

CHRISTINA DIETL, KHRYSTYNA FOSTYAK,
THOMAS SCHULTE-UMBERG, OLHA UHRYN,
NOREEN VAN ELK (EDS.)

WAR IN UKRAINE

THEOLOGICAL, ETHICAL AND HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

Aschendorff Verlag

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Patriarch Bartholomew's Position Towards the War Against Ukraine

Patrice Hrimle

This article highlights the statements of the Greek-speaking Orthodox Churches up to the beginning of 2023, especially those of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, which are related to the war against Ukraine. As a religious leader, the patriarch drew attention to this war and thereby contributed to the public discourse on this matter. His anti-war appeals to stop the military annihilation of Ukraine and the genocide of its people stand out among other public figures. In addition, the author outlines some efforts of the Ecumenical Patriarch in interchurch relations, particularly concerning the Russian Orthodox Church. The text takes a closer look at Bartholomew's reflections on the nature of war, its origins, consequences and possible solutions. Furthermore, the author focuses on the reaction of the Ecumenical Patriarch to the siege of Mariupol, i. e., to the consequences of the Russian air force's bombing of the city, especially the casualties of the civilian population as well as damages inflicted on the historical and cultural heritage of ethnic Greeks.

1. Defining the Problem

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022 raised serious concerns about attempts to destroy Ukrainian statehood as well as the impending danger of expanding the military conflict in Europe and unleashing another world war not only among political actors, but also religious leaders. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew was one of the first religious authorities to condemn this act of aggression.[1] Neither did he remain silent about the

1 Cf. The Ecumenical Patriarch Condemns the Unprovoked Russian Invasion of Ukraine and Expresses His solidarity to the Suffering Ukrainian People. (24 February 2022) URL: https://ec-patr.org/the-ecumenical-patriarch-condemns-the-unprovoked-russian-in-

annexation of Crimea and the Russian-sponsored separatist war in Eastern Ukraine (Donbas). In the Easter Epistle on 20 April 2014, he spoke of the war in Donbas: "In our times, the drums of death and darkness are beating desperately. Unfortunately, extinction and suppression of the weak by the strong dominates the secular pyramid of today's reality. We are often stunned by cruelty, by lack of compassion and by views of the powers that are holding the wheel of the world. Those powers think it is really they who make the world go around".[2]

In his numerous public appeals on the war against Ukraine, Patriarch Bartholomew has shared his thoughts on the nature of the war. On 13 February 2022, on the eve of the Russian full-scale invasion, he made an appeal to all parties involved to prevent the military conflict in order to avoid the risk of another world war.[3] Even though the history of mankind demonstrated that, despite the terrible experience of past wars and despite further industrial development, society still seeks military resolution to some conflicts. The interaction between different cultures may lead to disagreement on some matters, which often appear to be simply markers of different values, but the use of military force makes it worse. The processes of globalization and current geopolitical contexts have made the modern world very dense, i. e. it is hard to keep conflicts local; rather, they affect the globe. Bartholomew also underlined that any aggression using weapons is a violation of international law and the UNO Charter that banned the use of military force in international relations: "Weapons are not a solution. On the contrary, it brings nothing but war, violence,

vasion-of-ukraine-and-expresses-his-solidarity-to-the-suffering-ukrainian-people/; Βαρθολομαίος για πόλεμο στην Ουκρανία: Τα όπλα σκορπούν τον θάνατο και ασφαλώς δεν κάνουν διακρίσεις [Bartholomew on the War in Ukraine: Weapons Spread Death and Certainly Do not Make Differences] (20 March 2022). URL: https://www.ethnos.gr/ekklisia/article/200174/bartholomaiosgiapolemosthnoykraniataoplaskorpoyntonthanatokaiasfalosdenkanoyndiakriseis; The Holy See, "Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Turkey: Ecumenical Blessing and Singing of the Common Declaration" (30 November 2014). URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141130_turchia-firma-dichiarazione.html. All internet links in this article were last accessed on 5 April 2024.

2 Πατριαρχική Ἀπόδειξις ἐπί τῷ Ἁγίῳ Πάσχα 2014 [Patriarchal Testimony on Holy Easter 2014]. URL: https://www.saint.gr/19/texts.aspx. Own translation.

