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Peace Ethics in the context of Russia's War against the Ukraine –

12 Suggestions for what churches and religious communities can contribute to reconstruct justice and peace in East Slavic countries

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9, NIV)

Dr. Dietrich Werner, Berlin

In July 2022 the founder and president of Globethics in Geneva, Prof. Christoph Stückelberger, had published **Twelve Proposals Towards Negotiated Peace** in the conflict Russia-Ukraine.[1] This essay here is inspired by the conviction that his proposals are still of relevance today and deserve public attention and further discussion. The ecumenical dialogue about peace ethics in the context of this geo-political conflict as has been initiated by organizations such as CEC[2] and WCC[3] needs to be intensified in order to strengthen the role of faith-actors in political processes leading to steps for peace with justice in a situation which has become a geopolitical impasse and source of ever more tensions.

The following reflections renew the concern for deepening the commitment to ecumenical peace ethics and explores practical ways for advancing the cause and plea for a significant churches' contribution for achieving a diplomatic solution for the conflict.

1) Keeping a door open for a negotiated peace beyond a constant escalation of military actions and destructive warfare: How to turn a lose-lose-situation into a win-win-scenario for both sides?

The passionate proposal, made by Prof. Christoph Stückelberger in July 2022, to keep a door open for a negotiated peace between Russia and the Ukraine and not to allow the dynamic of constant military escalation to get out of control by the delivery of ever more sophisticated arms is more relevant than ever. Representatives of religious and Christian organizations which have a commitment for peace ethics should not allow to be side-lined in a political climate where each modest proposal for more space for diplomatic initiatives is immediately met with sceptical rejection and suspected as playing into the cards of the dominant military power which has one-sidedly started this imperialist war.[4] It is not a convincing starting point for a responsible approach to peace ethics to assume that this conflict can only be solved on the battle field and can only be answered in military terms. Neither a complete military victory of the Ukraine nor a military victory of Russia will be able to provide a solid base for a lasting peace in the region. A years-long protracted war of attrition which would bring both sides or only one side at the brink of a total collapse and exhaustion of their military, human and economic potentials is no solution either. Rather it would bring all related countries into the captivity of a dangerous vicious circle of a closed military logic of winning or losing all. Instead, responsible peace ethics needs to seriously wrestle with the question of how to prepare for an exit scenario from the military logic and how to possibly turn a lose-lose-situation into a win-win-scenario for both sides – a difficult question in deed in a situation where one side is the key aggressor. This is possible only if peace ethics – against all suspicions to become corrupted and blind to the imperialist power interests of one side - allows itself to seriously ask for the long-term interests of both sides in order to find some possible common ground for a solution of negotiation in some nearer or more distant future.

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[1] See: https://www.globethics.net/blogs/-/blogs/ukraine-russia-twelve-proposals-towards-negotiated-peace

[2] CEC Assembly Ukraine Hearing: Preparing for Peace: Role of churches in transforming violence, in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-GEjZ451gU; https://ceceurope.org/churches-hope-just-peace-ukraines-future;

[3] See: https://ceceurope.org/unpacking-peace-cec-webinar-fosters-honest-exchange-about-war-ukraine; https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-ukraine

[4] In the same direction see the excellent contribution of Martina Fischer: "Wie ist dieser Krieg zu deeskalieren und zu beenden? Perspektiven für Sicherheit und einen gerechten Frieden in der Ukraine und Europa", in: https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/523377/wie-ist-dieser-krieg-zu-deeskalieren-und-zu-beenden-teil-1/ and: https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/523379/wie-ist-dieser-krieg-zu-deeskalieren-und-zu-beenden-teil-2/

2) Overcoming both simplifying and idealistic as well as escalating and military dominated approaches in peace ethics: reclaiming the predominance of politics over against military dynamics

