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## **THE POLISH AUTOCEPHALOUS ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE RELIGIOUS SPACE OF EASTERN EUROPE**

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*The article analyzes the formation process of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church and its influence in the religious space of Eastern Europe. It was established that during the 20th century in the Republic of Poland, a whole complex of problems of state-church and inter-confessional relations, which are interconnected and mutually determined by powerful political processes, accumulated. The development of the Polish state was accompanied by the introduction of democratic principles into the social-political and religious-ecclesiastical spheres, and the formation and functioning of the political system became one of the conditions for ensuring the human right to freedom of conscience and religion. The main aspects of the autocephalous problem in the process of declaring a new status of the Local Church are defined: political, which were expressed in the context of religious tradition; ecclesiological foundations of the political-administrative system of the Orthodox Churches; analysis of the administrative and political status of the Church of the Byzantine tradition; politicization of the process of autocephalization and the church-administrative system of management of the Orthodox Church; the role of state authorities in determining and implementing autocephaly; the influence of political factors on religious processes in the country. It is proven that the state has always been an interested party in the acquisition of the independent status of the national church, therefore it acts as a defender of the rights and powers of the church located on its territory. However, the declaration of the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in Poland led to its de facto dependence on the state power, which was mainly a supporter of Catholicism and hostile to Orthodoxy. The autocephalization of the Orthodox Church only partially stabilized the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Polish authorities. The role and place of the Russian factor in the process of building the Polish autocephalous Orthodox Church is determined, the main goal of which is an attempt to revive the space based on the Orthodox religion, imperial ideological doctrines and the achievements of the past, which contain the ideas of the identity of the Russian people and its superiority over others.*

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**Key words:** religious freedom, Polish autocephalous Orthodox Church, autocephaly, Orthodoxy, local church, religious space, state-church relations.

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## ПОЛЬСЬКА АВТОКЕФАЛЬНА ПРАВОСЛАВНА ЦЕРКВА У РЕЛІГІЙНОМУ ПРОСТОРИ СХІДНОЇ ЄВРОПИ

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У статті аналізується процес формування Польської автокефальної Православної Церкви та її вплив у релігійному просторі Східної Європи. Встановлено, що впродовж ХХ століття у Республіці Польща накопичився низка проблем державно-церковних та міжконфесійних відносин, які взаємопов'язані і взаємообумовлені потужними політичними процесами. Розбудова польської держави супроводжувалася впровадженням у суспільно-політичну та релігійно-церковну сфери демократичних принципів, а формування та функціонування політичної системи стало однією із умов забезпечення права людини на свободу совісті і віросповідання. Визначено головні аспекти автокефальної проблеми у процесі проголошення нового статусу Помісної церкви: політичні, які виражалися у контексті релігійної традиції; еклезіологічні засади політико-адміністративної системи православних Церков; аналіз адміністративного й політичного статусу Церкви візантійської традиції; політизація процесу автокефалізації й церковно-адміністративної системи управління православної церкви; роль органів державної влади у визначенні й реалізації автокефалії; вплив політичних факторів на релігійні процеси в країні. Доведено, що держава завжди була зацікавленою стороною в набутті незалежного статусу національної церкви, тому вона виступає захисником прав і повноважень церкви, розташованої на її території. Однак проголошення автокефалії Православної церкви у Польщі призвело до її фактичної залежності від державної влади, яка в основному була прихильницею католицизму і вороже налаштованою щодо православ'я. Автокефалізація Православної церкви лише частково стабілізувала відносини між Православною церквою та Польською владою. Визначено роль і місце російського фактору в процесі розбудови Польської автокефальної Православної Церкви, основною метою якого є намагання відродити соціокультурний простір, заснований на православній релігії, імперських ідеологічних доктринах і здобутках минулих часів, які містять ідеї самобутності російського народу та його переваги над іншими.

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**Ключові слова:** релігійна свобода, Польської автокефальної Православної Церкви автокефалія, православ'я, помісна церква, релігійний простір, державно-церковні відносини.