3 Cf. Πατριάρχης Βαρθολομαίος. Έκκληση για ειρήνη στην Ουκρανία, να αποφευχθεί ο κίνδυνος του Γ' Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου [Patriarch Bartholomew: Call for Peace in Ukraine to Avoid the Risk of World War III] (13 February 2022). URL: https://www.bankingnews.gr/diethni/articles/610834/vartholomaios-ekklisi-gia-eirini-stin-oukrania-na-apofefxthei-o-kindynos-tou-g-pagkosmiou-polemou.

mourning and death".[4] It is important to seek peace through dialogue, which would create the conditions for resolving problems and help eliminate critical situations. The role of religion in peacekeeping and the need for cooperation should not be disregarded.

In May 2022, Bartholomew pointed out that Moscow claiming jurisdiction over the Orthodox Church in Ukraine helps justifying the war.[5] Although the discourse on the canonical procedure for granting autocephaly is not addressed in this paper, the position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (EP) is of interest. It is based on the fact that the See of Constantinople is historically the mother Church for Ukrainian Christianity, since the Metropolis of Kyiv was founded in the context of the baptism of the Kyivan Rus.[6] Therefore the attention to the historical and spiritual development of this land, as well as the interest in rehabilitating the canonical status of two major jurisdictions, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, now united as the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), are understandable.

Besides, the position of the EP on granting autocephaly is based not only on historical practice, but also on "οἰκονομία" (a concept of a more flexible application or interpretation of canons) and the political independence of Ukraine as a state.[7] Since 1991, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, operated with a status of "a self-governing

4 Οικουμενικός Πατριάρχης: Προσευχόμαστε για τη διατήρηση της ειρήνης στην Ουκρανία [Ecumenical Patriarch: We Pray for the Preservation of Peace in Ukraine] (13 February 2022). URL: https://www.capital.gr/epikairotita/3614573/oikoumenikos-patriarxis-proseuxomaste-gia-ti-diatirisi-tis-eirinis-stin-oukrania. Own translation.

5 Cf. The Ecumenical Patriarch Condemns the Unprovoked Russian Invasion; Bartholomew: What is Happening in Ukraine Is a Disgrace That Will Stigmatize for Ever Those Who Caused It (1 May 2022). URL: https://orthodoxtimes.com/bartholomew-what-is-happening-in-ukraine-is-a-disgrace-that-will-stigmatize-for-ever-those-who-caused-it/.

6 Cf. Nataliia Yakovenko, Нарис історії середньовічної та ранньомодерної України [An Outline of the History of Medieval and Early Modern Ukraine], Kyiv 2006, 45.

7 Cf. Grigorios D. Papathomas, Ἡ υἱοθέτηση τῆς Αὐτοκεφαλίας στὴ Δύση καὶ τὴν Ἀνατολὴ [The Adoption of Autocephaly in the West and the East], in: Θεολογία 90/1 (2019) 235–276, here: 235. See also: Stavros Mutafis, Ἡ Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Οἰκονομία κατὰ τοὺς Ἱεροὺς Κανόνες [The Ecclesiastical Economy According to the Holy Canons] Athens 2016, 16: "And the second way, which concerns the economy, we see in the transition by which the Christ-conforming multitude can be governed in the course of the Church's progress towards the perfection of life in Christ". Own translation.

Church with the rights of broad autonomy".[8] Achieving Ukrainian political independence led to the EP granting the OCU autocephaly in 2019.

Since 2018, the Russian Federation has used a variety of methods and manipulations to exert pressure on the Church of Greece and the See of Constantinople, which were engaged in resolving the problem of canonical jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. On 15 October 2018, after the Holy Synod in Minsk, the Moscow Patriarchate broke off Eucharistic communion with Constantinople.[9] On 29 October 2018, the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Gre Andrey Maslov described the decision to grant autocephaly to the OCU as one that would cause "dangerous consequences" for Ukraine.[10] In light of the events of 2022, it is clear that this statement should have been seen as a warning.

On 5 January 2019, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew granted the OCU the Tomos, the decree of ecclesial independence.[11] The OCU obtained the right to decide on issues concerning the daily life of the church in accordance with Ukrainian traditions, customs, and language within the borders of its state. This decision was recognized by the Church of Greece, the Patriarchate of Alexandria and the Church of Cyprus.[12] At the same time, the Tomos restricted the possibility of the ROC to control this area, and so the announcement that the Moscow Patriarchate would not recognize it, did not come as a surprise.

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8 The Rule of the Russian Orthodox Church. Chapter 10.1.: "… самоуправляемая Церковь с правами широкой автономии". URL: http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5082273.html. Own translation.