Peace Marches during the Easter period 2023 sometimes have been too simplistic as publicising slogans like ("Frieden schaffen ohne Waffen"), to create peace without arms, is just an idealistic vision in itself. While the pacifist tradition is a precious and visionary element within the history of Christian peace ethics, which is not renouncing the right to collective self-defence, but explores ways of collective non-military resistance and disobedience to military means of occupation and assault, the key slogan as such does not in itself answer sufficiently the needs and real situation of a country which has been one-sidedly attacked by a massive military invasion like the Ukraine by Russia. The right to defend one-self either by non-military means or even by the limited use of military arms cannot be denied by a responsible Christian peace ethics even though individuals might legitimately opt for a complete pacifist position and join the defence of their home country by non-military means as many do. However, the application of the ultima ratio in the use and deployment of military means of self-defence cannot present itself as the only and sufficient answer either to an ongoing territorial, geopolitical and cultural conflict. The great danger of becoming involved in a military conflict always lies in the tendency that the military dynamic easily takes on its own self-regulatory dynamic and reduces the minds of politicians, military leaders and the media very swiftly to becoming confined to military categories only. Less and less energies then are devoted to exit-strategies and the creative proposals for a complementary and more comprehensive strategy of diplomatic and negotiated solutions. The "hard facts" of military power dominate and present themselves as superior than the "soft strategies" of negotiations which seem to be less effective than the direct power of military arms. The protracted continuation of a military war thus easily can have a dangerous effect on the political and ethical mindset of politicians and media, as people get addicted to a militaristic reductionism in their worldview, thinking and perceptions. In studies about militarism from earlier decades (WCC study on militarism from the 70is)[5], it has often been stated that militarism transforms the whole of society, as the space for civil society organizations is often shrinking during these periods of a dominant rule of military actors. In cases like this the freedom of opinion gets severely and easily limited as any critical question is often seen immediately as an act of treason and disloyalty. Also, the heroization of military acts and personnel is spreading like a cancerous disease to cope with and counter the pain of the immense losses of lives which are occurring on both sides, including a dramatic increase of violence against women in families and in society in general. Even more complex, dangerous and unpredictable is a situation in which several private and competing armies and military leaders are active and involved, partly supported by official government forces, partly under the command of those regional and self-appointed warlords who are financing them (like in Russia). The question of how to disarm regional military actors like these and to restore a clear line of democratic state control and a demilitarization effort is a challenge which needs much more attention as either a failed state or a civil war between regular and irregular armies can otherwise become the outcome fairly soon. Overcoming both simplifying, idealistic and individualizing as well as escalating, heroizing and militarizing approaches to peace ethics is a task therefore for all related sides, the urgency of which can be compared to a process of exorcism, of driving out the evil demons of reducing everything to categories of military power and military technologies. In that case the other side is often reduced to a nameless enemy and a factor to be eliminated - a dehumanized human mindset can unintentionally be the consequence if we allow a military logic to dominate our reasoning. Breaking the vicious cycle of counter-violence, revenge and the multiplication of mutual threats needs some first steps of courageous dissenters from both sides.[6] We need to be reminded by the commitments taken by the World Council of Churches assembly in Karlsruhe on an undisputable priorization for international projects of peace building over against ongoing trends of militarization: "Increased military spending inevitably comes at the cost of essential investment in peacebuilding, the elimination of extreme poverty, climate action, a just transition to renewable energy, and other investments in sustainable development and economic justice that are necessary for true human security and global stability. The direction of even more financial resources away from these purposes and

[5] Se: Wolfgang Huber: Militarism. Some theological perspectives, in. Ecumenical Review April 1978, Volume30, Issue2, page 155-165, in: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1758-6623.1978.tb03512.x

