paper read by Bishop Joanikije of Budimlja and Niksic (Serbian Orthodox Church) at international academic reflection-action conference on Violations of Rights of Believers in Ukraine

In the actions undertaken by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Ukraine to recognize and merge two groups headed by two schismatics (one of them is anathematized) and to present thus created structure with “autocephaly”, which has not been recognized by any of the other Orthodox Churches, there is nothing that would have been done in accordance with holy canons and the commonly accepted church procedure of granting the status of autocephaly. If, in the very beginning, grave canonical violations were committed (in the first place, an invasion in the canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate and the self-governed Ukrainian Orthodox Church without their consent and a “cancellation” of the 1686 decision of Patriarch Dionysius of Constantinople, by which the Metropolis of Kiev was transferred to the Moscow Patriarchate, and with a stubborn refusal to hold dialogue with the Moscow Patriarchate and other Orthodox Churches who pointed to these violations), then all the consequent actions, too, have proved to be unlawful and uncanonical. The Russian Orthodox Church timely and soundly analyzed Fanar’s actions and evaluated it on the canonical basis, which helped other Orthodox Churches take the right stand on this painful issue.

Without going into more details of the canonical aspect of this issue, we will only point out some of its most important particulars. In this case, the Patriarchate of Constantinople has shown its readiness to interpret centuries-old ecclesiastical provisions in conformity only with its own interests by ignoring the inalienable rights of others and the legal logic on the whole. As for the cancellation of the 1686 decision to transfer the Metropolis of Kiev to the Moscow Patriarchate, we believe that by this logic it can just as well annul other similar documents important to Churches, including tomoses granted in previous centuries to other Local Churches.

The right to accept appeals, which it used in the time of the Byzantine Empire in the area of its jurisdiction, the See of Constantinople now wants to extend to the whole Orthodox universe on the basis of its interpretation of Canons 9 and 17 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council. This interpretation has no grounds in church canon law scholarship, nor is it accepted by the most of other Churches, just as they do not accept the similar interpretation of Canon 28 of the same Council, on the basis of which Constantinople wishes the whole Orthodox diaspora to belong to its jurisdiction.

It is on this and similar interpretations of holy canons that ideologues of Constantinople base the teaching on “the Patriarchate of Constantinople’s primacy of power”. While references to this teaching can be found in the ancient past of the Church of Constantinople, we can see that it began taking momentum rapidly in the beginning of the third decade of the 20th century, from the time of Patriarch Meletius (Metaxakis) up to the present Patriarch Bartholomew.

Proceeding from the primacy in honour of the Patriarchate of Constantinople as to the diptych of the Orthodox Churches, this ideology has gone as much beyond as postulating a thesis that every Orthodox Church attains its canonicity only in communion with the See of Constantinople, that without this Patriarchate there is no Orthodoxy and that the Patriarch of Constantinople is the primate of the entire Orthodoxy, “the first without equals”.

When this new Phanarian ideology on the primacy of the See of Constantinople is pieced together with a new teaching about the special rights of a Mother Church in relation to Daughter Churches that she has begotten, even greater problems are to be expected. Many cases, including the events in Ukraine, show that this Mother wishes not only to preserve her power over the Daughters, but also to seize some of their churches for her own stauropegia, to obtain the whole of their diaspora, to deprive them of the right to prepare myrrh on their own, etc.

Any ideology, especially ecclesiastical, always has vital practical consequences. As logical consequences of the attempt made by Phanar to belittle the doctrine on Christ as the Head of the Church, divine epithets are conferred on the Patriarch of Constantinople, such as “Head of the Orthodox body” without which “all the Local Churches will be like sheep without a shepherd”, “the first without equals”, who is alleged to have the right of the last instance judge over all the Orthodox hierarchs in the universe. Old predecessors of the Ecumenical Patriarch, who would challenge the claims of the Bishop of Rome to power over the whole Church, adhered to the New Testament principle whereby Christ is the Head of the Church and any attempt to appropriate this primacy contradicts His teaching. Since the ideology offered now differs from the Orthodox ecclesiology and doctrine on the conciliarity of the Church, it is not surprising that already today it has caused disorders in Ukraine, and tomorrow we can expect them to happen in many other places.