9 Cf. Andrew Roth/Harriet Sherwood, Russian Orthodox Church Cuts Ties with Constantinople (15 October 2018). URL: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/15/russian-orthodox-church-cuts-ties-with-constantinople.

10 Cf. Συνάντηση Υφυπουργού Εξωτερικών, Μ. Μπόλαρη, με τον Πρέσβη της Ρωσικής Ομοσπονδίας στην Ελλάδα [Meeting of Deputy Foreign Minister Bolaris with the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Greece] (30 October 2018). URL: https://www.mfa.gr/epikairotita/eidiseis-anakoinoseis/sunantese-uphupourgou-exoterikon-mpolare-me-ton-presbu-tes-rosikes-omospondias-sten-ellada-athena-30102018.html.

11 Cf. Τόμος Αυτοκεφαλίας. Patriarchal and Synodal Tomos for the Bestowal of the Ecclesiastical Status of Autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine (6 January 2019). URL: https://ec-patr.org/patriarchal-and-synodal-tomos-for-the-bestowal-of-the-ecclesiastical-status-of-autocephaly-to-the-orthodox-church-in-ukraine/.

12 For more see: Christos Karakolis, The Stance of Orthodox Greek-Speaking Churches Regarding the War Against Ukraine: a Critical Perspective with Reference to Romans 13:1–7 and John's Revelation, in: Наукові записки УКУ: Богослов'я 9 (2022) 75–93, here: 77–83.

2. Bartholomew on Relations with the Moscow Patriarchate

Now let us focus on the position of Patriarch Bartholomew regarding the relations between the two patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow till February 2023. The involvement of the See of Constantinople in resolving the issue of the ecclesial independence of the OCU has caused an adverse reaction from the Russian state and the ROC, which consider Ukraine to be part of the latter's canonical territory. However, Bartholomew did not recognize the ROC's decision to terminate eucharistic relations. On 29 July 2021, in his address on the 1,033rd anniversary of the Baptism of Kyivan Rus', the Patriarch refuted Russian accusations and supported the canonical independence of the OCU "… with prudence and responsibility to manage the issues of everyday ecclesiastical life with their traditions, manners, customs, language, within the borders of the state of Ukraine."[13] He also stressed that the See of Constantinople feels a spiritual responsibility and "immutable duty" to the independent Ukrainian Church, even though it can be "sacrificial and exhausting".[14] In his speech on Ukraine's Independence Day in 2022, he spoke about the historical ties between the Mother Church of Constantinople and the Church of Ukraine, and expressed concern about the political, sociological and ecological consequences of the war.[15]

In an interview with the Greek TV channel ERT1 and the journalist Giorgos Kouvaras, Bartholomew appealed to the Russian Patriarch Cyril to condemn Russian aggression in Ukraine and to oppose the state ideology.[16] Cyril's blessing the war was seen by Bartholomew as hypocritical, the Russian hier-

13 Вітання Вселенського Патріарха Варфоломія з 1033-ю річницею Хрещення Руси-України [Address of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the 1033rd Anniversary of the Baptism of Rus-Ukraine] (29 July 2021). URL: https://www.pomisna.info/uk/vsi-novyny/vitannya-vselenskogo-patriarha-varfolomiya-z-1033-yu-richnytseyu-hreshhennya-rusy-ukrayiny/. Own translation.

14 Ibid.

15 Cf. Bartholomew, Greeting for Ukrainian Independence Day (24 August 2022). URL: https://istanbul.mfa.gov.ua/en/news/greeting-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-ukrainian-independence-day-24-august-2022.

16 Cf. Βαρθολομαίος: Έπρεπε να παραιτηθεί ο Κύριλλος για την επίθεση στην Ουκρανία και ας πήγαινε και φυλακή [Bartholomew: Cyril Should Have Resigned for the Attack on Ukraine and Should Have Gone to Prison] (24 May 2022). URL: https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/1246927/vartholomaios-eprepe-paraitithei-o-kurillos-kai-as-pigaine-kai-fulaki/. See also: Οικουμενικός Πατριάρχης για Ουκρανία: Ο πόλεμος δεν λύνει τα προβλήματα, προσθέτει νέα [Ecumenical Patriarch on Ukraine: War Does Not Solve Problems, but Adds New] (8 April 2022). URL: https://www.kathimerini.

arch should have considered resigning instead. The interview also discussed controversies between the Churches of Constantinople and Moscow over the canonical subordination of the OCU.