[6] See on the background of this commitment to overcome the logic and temptation of a reductionist militarization of conflicts: Antje Haider-Rottwilm: Krieg in der Ukraine - Ist der „Vorrang der Gewaltfreiheit" überholt?, in: https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/22.11.08-Friedenskirche-_Heerstrasse_fin.pdf

towards the means of making war is self-defeating and unacceptable."[7] Seen in this perspective responsible peace ethics is always an act of resistance over against a culture of militarization of mindsets and a counter-cultural movement which demands proper nurture and well-organized international connectivity to be sustained. Replacing a logic of military defence and retaliation by a logic of building peace by non-violent means is a demanding exercise and needs an ethically highly reflected approach, it often, but not always can be more successful than a military escalation. But it needs people prepared to enter a risky path and to swim against the stream. Churches and religious organizations should and can provide such a ground and safe space for nurturing a culture of dialogue and ethical sensitiveness which is the precondition for any meaningful long-term process of a negotiated peace in the end. The continuation of the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Europe thus is an urgent mandate for all churches concerned.[8] The voices of important think tanks such as Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker Stiftung need to be strengthened which has argued: "Krieg aber kann und darf Politik nicht ersetzen; die Politik ist in der Pflicht alle Möglichkeiten zu nutzen, den Krieg in und um die Ukraine nicht in einen dritten „Großen Krieg" entgleiten oder treiben zu lassen, sondern im Clausewitz'schen Sinne zu seinem Ende zu bringen und eine tragfähige Grundlage für den Ausgleich unterschiedlicher Interessen unter der Bedingung des Friedens zu schaffen. Die Zeit drängt!".[9]

3) Dissociating religious identities, rigid nationalistic loyalities and imperialist dreams: towards an agreed policy of protection of minorities rights and respect for territorial integrity

One of the most tragic factors in the current conflict between Ukraine and Russia is that the majority of people on both nations belong to Christian faith, which has as one of its essentials the commandment to love God and love one's neighbour as you love yourself. How to reconcile this terrible fratricidal war with essential principles of one's own religious identity? This is only possible by a massive distortion and a bending of essential principles of Christian faith. The reputation of the Russian Orthodox Church globally as well as within the community of other orthodox churches has unfortunately suffered greatly from the deliberate misuse and distortion of faith principles by its Patriarch Kirill who has justified the war as an eternal and even holy spiritual war against the evil forces and moral decay of the West.[10] It is clear that the line of thought of Patriarch Kyrill is not shared by all of the priests of the Russian Orthodox church within Russia, therefore on should be very careful with and avoid generalized statements about a "Putin's church".[11] However, what is at stake here is a fundamental purification and reorientation process of the Russian Orthodox tradition and its relation to nationalistic loyalities and even to imperialist dreams. Also a more nuanced perception and overcoming of the demonization of western civilization and culture is highly needed as it cannot be painted in such a black and white dualistic and contrasting perception as often seems to be proposed in statements of the Russian Orthodox Church. It is not much known, but very important to realize that there are minority circles of engaged Christian women and men both in Russia as well as in the Ukraine which pray for each other and for their respective countries in order to overcome violence, demonization and hatred between Russians and Ukraine – the power of prayer should by no means be underestimated. Common prayers by groups from both sides might be the most important and non-violent means for promoting a no-hate policy and culture both for Russian and for Ukrainian believers and to overcome the ideology of a sacred war. Pantelis Kalaitzidis from Volos Academy in Greece in a highly interesting research paper had stated: "'Ethnotheology' or 'national Orthodoxy,' i.e., the understanding and definition of the church in ethnic and national terms, is a centuries-old

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[7] "The Things That Make For Peace: Moving the World to Reconciliation and Unity", Statement of the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, German, Declaration WCC 2022, in: https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-things-that-make-for-peace-moving-the-world-to-reconciliation-and-unity

[8] Matthew Ross/Jin Yang Kim: Seek Peace and Pursue It Reflections on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Europe, WCC Publications & Globethics.net, 2022, in: https://www.globethics.net/documents/10131/27303987/PJP4_9782889314706_WEB.pdf

[9] In: https://neue-entspannungspolitik.berlin/primat-der-vernunft/; see also: https://www.cfvw.org/files/cfvw/pdf/04_DENKSCHRIFT_i%20d%20KRISEN%20u%20ZEIT_c.pdf