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**Formulation of the problem.** During the period of reforming Ukrainian legislation in the religious sphere, an important aspect is the observance of democratic rights and freedoms of man and citizen in the state. Ukraine, as a legal state, must ensure the implementation of the constitutional right to freedom of conscience and religion and create an effective legal framework for citizens regardless of religious views. This can be achieved only by combining national and universal values and meeting the spiritual and religious needs of society. Ukrainian society is multi-confessional with pronounced peculiarities of culture and spirituality. This presents the state with the problem of regulating the legal status of religious organizations existing on its territory, while complying with international standards [1]. In this case, it is important to take into account

historical experience for the formation of a legal framework that will take into account all aspects of religious life in Ukraine. In this context, the study of the legal status of the Orthodox Church in Poland in the process of its autocephalization can be indicative.

The analysis of the legal regulation of the status of the Orthodox Church in Poland by Ukrainian researchers was carried out in a fragmented manner. Instead, Polish scientists who were interested in the issue of autocephalization of the Orthodox Church considered this issue from the standpoint of theological education, political scientists, historians, sociologists, religious scholars, and lawyers. Each of them reveals a separate aspect of this process. Among the general most important works dedicated to the Orthodox Church in Poland, the works of Ukrainian authors I. Vlasovskyi, M. Bessonov, O. Khomchuk, S. Chobych

and others should be singled out. Among Polish researchers, we highlight the works of E. Przybył and K. Lesniewski. Each of these authors also drew attention to the peculiarities of the formation and functioning of the Orthodox Church in Poland in the 20th century. The legal aspect of autocephalization of the Orthodox Church in the Republic of Poland is reflected in the writings of U. Nowytska, E. Malkevych, and S. Podemsky. The researchers presented an analysis of the decrees that confirmed the legitimacy of religious organizations and the right of citizens to belong to them. Since the works were written in different political conditions, the scale of their censorship differs. In particular, U. Nowytska comments on the regulatory framework related to the PAOC and draws conclusions about the peculiarities of its chronological transformation, while E. Malkevych and S. Podemsky analyze constitutional acts with comments on them. Approaches and methods of analyzing the material are different, but in the context of studying the issue, they complement each other.

**The purpose of the article** is to analyze the activity of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church in the religious space of Eastern Europe.

**Discussion and results.** The establishment of relations between the Polish state and the Orthodox Church on the basis of autocephaly arose after Poland gained independence. The issue required immediate legal regulation, considering the number of Orthodox believers, which, according to the 1921 census amounted in 3700 individuals [2: 188]. In its religious policy, the Polish government sought to separate local religious organizations from their central authorities located abroad. Granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church envisaged not only the separation of the latter from the Moscow Patriarchate but also deprived the Soviet government influence, through the Orthodox clergy, over the population of Poland. However, the condition of the Orthodox Church in Russia after 1918 was complicated [3:

76]. Due to the Soviet-Polish war, ties with the Moscow diocese got more difficult, and the Patriarchate itself was under severe pressure from Soviet punitive authorities. An additional, formal-legal argument in favor of autocephaly was the Riga Peace Treaty, which prohibited interference in the internal affairs of religious organizations located in another state's territory. The treaty affirmed the right of church and religious minorities to independently resolve their internal affairs within the framework of the legislation of the state in which they operated [4: 115].

Implementing the idea of autocephaly for the Orthodox Church, the government sought approval from the Orthodox bishops in Poland. However, the attitude of the bishops themselves towards the separation of the Orthodox Church from Moscow was not clearly defined. On the one hand, the clergy aimed to maintain relations with the Polish government, while on the other hand, they awaited a decision regarding the church's independence from the Moscow Patriarch [5: 107]. At the same time, the Polish authorities negotiated with Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow, who remained an active supporter of the restoration of the tsarist regime in Russia and sought to preserve a unified Orthodox Church. Patriarch Tikhon believed that granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Poland would be possible if the Orthodox constituted the majority or the entirety of the Polish population. However, since Orthodox believers formed a religious minority in Poland, the canons of the Orthodox Church did not permit granting autocephaly.