Today both churches exist as competing parallel jurisdictions. The question of affiliation of the UOC to the Moscow Patriarchate as well as the lack of recognition of the OCU by the majority of the autocephalous churches still raises questions.

3. Voices of the Other Greek-Speaking Hierarchs

The escalation of Russian military aggression in Ukraine in February 2022 incited a strong response in the Greek Orthodox world. The Patriarchs of Constantinople, Jerusalem, Greece and Alexandria demonstrated deep compassion for and engagement with the events in Ukraine, with concerns for the safety of the Ukrainian people and the challenges faced by the OCU. As Christos Karakolis critically noted, although the statement of the Patriarch of Jerusalem calls for prayers for peace and wisdom for the parties involved, it replaces the word "war" with the term "crisis".[17] The above-mentioned hierarchs condemned war as a method of conflict resolution, because its nature contradicts Christian values, especially the intrinsic value of Christian love. According to Anastasios, Archbishop of Albania, "the aggressive war is the most tragic and cruelest insult and negation of love".[18] The Archbishop of Athens and all Greece, Ieronymos II said: "We feel pain reaching a heart-breaking acme, reflecting the scale of the problem which is very tormenting for our conscience".[19] On 20 March 2022, the Holy Synod of Greece issued an encyclical letter on the war against Ukraine directly blaming Russia for it, speaking of "the violent inva-

gr/world/561800734/oikoymenikos-patriarchis-gia-oykrania-o-polemos-den-lynei-ta-provlimata-prosthetei-nea/.

17 Cf. Christos Karakolis, The Stance, 78. For the appeal of the Patriarch of Jerusalem see: Statement on Situation in Ukraine by His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III (27 February 2022). URL: https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/blog/2022/02/27/statement-on-situation-in-ukraine-by-his-beatitude-patriarch-of-jerusalem-theophilos-iii/.

18 Nasos Bratsos, Τα Αναστάσιμα μηνύματα των Προκαθημένων της Ορθοδοξίας για το Πάσχα. [The Easter Messages of the Orthodox Prelates for Easter] (23 April 2022). URL: https://www.ertnews.gr/eidiseis/ellada/ta-anastasima-minymata-ton-prokathimenon-tis-orthodoxias-gia-to-pascha-video/. Own translation.

19 Ibidem.

sion of Russian troops and the war in Ukraine".[20] However, the Greek bishops have also tried to remain diplomatic, since the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches have shared the same faith and traditions for centuries. Theodoros, Patriarch of Alexandria, emphasised in his Easter message: "With sorrow in our hearts we can see people of one belief killing one another in Ukraine. My thoughts are with them".[21] The eschatological nature of Christianity in those Easter messages is evident in the hope that the war will end, and that life will rise again from the ruins. These statements reflect the understanding of the war against Ukraine as tragic and absurd, since it is experienced from both sides by Orthodox Christians, who share the same faith and should have common values. In the meantime, the Moscow Patriarchate is no longer in communion with the bishops (including the first hierarchs) of the churches of Alexandria, Greece and Cyprus, which recognize the OCU, and the Patriarch of Alexandria has conversely given up communion with Moscow.

Much clearer than the other Greek-speaking Orthodox church leaders, Bartholomew has repeatedly identified the military conflict in Ukraine as "cruel and unfair war of Russia against Ukraine" or "unjustifiable military aggression". He has described the Russian Federation as the invader, who attacks innocent people.[22]

4. Humanitarian Catastrophe in Mariupol and Bartholomew

Patriarch Bartholomew frequently addressed the ethical and theological understanding of human life. A comprehensive description of the EP's position on this matter was elaborated over a period of three years by a Special Commission of the EP led by archdeacon John Chryssavgis. As a result of the commission's efforts in 2020 the collective work "For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church" was released with the approval of the Holy and Sacred Synod.[23] This document contains specific directions and gen-

20 Official Website of the Church of Greece, Περί τοῦ πολέμου στήν Ούκρανία (17 March 2022). URL: https://ecclesiagreece.gr/ecclesiajoomla/index.php/el/iera-synodos/enkyklioi/peri-tou-polemou-sten-oukrania.

21 Ibid.

22 Bartholomew, Greeting for Ukrainian Independence Day: "The virtuous Ukrainian people did not attack anyone, but were forced to defend their land and homes."