[10] See: https://orthodoxtimes.com/no-religion-can-justify-the-war-in-ukraine/; Anna M. Solarz/Iuliia Korniichuk: The Reactions of Orthodox Churches to Russia's Aggression towards Ukraine in the Light of the Postsecular Approach to IR Studies, in: https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/4/515

[11] See some of the letters of priests in Russia part of which were published and circulated openly: https://catholicherald.co.uk/i-cant-stand-the-lies-the-priests-letter-rocking-the-kremlin/; https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/stop-the-war-russian-orthodox-leader-on-why-hundreds-of-brave-priests-are-joining-his-campaign/12651.article

problem of the Orthodox Church, the main and most serious challenge the latter has faced since the fall of Byzantium in 1453. It is a challenge that annihilates its eucharistic and ecclesiological self-awareness, as well as its unity and mission in the world… the Pan-Orthodox Council of Constantinople (with the exception of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Patriarchate of Moscow), clearly condemned ethnophyletism in 1872 by characterizing it as "heresy" and a distortion of the authentic Christian faith and the Orthodox tradition. The reason for this conciliar condemnation was the establishment, based on ethnicity, of a separate Bulgarian Exarchate within the canonical territory of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and therefore the theological justification of a tendency inherent in Eastern Orthodoxy. But while the conciliar condemnation was supposed to stop or at least delay the expansion of ethnophyletism among the Orthodox, it was exactly the opposite that happened: i.e., the emergence and multiplication of national autocephalous churches, with the initiative and the support of the respective newly created nation states."[12] Without a critical rethinking of the relationship between Christian identities and nationalism there is no basis for an agreed policy of protection of minorities rights and respect for territorial integrity, which is an indispensable component of any peace solution.

The critical reflection of the intersections between orthodox identities and nationalism has become a major debate in some leading circles of Diaspora orthodox theologians since some years, now intensified due to the tragic events in the Ukraine war.[13] This is also accompanied by an upswing of orthodox peace ethics in other orthodox traditions outside Russia[14] (following particularly the Ecumenical Patriarch's Synodical Statement on Orthodox Ethics "For the Life of the World"[15]), the critique of the tradition of Russkji Mir teachings[16] (and its roots in misleading ethno-theologies as well as its imperialistic delineations) as well as the spread of dissenting voices for peace ethics and human rights within fellowships of Russian orthodox priests and Christian laypeople many of whom risk a lot for their public or non-public voices. This needs to be recognized and made more known also in other churches. Who knows and where is sufficient public knowledge about the fact that even in the Ukraine there are minority Christian traditions (for instance from Adventist and evangelical traditions) which maintain a strongly pacifist tradition and refuse to be forced into military warfare but instead try to resort to non-violent means of resistance and protest again occupation?[17] Churches which have gone and experienced the disastrous consequences of a religious nationalism and imperialist expansionism in their own history have played and should continue to play a vital role in a learning and ecumenical dialogue process which needs to aim at dissociating faith identities from rigid nationalistic concepts while certainly allowing for a genuine Christian patriotism which can unfold itself without in itself being directed and constructed against another nation and different national identities.[18] The failure of past ecumenical efforts in dialogue with Orthodox traditions plays a significant role here as we need to identify the dialogue on ethics of church, the

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[12] Pantelis Kalaitzidis: Orthodox Theology Challenged by Balkan and East European Ethnotheologies, in: Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age, Brill/Schöningh 2022, 108–159; in: https://brill.com/edcollchap-oa/book/9783657793792/BP000015.xml

[13] See: Pål Kolstø/Helge Blakkisrud: The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015, Edinburgh University Press 2016; See also: Carlo J.V. Caro: Vladimir Putin's "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality", in: The Rule of Law Post August 31, 2022, Centre of Ethics and the Rule of Law, University of Pennsylvania, in: https://www.penncerl.org/the-rule-of-law-post/vladimir-putins-orthodoxy-autocracy-and-nationality/