It is clear from the above that the Patriarchate of Constantinople’s interest was stronger than any canonical reason for making a number of decisions that have culminated in the inadmissible bestowal of autocephaly to the schismatics in Ukraine. The justifications it voiced that this was allegedly made out of maternal concern and love for the excommunicated brothers were actually used merely to cover up the material and other interests of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

However, it is our conviction that the basic cause of this problem lies not in an incorrect application of canons and not even in the interests of the Patriarchate of Constantinople but in the anti-Russian policy pursued by some western countries. Certainly, it is especially difficult for the Church to realize that the Patriarch of Constantinople drives on the wave of this policy, thus, under the pretext of healing, making even deeper the wounds existing in the body of the Ukrainian Church.

Right are the analysists who directly link the violent coup in Maidan – carried out under the guidance of western powers with the all-possible support of schismatic organizations and Uniates – with the recent artificial unification of the schismatics and assignment of autocephalous status to this dubious structure. A political coup proved not sufficient for spoiling the relationships between Ukraine and Russia – what was also needed for doing it was a religious coup that could have possibly involved the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Fortunately, it failed.

In the project for forming “a new Orthodox church in Ukraine”, the former Ukrainian President P. Poroshenko, with a comprehensive support of the West and Patriarch Bartholomew, assumed the deplorable role of a false prophet. He grossly violated the Constitution of his country and, abusing his office, interfered in matters pertaining exclusively to the ecclesiastical sphere. Under him, we could see the emergence of a caricature version of caesaropapism in a pro-European (though only by word) and pro-NATO secular state. Everything that is forbidden and unthinkable in western democracies was approved and supported in Ukraine by the West, first of all, America.

Under that president, the greatest possible injustice was done to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, her Primate, his Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy, her hierarchs, clergy and people of God. To make them follow the momentary political currents and join the above-mentioned project, the use was made of force and coercion, capture of churches, coercive interviews in the Ukrainian Security Service, pressure from media and that sort of thing. Thank God, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was able to oppose the pressure and provocations, firmly upholding the canonical positions, preserving the faith and her shrines, cultivating and strengthening in the hardest of times the unity of her people, who have been entrusted to her by God. She has ascended her own Golgotha remembering the Cross of Christ and His Resurrection. Unfortunately she also had several of her own Judases in the persons of two betrayer-hierarchs and a small number of clergy. But however painful and sad it may be, the Church has not been weakened by this betrayal – she has simply purified herself.

In analyzing the church problem in Ukraine, special attention should be given to ethnophyletism. Generally speaking, this phenomenon is characterized by hate and intolerance towards other ethnicities. On the other hand, all ethnophiles fanatically stress their peculiarities, both ethnic and religious. Ethnophyletism in a nation subjects the religious feeling to the national one, and in this form, the faith, even if formally called Orthodox, is turned into a nationalistic sect. The Orthodox Church of

Constantinople tended to ascribe the heresy of ethnophyletism, first of all, to the Slavic Orthodox nations. Putting aside the question whether she was right and to which extent she herself resisted this temptation, let us look at how the Patriarchate of Constantinople treated ethnophyletism in Ukraine.

A typical example of ethnophyletism is evident in the activity of the schismatic group of Philaret Denisenko and Makariy Malesich in the territory of today's Ukraine: these groups are distinguished for their hate toward Russia, with it being part of their identity because they were created as anti-Russian associations. In this regard, they are more similar to the Greek Catholics in western Ukraine. Western countries have used ethnopyletically-minded schismatic groups during the Maidan rebellion in 2014 and later during the deplorable civil war, which continues to this day.

It is worth noting that the apparent ethnophyletism of the schismatic groups in Ukraine did not prevent the Patriarchate of Constantinople from making the uncanonical decision to rehabilitate them. Moreover, ethnophyletism has just been strengthened by granting "autocephaly" to these artificially united structures. The coordination of actions between western countries and the Patriarchate of Constantinople during the double coup in Ukraine – political and ecclesiastical, is more than evident. In both cases, the Ukrainian pseudo-ecclesiastical ethnophyletism was used as a fuel for creating once and for good a politically and spiritually anti-Russian Ukraine.