The first step towards declaring autocephaly for the Orthodox Church in Poland was obtaining Patriarch Tikhon's consent for the formation of its transitional form – the exarchate. In his letter to the Polish authorities dated September 15, 1921, the patriarch confirmed granting a certain autonomy to the Orthodox Church in Poland and the possibility for it to manage church affairs through a council of bishops led by an exarch. By decree dated September 28, 1921, Patriarch

Tikhon appointed Georgy Yaroshevsky (who, at the time was the temporary administrator of the Warsaw diocese) as the exarch in Poland [6: 334–335].

Despite Patriarch Tikhon's actions, the Moscow Patriarchate sought to keep the Orthodox Church in Poland dependent on Moscow. Confirmation of this was the resolution of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church dated January 14, 1922, which approved the internal statute of the Polish Orthodox Church. Under these circumstances, the Polish government issued on January 30, 1922, "Temporary Rules on the Government's Relations with the Orthodox Church in Poland." These rules aimed to establish the legal status of the Orthodox Church until the adoption of a law in Poland that was supposed to regulate relations between the state and the church according to the Constitution. Through this act, the Polish authorities sought to stabilize the situation of the Orthodox Church and unify the norms of relations between the state and the church [4: 121].

In April 1922, Patriarch Tikhon was arrested for anti-Soviet activities and removed from church administration. These changes led to difficulties in relations between the Polish government and the church, as the latter did not want to make decisions without the consent of the Moscow Patriarch. Instead, the Polish government firmly insisted on declaring autocephaly, pointing to the elimination of church authority in Moscow [7: 73].

On June 14, 1922, a council of senior hierarchs of the Polish Orthodox Church took place, attended by government representatives. The Polish clergy decided on the independence of the Orthodox Church on the basis of autocephaly. In response, the Synod adopted a resolution allowing senior hierarchs of the Orthodox Church in Poland to independently decide all matters related to church life and its relations with the state. According to Article 1 of the "Temporary Rules on the Government's Relations with the Orthodox Church", the bishops' assembly committed not to comply with orders received from

church authorities in Moscow. Additionally, the Synod expressed its willingness to cooperate with the Polish government based on the Constitution, provided they received blessings for autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarch, as well as the patriarchs of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches in Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Moscow Patriarch (if he were to lead the Orthodox Church again) [6: 336]. On August 10, 1921, in Yugoslavia, Russian bishops who were expelled from Russia convened a council, where it was decided to send a protest to the Ecumenical Patriarch and all other autocephalous churches against the actions of Orthodox bishops in Poland. They deemed the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in Poland as non-canonical since not all bishops in Poland and the Ecumenical Patriarch gave their consent.

During the negotiations between the Orthodox Church and the Polish government with the Ecumenical Patriarch, the exarch of the Polish Orthodox Church, H. Yaroshevsky, died, and Metropolitan Dionysius took his place. Bishops who opposed the declaration of autocephaly were gradually removed from managing church affairs, and part of the Orthodox clergy was deported from Poland. The Orthodox Church abroad also opposed the declaration of autocephaly. The problem of autocephalization of the Orthodox Church in Poland deepened due to dissatisfaction among the Orthodox population with the reduction in the number of parishes and the absence of regulation of the church's legal status [8].

After Patriarch Tikhon returned to ruling, Metropolitan Dionysius, together with the Synod of bishops, once again appealed to him to consent to autocephaly. The patriarch refused this request, arguing that according to the norms of canon law, only the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church could grant consent to autocephaly. Only in 1925, after the death of Patriarch Tikhon, were relations between the Orthodox Church in Poland and the Moscow Patriarchate finally severed.