[14] See earlier initiatives from Rumanian Orthodox church tradition, in: https://www.oikoumene.org/news/peace-ethics-debated-by-experts-from-both-strands-of-orthodoxy

[15] See: FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD. Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church 2020, in: https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos; y

[16] See: Brandon Galagher/Pantelis Kalaitzidis: A Declaration on the "Russian World" (Russkii Mir) Teaching Coordinators of the Drafting Committee, in: https://brill.com/view/journals/mist/39/2/article-p269_8.xml?ebody=pdf-63199; also in: https://ucu.edu.ua/en/news/deklaratsiya-pravoslavnyh-bogosloviv-svitu-pro-russkij-mir/

[17] See: https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/sabbat-statt-krieg-eine-transkarpatische-fluchtgeschichte-dlf-9b65f2a1-100.html

[18] Both in dialogues of EKD or Roman Catholic Churches with the Russian Orthodox Church as well as with the Serbian Orthodox Church issues like this have been long on the agenda, with limited success and need for continuation. Certainly the attitude towards nationalism is a continuous problem also for protestant churches (for instance in their critique regarding right wing populist ideologies). See: Simone Sinn/Eva Harastra (eds): Resisting Exclusion. Global Theological Responses to Populism, EVA Leipzig, LWF 2019, in: https://www.eva-leipzig.de/material/leseproben/pdf/9783374061754_LP.pdf

nations and the global community – a topic which once was on the agenda already of the famous Life and Work Conference in Oxford on Church, Community and State in the year 1937[19] in the context of emerging fascism in Germany, but lessons of which need to be learned again by both Orthodox and Protestant Churches in Eastern Europe. May the words and warnings of Pantelis Kalaitzidis and others behind the critical statement against the Russkji Mir ideology be heard in all affected circles: "We, the Orthodox (mainly of the traditionally "Orthodox" countries) have been identified so much with the individual national churches and local traditions, we have combined Orthodoxy so much with the individual national narratives, and linked faith so closely with traditions and habits that we have largely lost the awareness of catholicity, ecumenicity, and universality and thus reduced Orthodoxy to the realm of custom, ancestral heritage, and ethnocultural identity."[20]

4) Addressing the psycho-social and geo-political traumata from the past of both sides – moving beyond geopolitical block-thinking

As any full-scale military war presents a combination of military actions, political actions and incalculable steps in a communication's war, also the current conflict is full of ideological warfare elements and distorted messages from both sides. How to deconstruct the enemy image which is reconfirmed every day by both proper as well as fake news, how to read the sentiments behind sweeping judgements on "all Ukrainian" or "all Russian" people and how to demilitarize the language and ideological rhetorics of war is a key task for churches and religious communities. Religious actors by their essence have and should employ a capacity to look beyond the current framework of the war, to overcome demonization of the other side and to keep their eyes open on issues which affect the common good of all and the whole inhabited earth. Any full-scale war is also the result of a failed process of listening to each other in the decades before. While Russia has been the main aggressor in this conflict and the task is on the table of how to get away from the image of an aggressor country again, the question also is what are the roots of its perceptions of the origins of the conflict and what has been the role of western powers in aggravating the situation? Is there a hidden trauma or a failed process of readjusting its national narrative and identity involved in the different ways which are used and repeated to justify the involvement in the war? Where does the trauma of Russia to see itself as a constant victim of western powers and cultural changes, even in weird and exaggerated versions - as a target of a massive western strategy to be annihilated and to disappear from the world's landscape come from? Is there something behind the political propaganda elements which needs to be still seriously listened to – like the resistance over against the perceived mono-linear geopolitical global order concept of the US? How to overcome a strategy of an isolating self-victimization in dealing with the experiences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 which at that time has been signed and authorized by the presidents of the core states Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia, and was not imposed by western powers? What have been the traumata and the deepest longings on the other side of Ukrainian people in the Maidan revolution? And is there a way for reformulating these desires in a way which could potentially be reconciled with the interests of Russia to protect the Russian speaking minorities within Eastern Ukraine? Any long-term effort for preparing a common negotiating table for future talks needs to be aware of these hidden ideological perceptions and unsolved or perceived traumata of both sides.

