

## **Kyiv Patriarchate moves closer to achieving autocephaly**

### **Culture**

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**A process that could take at least years - maybe decades - is slowly moving the Kyiv Patriarchate toward achieving official recognition as autocephalous Photo: Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko (left) talks with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Istanbul on April 9.**

Commentary by Andrew Sorokowski: Last April 17, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko called on Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. He was joined in this request by the heads of the two independent Orthodox churches in his country: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate (UOC-KP) and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, however, opposed the request. On April 19, Parliament voted to support the President's initiative. What is autocephaly? Literally, it is "self-headedness." That is, an autocephalous church has its own head, who does not report to any higher earthly authority — although it does recognize the spiritual authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. Furthermore, this hierarchy is elected by the church itself, not by some outside authority. The head of an autocephalous church may be a patriarch, a metropolitan, or an archbishop. How does autocephaly arise? Historically, autocephaly was granted by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Thus, the Patriarch recognized the autocephaly of the Bulgarian church in 870, and that of the Serbian Church in 1219. But some churches have simply declared themselves autocephalous, or begun to act as such. Thus, the Muscovite Church became de facto autocephalous in 1448; the Georgian Church declared its own autocephaly in 1917. Those autocephalies were formally recognized later. Often, the initiative for autocephaly comes from the secular power. In the middle ages, this could be a monarch or emperor. In the modern era, this was sometimes the government of a nation-state newly liberated from an empire. Thus Romania, formed in 1859 from formerly Ottoman-ruled Moldavia and Wallachia, passed a law on autocephaly in 1872; the Patriarch of Constantinople recognized this church's independence in 1885. The Directorate of the Ukrainian People's Republic issued a law on autocephaly in January 1919. Sometimes, a church attempts to grant autocephaly to one of its constituent parts. Thus, in 1970 the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church purported to grant autocephaly to its North American Metropolia, known as the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America. Thus was created the Orthodox Church of America. Most Orthodox churches, however, do not recognize the OCA's autocephaly. Does the Moscow Patriarchate have the sole right, as it claims, to grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church? It bases its claim on the fact that in 1685, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, then under Ottoman rule, transferred the Kyivan Metropolitanate to the jurisdiction of Moscow (whose autocephaly it had recognized in 1589). The validity of this transfer, however, has been challenged. Moreover, when in 1924 the Ecumenical Patriarch issued a *tomos* (decree) of autocephaly to the Orthodox church in Poland, which then included the Orthodox Ukrainians of western Volhynia, it effectively declared the 1685 transfer uncanonical. If Moscow's jurisdiction over the Kyivan Metropolitanate is invalid, then it has no right to grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian church. Furthermore, the Kyivan church, founded in 988, is older than the Muscovite church, which can be dated back only to the 14th

century. For a "daughter church" to give autocephaly to its "mother" would be anomalous. Assuming, then, that it is the Ecumenical Patriarchate that is entitled to grant autocephaly, to which Ukrainian church would it grant it? Since the UOC (KP) and the UAOC both supported the President's appeal, it is they who would become autocephalous. Of course, it would behoove them to unite in advance of any such grant. But these two Ukrainian Orthodox churches are already acting as de facto autocephalous churches. Indeed, one of them has the word "autocephalous" in its name. It would thus seem more correct to speak of the Ecumenical Patriarch "recognizing" their autocephaly rather than "granting" or "creating" it. And since they are not regarded as "canonical" in the Orthodox world, it might be technically better to first recognize their legitimacy, and then their autocephaly. Can the Ecumenical Patriarch do this by himself? He is reportedly consulting with his synod, which would have to agree. Some opponents claim that without the consent of all the Orthodox churches of the world, autocephaly should not be granted, as it changes the structure of world Orthodoxy. At the least, the opinions of the various Orthodox churches should be solicited. Naturally, the Moscow Patriarchate is busy both in Ukraine and the outside world agitating against such a grant of autocephaly to the UOC-KP and the UAOC, which it regards as schismatic. But its ability to influence world Orthodoxy is limited, as became evident when it opposed the pan-Orthodox conference on Crete in 2016. And in the 1990s, it failed to head off a revolt by a part of the Estonian Orthodox church, which came under the direct jurisdiction of Constantinople. How it will fare in the Ukrainian case, which is more serious, cannot be predicted.

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