On February 13, 1925, the Ecumenical Patriarch informed the clergy of all Orthodox churches about the recognition of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Poland and sent Metropolitan Dionysius an official copy of the Tomos. Already on September 17, 1925, at the Cathedral of St. Mary Magdalene in Warsaw, representatives of the patriarch announced the acceptance of the Tomos, granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Poland [9]. In connection with this, the senior hierarchs of the Orthodox Church officially recognized the Tomos as sufficient grounds for organizing the Orthodox Church on the basis of autocephaly. This fact was confirmed by the Synod's introduction of the name "Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church" (PAOC) [10: 63].

This position of the Synod provided the church authorities with the opportunity to come to an agreement not only with the Polish government but also to regulate the legal status of the church based on three principles: full freedom of internal church life, loyalty of the state to the church, and full respect for freedom of religion and organization of religious life.

In December 1925, Metropolitan Dionysius submitted a memorandum to the Ministry of Religious Affairs demanding the repeal of the "Temporary Rules" and legislative regulation of relations between the Polish state and the Orthodox Church.

The position of the successors of the late Metropolitan Tikhon in Moscow regarding the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in Poland remained unchanged. The declaration of autocephaly drew sharp criticism from them. The argument for this position was based on the fact that Patriarch Tikhon only gave his blessing for the autonomy of the Orthodox Church in Poland, and therefore, autocephaly should be considered invalid and non-canonical. Moscow's senior hierarchs suggested that Dionysius postpone the matter of autocephaly until the convening of the All-Russian Council. In response to

criticism from the Moscow Patriarchate, on October 27, 1930, the Orthodox Synod in Poland decided to sever contacts with the Moscow Patriarchate.

Orthodox believers suffered a significant blow due to revindication. The Supreme Court's decision on October 15, 1933, regarding the return of Orthodox shrines (over 700 Orthodox churches, monasteries, and 39 church properties) was in favor of the Orthodox side. The government actively integrated the Church into the country's internal politics. In the mid-1930s, the process of Polonization began. In 1938, repressive measures were taken against the Orthodox population in the regions of Chełm and Podlasie [11: 261–262]. Metropolitan Dionysius unsuccessfully tried to find protection in the Polish Sejm. The Church also had significant internal problems, including with the ethnic composition of the clergy. Almost all bishops, along with the primate, were ethnic Russians, while over 70% of the laity were Ukrainians and 29% were Belarusians.

In September 1939, the territory of Poland was occupied by Soviet and German forces. The majority of the Orthodox believers found themselves under the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church. Under the conditions of repression, Orthodox clerics in the Soviet occupation zone were forced to recognize the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate.

In the German occupation zone, a general governorate was established, within which three eparchies operated - Warsaw, Chełm-Podlasie, and Kraków-Lemko. The occupiers attempted to subordinate the eparchies to Archbishop Seraphim (Lade) of Berlin, but Metropolitan Dionysius managed to defend the autonomy in governance. Efforts by Bishops Ilarion and Palladius initiated the process of Ukrainianization of Orthodox church life. The German administration supported the Ukrainian national movement for political reasons.

The new occupation of Poland by the Soviet Union in 1945 and the imposed socialist transformations led to changes

in the church-Orthodox life. The Moscow secular and church authorities demanded the cancellation of the autocephaly obtained from Constantinople. In 1947, Metropolitan Dionysius was effectively removed from the Church administration, accused of collaboration with the occupying German authorities, and placed under house arrest. In April 1948, the Council of Ministers of Poland officially deprived the metropolitan of his position and created a Temporary Governing Collegium for the Affairs of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC) under the chairmanship of Archbishop Timothy (Shretter). Dionysius was forced to send repentance to Moscow Patriarch Alexy I for his activities. As a result, the title of "His Beatitude" was returned to him, but without the possibility of managing the PAOC.