23 Ecumenical Patriarchate, For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church, ed. by David B. Hart/John Chryssavgis, Brooklyn 2020. For more see: Piercamillo Falivene, Churches Before the Russian-Ukrainian War, in: JoMaCC 2/2 (2023) 249–293, here: 258.

eral guidelines for the EP regarding social challenges and responsibility. Since the EP pays much attention to human dignity and basic rights, it should be said that the Patriarch also expressed his concerns about the sufferings of the Ukrainians due to the war many times.[24]

Ever since the beginning of the war, the civilian population has been under assault from Russian troops using weapons forbidden by international law. Among the numerous atrocities caused by Russian forces in Ukraine, one of the worst chapters of the invasion was the siege of the industrial port city Mariupol between February and May 2022. Those events caused a considerable resonance in the world. The Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations could not stand idly by and issued a statement on the need for humanitarian corridors to Mariupol from the Azovstal plant for civilians and wounded defenders in April 2022.[25]

The initial count of casualties among the civilian population living in the city and the adjacent villages revealed a figure of around 87,000, however this figure is not final.[26] In February 2024, Human Rights Watch in cooperation with the Ukrainian NGO "Truth Hounds" and SITU Research published the report "Our City Was Gone: Russia's Devastation of Mariupol, Ukraine" with a multimedia feature analyzing the killing of civilians, unlawful attacks and the destruction of the infrastructure.[27] The use of satellite footage and geographical information systems as well as statistical methods made it possible to confirm the large number of victims by comparing the landscape of cemeteries and spontaneous collective burials. Before the Russian invasion and occupation

24 Cf. Bartholomew, Message to the Ukrainian People on the Occasion of Christmas 2022 (25 December 2022). URL: https://ec-patr.org/message-by-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-to-the-ukrainian-people-on-the-occasion-of-christmas-2022/?fbclid=IwY2xjawFORpxleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHT30Gw1gv14HNvbETYowA33nsjqRsJo_4K1GVoVTJHouW2yz02LBpLXpDw_aem_xVk9oN7HNcgMfhjv-zVBlQ; idem, Η Πρώτη του έτους στο Φανάρι [The First of the Year in the Phanar] (2 January 2023). URL: https://panorthodoxsynod.blogspot.com/2023/01/blog-post_2.html?fbclid=IwAR2×76ZuZPYL_DOtrg3dbJgkwpyEDO_D918rJj-iECTtP7InHbl9XP_k0e8.

25 Cf. UCCRO Statement on the Necessity of Humanitarian Corridors for Mariupol (16 April 2022). URL: https://vrciro.ua/en/statements/uccro-statement-on-humanitarian-corridors-for-mariupol.

26 Cf. Natalya Buchalova/Olena Davlikanova/Svitlana Timičenko, Парламент України під час війни: аналітичний звіт [The Parliament of Ukraine During the War: An Analytical Report], Kyiv 2023, 125.

27 Cf. Human Rights Watch/SITU Research/Truth Hounds, Our City Was Gone: Russia's Devastation of Mariupol, Ukraine, New York 2024.

of the city, about 425.000 people lived in Mariupol and the surrounding area. Taking into account the number of victims, it can be assumed that more than 30 % of the population was killed. Among the people, who suffered due to the bombing operations on Mariupol, were the Greeks of the Azov area, whom I will discuss here more closely.

Artillery shelling and air strikes by Russian troops have led to the destruction of the historical part of Mariupol, founded in 1780 by the Pontic Greeks, Urums, and Rumeis as a result of their resettlement to the Azov region. Initially it was a separate Greek administrative district in which no people of other nationalities lived.[28] For centuries, the ethnic Greeks of the Azov area, who were grouped around Mariupol, preserved their language, their way of life, culture and religion. Before the military invasion, the historic part of the city had retained its traditional layout of houses and streets, characteristic of both Greek urban settlements and Byzantine Constantinople. Greek historical relics, such as the throne of Metropolitan Ignatius, the first Greek metropolitan in Mariupol, and the Greek Gospel, preserved in the Mariupol Museum, were lost in a fire during the bombing.[29] As a result of the Russian invasion, the Greek population of Mariupol and the Azov region was subjected to physical extinction, emigration and deportation. Besides that, the Russian authorities are pursuing a policy of assimilation and dissolution of the Azov Greeks within the so-called "Russian nation" by suppressing their historical memory. The Greek language and the ancient dialects of the Urums and the Rumeis, which have been cherished here for centuries, are being replaced by the Russian language in schools.