After what was mentioned above, we should ask the question: What is the result of the actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Ukraine? As it could be supposed, it has managed nothing except for strengthening the Ukrainian schism and provoking a threat of further schisms on the pan-Orthodox level. In Ukraine, with rare exceptions, everything has remained where it was before. However, the Orthodoxy on the whole is aware and can feel that the consequences of the uncanonical actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople can be fatal. These consequences have already been manifested everywhere, being especially visible in the diaspora in which pan-Orthodox liturgical assemblies are no longer held. The negative consequences of the steps made by the Patriarchate of Constantinople have affected Holy Mount Athos, with which all the Orthodox Christians without exception are spiritually bound. If the Ukrainian schismatics supported by the Patriarch of Constantinople continue to serve the Holy Mountain, we may expect dangerous schisms to happen among the Athonites and the deepening of the wounds existing on the Body of Christ.

Because of the Patriarchate of Constantinople's uncanonical invasion in Ukraine, which belongs to the sphere of politics and is motivated by temporal interests, its reputation in the world of Orthodoxy has immensely declined. They can put the blame only on themselves seeing the cause in their new ecclesiology, their own interpretation of canons and in the decisions harmful for the whole Orthodoxy. None of the Orthodox Churches wanted to put at risk the reputation of Church of Constantinople, nor to challenge her honour, or to deprive her head of the status of the first among the equals, or of any other

privileges stemming from this; but at the same time, these honours cannot be extended to no limits.

Today, the situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is as complicated as it was in the old Metropolis of Kiev in the 16-17th centuries before it was incorporated in the Moscow Patriarchate in 1686. It may even be even more complicated than that because the then Metropolis of Kiev experienced pressure from Uniatism and the Polish-Lithuanian authorities, while today a war is waged on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church simultaneously by Uniates, schismatics, some Ukrainian authorities, while the Patriarchate of Constantinople tends to challenge her position, name and canonical status. The Ukrainian authorities have also tried to force the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to change its name, but, thank God, they have failed for the present.

The recent decisions made by the Patriarchate of Constantinople before and after the declaration of the so-called “OCU” have encouraged schismatic groupings to capture, with the authorities’ support, churches of the canonical Church and to drive away the clergy and faithful from them. Some priests have been lured by the invitations from the Patriarchate of Constantinople to leave the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and join the schismatics.

At the same time, the faithfulness to canonical order, the devotion and commitment to the will of God have united and strengthened the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from within and made her capable of confronting various trials and pressure from various sides. The devout Ukrainian people now have an opportunity to see where lie the true faith and *the patience of the saints* (Rev. 14:12). The Ukrainian hierarchs headed by the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Onufriy of Kiev and All Ukraine, are faithful pastors for all Orthodox people regardless of their party affiliation or ethnic background.

Preserving the values of Old Rus’, Kiev, which is the Mother of Russian cities, this Church cherishes her roots showing that she does not want to change the history in the course of which she developed a brilliant culture, cultivated literacy and spirituality in people, created beautiful shrines, gave birth to many saints, confessors and martyrs. Preserving her liturgical and canonical unity with the Moscow Patriarchate as it autonomous part, she at the same time reflects the special features of the Ukrainian people. Safeguarding her identity, she also constitutes an integral part of “the Russian World”. She has overcome all kinds of ethnophyletism, as seeking salvation in her are Ukrainians and Russians, as well as an enormous number of those who have the multilayer Russian-Ukrainian identity as well as representatives of other nations who wish to stay in the canonical Church and in unity with all the Orthodox Christians.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church accepts both pro-Russian and pro-western people in the vast Ukrainian land as their beloved children, building the spiritual unity of all in the house of God in which there is

neither Jew nor Greek, neither Ukrainian nor Russian, neither Pole nor Lithuanian, but all together we are the people of God, the New Israel redeemed by the Most Holy Blood of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/46315/