Under Archbishop Timothy, the Moscow Patriarchate sought "repentance" from Polish Orthodox clergy for their "voluntary" departure from the jurisdiction of the Russian Church, which became the first step towards declaring the granting of autocephaly to the PAOC from Constantinople invalid. Under the threat of repression, Polish Orthodox hierarchs signed a letter to the Moscow Patriarch, refusing to mention the primate (Metropolitan Dionysius) and asking for "legitimate" autocephaly. The letter was delivered to Moscow by a special delegation of the PAOC headed by the chairman of the Temporary Governing Collegium, Archbishop Timothy.

On June 22, 1948, the Moscow Patriarch and the Holy Synod issued their own Tomos granting autocephaly to the PAOC. The Polish church delegation was presented with an "Act on the Reunification of the Polish Orthodox Church with the Russian Orthodox Church and the Granting of Autocephaly to it." [12: 654]. This Act consists of the text of the delegation's appeal to the Moscow Patriarch and Synod, as well as the Patriarch and Synod's resolution. It states that after the approval by the Council of Bishops of the Russian

Orthodox Church of the autocephaly of the Polish Church, the Polish Church elects the Head of its Church. Until that time, the Polish Church receives a system required by canons for autocephaly. Thus, this document must be ratified by the Council of Bishops of the Russian Church, and only then can the PAOC choose its primate. Given that no subsequent Council of Bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate has raised this issue, the procedure established by the Act has not been observed.

Thus, the status of the PAOC is uncertain from a canonical point of view. In 1948, the delegation of the Polish Orthodox Church rejected the Tomos from the Patriarchate of Constantinople and received a promise of a Tomos granting autocephaly from the Russian Orthodox Church. As of 2024, the Russian Orthodox Church had not provided an official Tomos to the PAOC. This document has not been published and discussed with other local Orthodox Churches in accordance with the norms of canonical law.

In June 1951, the PAOC delegation in Moscow requested Patriarch Alexy I for the "canonical release of a worthy candidate to the Polish Church for the metropolitan throne" [13]. Archbishop of Lviv Makary (Oksiuk) became such a candidate, who in July 1951 assumed the functions of Metropolitan of Warsaw and All Poland. The PAOC found itself in the sphere of Moscow's church policy. In September 1951, the Warsaw Orthodox Consistory was liquidated, and in 1952, the Internal Church Statute and the Parish Statute of the PAOC were abolished. Traditional rules of the Moscow Patriarchate, principles of centralization of church power, and the Russian language in official publications were introduced.

In order to exercise the right to religious gatherings, there were certain legal formalities recorded in the amended and updated "Regulations on Assemblies", which entered into force on April 29, 1962. Gatherings of people at religious services were considered legal if they were conducted by a legal

organization or institution in a temple, chapel or special room for prayer. It was forbidden to conduct retreats, public discussions, lectures in cells and other premises of the monastery. The publication of the new Internal Statute is considered the most significant achievement of the leadership of the PAOC in the legal sphere during the existence of the Polish People's Republic. Work on its project began in the late 1960s, and already on February 26, 1970, the revised and improved text, in accordance with the political conditions of the time, entered into force [14: 31].

In the document presented to the Ministry of Religions, in particular in the draft version, there was even a change in the official name of the Church. Instead of "Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church" it was proposed to use "Orthodox Autocephalous Church in the Polish People's Republic". Such an innovation was rejected because it emphasized political affiliation and made religion the prerogative of national minorities, not Poles.

The management apparatus of the Church underwent a significant transformation. The statute introduced a new body – the Metropolitan Council. It was a collegial organization. The main functions were reduced to providing assistance to the metropolitan in managing the administrative and economic sphere. It included: the metropolitan as the head, 12 councilors (9 clergymen and 3 secular persons), 4 deputy councilors (2 clergymen and 2 secular persons) [8]. The approval of the Internal Statute of the PAOC with the preservation of its official name was a significant event and meant the consolidation of equality between a Roman Catholic Pole and an Orthodox Pole at the legislative level. The document also recorded the final eparchial-parochial division of the Church, which was preserved until 1983 without large-scale changes, the process of teaching religion, features of missionary activity, and economic issues [8]. The new edition of the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic of 1976

did not make any significant changes to the section on the rights and freedoms of the citizen. Therefore, in the future, it was allowed to form religious organizations, to belong to already established ones, to freely choose a religion, to participate in rituals, and to promote one's views.