Human casualties within the Greek community in the conflict zone caused discontent in Athens. The Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias emphasized in his interview on 17 April 2022 that the protection of civilians and the provision of humanitarian aid to the Greek Diaspora in Ukraine is a top priority for Greece.[30] He even visited Mariupol before the beginning of the full-scale war on 31 January 2022 and spoke about security issues. Concerning Urums and

28 Cf. Vlassis Agzidis, Μια άγνωστη ελληνική δύναμη μακριά από την Ελλάδα: Οι Έλληνες της Ουκρανίας [An Unknown Greek Force Far from Greece: The Greeks of Ukraine] (16 March 2022). URL: https://www.cnn.gr/focus/story/305117/mia-agnosti-elliniki-dynami-makria-apo-tin-ellada-oi-ellines-tis-oykranias.

29 Cf. ibid.

30 Cf. MFA, Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias' Interview with 'Kathimerini tis Kyriakis' Newspaper and Journalist Vasilis Nedos. (17 April 2022). URL: https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/statements-speeches/minister-of-foreign-affairs-nikos-dendias-interview-with-kathimerini-tis-kyriakis-newspaper-and-journalist-vasilis-nedos-17042022.html.

Rumeis, who were exposed to suffering, exile and killings, Greece appealed to the International Criminal Court to investigate these war crimes, which are referred to as ethnocide in international law.[31]

The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew addressed the humanitarian tragedy in Mariupol in his Easter Sermon of 2022: "Let's beg the Risen Redeemer this Easter to be the initiator to open humanitarian corridors, safe passages to truly safe areas, for the thousands trapped in Mariupol, the civilians, among them the wounded, the elderly, women and many children. The same applies to all other regions of Ukraine, where an indescribable human tragedy is unfolding."[32] He called for a halt to the physical assault on the civilian population, and to immediately end the fratricidal war by the Russian Federation's airforce. He also held a conversation with the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, who informed him about the Russian blockade of Mariupol and the villages Sartana and Volnovakha inhabited by the Greek population.[33] In 2023, families of Mariupol defenders met with Patriarch Bartholomew. During the audience he blessed the Ukrainian delegation and expressed his hope for the quick return of all prisoners and deportees, including children, whom Russia had illegally taken from Ukraine.[34]

31 Cf. Panagiota Manoly, Greece's Response to Russia's War in Ukraine, in: Anja Mihr/Chiara Pierobon (eds.), Polarization, Shifting Borders and Liquid Governance. Studies on Transformation and Development in the OSCE Region, Cham 2024, 349–366, here: 356.

32 Τα πασχαλινά μηνύματα του Οικουμενικού Πατριάρχη και των Αρχιεπισκόπων Ελλάδος και Κύπρου. [The Easter Messages of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Archbishops of Greece and Cyprus] (24 April 2022). URL: https://gr.euronews.com/2022/04/24/ta-pasxalina-minymata-tou-oikoumenikou-patriarxi-kai-toy-arxiepiskopou. Own translation.

33 Cf. В. Зелéнски: Ευχαριστώ τον Οικουμενικό Πατριάρχη για τις ευχές του για νίκη. [V. Zelensky: Thanks to the Ecumenical Patriarch for His Wishes for Victory – Video] (29 July 2022). URL: https://www.dogma.gr/kosmos/zelenski-efcharisto-ton-oikoumeniko-patriarchi-gia-tis-efches-tou-gia-niki-vinteo/150499/.

34 RISU, Родичі полонених Маріупольського гарнізону зустрілися з Патріархом Варфоломієм [Relatives of Mariupol Garrison Prisoners Meet with Patriarch Bartholomew] (11 August 2023). URL: https://risu.ua/rodichi-polonenih-mariupolskogo-garnizonu-zustrilisya-z-patriarhom-varfolomiyem_n141636.

5. Conclusions

To summarize, Bartholomew's statements on the war against Ukraine reflect the pastoral responsibility of the See of Constantinople and his concern for the future of the Ukrainian people and the OCU. He condemned the Russian aggressive activities, which contradict the Christian commandments of beneficence and brought nothing but violence, mourning, destruction and death. The Ecumenical Patriarch has not hesitated to unmask Russian Patriarch Cyril's use of religious rhetoric as a means of justifying the war, and has called this hypocritical. He has pointed out repeatedly that it is the duty of religious leaders to condemn militaristic policies, not to support or bless them. He also holds the opinion that the controversy of the canonical subordination of the OCU should neither contribute to the justification of the Russo-Ukrainian war nor become a reason for a schism between Constantinople and Moscow.