The most significant achievement of the leadership of the PAOC in the legal sphere is considered to be the issuance of a new Internal Statute. Work on its draft began in the late 1960s, and on February 26, 1970, it came into force. The approval of the PAOC statute with the preservation of its official name was a significant event and meant the consolidation of equality between a Polish Roman Catholic and a Polish Orthodox on a legislative level. The document also recorded the final division of the diocesan-parish structure of the Church, which remained unchanged until 1983, without significant changes in missionary activity and economic issues.

In 1989, the process of the collapse of the communist system in Central and Eastern European countries accelerated, leading to significant transformations in political life. Poland was not an exception for these changes. The authorities of the People's Republic of Poland (PRP), observing the rapid turn of the most important social vectors, were forced to resort to reforms. The Declaration of Freedom of Conscience and Religion, adopted on May 17, 1989, guaranteed not only the general rights of every citizen to choose their religious beliefs but also laid the groundwork for the adoption of the "Law on Relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the State". The Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC) was also interested in such regulation of relations with the secular authorities, as it aimed to normalize the internal situation and strengthen its own positions [14: 37].

Work on the "Resolution on Relations between the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the State" lasted for about a year and came into force on July 4, 1991. It contains the legal basis

for the functioning of the institution in the Republic of Poland: "The Orthodox Church in Poland is part of the Universal Orthodox Church and maintains unity with it in canonical and doctrinal matters. The PAOC, in its internal activities, utilize its own rights, freely disposes of the provided guarantees and jurisdiction".

Throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s, the activity of the PAOC was ensured by a number of normative legal acts. Among them were the Declaration of Guarantee of Freedom of Conscience and Religion; the Law on Social Security for the Clergy; the Order of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration on the detailed principles of systematizing acts of civil status, methods of keeping civil status books, their control, storage, provision, as well as samples of acts of civil status, copies, extracts, certificates, and protocols, which regulated the interaction, rights, and obligations of officially registered religious communities and organizations [15].

The authority overseeing the activities of the Orthodox Church in Poland is the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, in particular, the department of religious affairs. Its competence includes the audit of church funds, resolution of property issues, preparation of draft normative legal acts, and maintenance of contacts with the higher church hierarchy. In addition, according to Polish legislation, for the protection of civil rights and the prevention of crimes, the functioning of the PAOC is supervised by the Prosecutor's Office.

It is noteworthy that none of the metropolitans who headed the PAOC after World War II were Polish by nationality. One of the most influential leaders, Dionysius (Waledynski), was born in present-day Russia. His successors, Makary (Oksiuk) and Vasyl (Doroshkevych), came from Podlaskie. Stefan (Rudyk) was born in Lviv region, and Timothy (Shretter) in Rivne region. The current metropolitan of the PAOC, Sawa (Hrycuniak), is a native of Zamość Voivodeship, although he has repeatedly emphasized his non-Polish origin.

**Conclusions.** The declaration of the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in Poland led to its de facto dependence on the state power, which was mainly a supporter of Catholicism and hostile to Orthodoxy. The autocephalization of the Orthodox Church only partially stabilized the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Polish authorities. The Orthodox diocese interpreted the announcement of autocephaly as an opportunity for the further organization of the Orthodox Church on favorable terms, while repeatedly stressing that autocephaly cannot be completed until the Diet has adopted a legislative act regulating the legal position of the church and an internal statute that had to be approved by the government of Poland. Instead, the freedom and independence of the Orthodox Church was ensured only in a general form by the declarations contained in the articles of the Polish Constitution, and other legal acts significantly limited the freedom of action of the church authorities.

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