If Russia views the alleged Eastern extension of the real of NATO states as a major threat to its own security, why cannot the concepts of neutrality beyond any former military alliance and of common security formats for the future of the Ukraine territorial integrity be explored again in order to develop a concept of common security in the whole of Europe which is viewed as non-threatening, but still assuring for both sides? Any attempt to move beyond the present impasse must reconnect again to the principles which were spelled out by the OSCE concepts for a common security partnership architecture in Europe and the basic principles of the "Paris Charter of a New Europe" from 1990 which were meant to include Russia.[21]

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[19] J.H. Oldham. The Oxford Conference Official Report 1937, in: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f8/The_Oxford_conference%28official_report%29_%28IA_oxfordconference00univ%29.pdf

[20] See: bid.: https://brill.com/edcollchap-oa/book/9783657793792/BP000015.xml#ref_FN150126

[21] See Charter for a New Europe 1990, at that time signed by Russia!: https://www.osce.org/mc/39516

5) Preparing for a multilateral reconstruction program of religious sites in the Ukraine – focussing on the cultural and religious dimensions of healing of memories

The most precious sticking point for the cultural and religious identity of people in many regions is the monastery, the church building or the building of a mosque people are gathering around and even use for humanitarian emergency gatherings if nothing else is available. An overwhelming number of more than 500 sacred places, church building and mosques have been intentionally destroyed or severely damaged in the course of the Ukraine war since February 2022.[22] Destroyed sacred buildings are the most visible signs of desperation and the loss of identity which will deter people from returning to their home cities, local villages and destroyed neighbourhoods. Only when reconstruction of the sacred sited and key building begins and takes place, this was shown in Syria, this always is sending a message of encouragement to populations of refugees and IDPs that a time might come when it is safe enough and appropriate and promising to return to their villages and cities ad to let a new form of peace emerge. The reconstructing of sacred building thus can become the core and inner heart of reconstructing settlements, infrastructure and living communities in a country which has suffered from war. What would happen if local religious communities, Russian Orthodox and Protestant and Catholic churches in Russia and beyond would campaign for collecting donations to rebuild sacred building, churches and mosques in their neighbouring country Ukraine, in order to put up a sign that a new beginning should be possible?! Certainly, this needs to be allowed by the state which currently might be unrealistic, but it could be perhaps started informally and slowly. The reconstruction of religious sites and places sends a strong signal of reconciliation, of blessings and determination for a different future which should not be underestimated. It will take several generations probably to cope with the wounds which have been created by this horrible war between Russia and the Ukraine. But churches need to think beyond the present impasse and need to bring in and explore symbolic actions of reconciliation and healing of memories already now and independent from political actors. Churches can start processes of inter-regional reconstruction partnerships on their own which are putting pressures on politicians and send a political signal within a country that a population is ready and able to move ahead towards a future beyond hatred and enmity! It is very encouraging to know that Baptist churches in Europe for instance have started to create a major fund already for the rebuilding of sacred sites already which currently is located and nurtured in Estonia.

6) Reconstructing the credibility and vitality of ancient orthodox spirituality as a unifying and reconciling factor between different ethnic and national identities – getting involved with critical orthodox minorities

The credibility and vitality of ancient orthodox spirituality can be revitalized and reimagined only if it is taken seriously that the Church always has an incarnational character and thus is both enculturated in each regional or national culture, but at the same time also the Church always remains distinct from any given culture and national entity in expressing its transnational, its inter-cultural outreach and its transcendence. If the Church is identified rigidly and indiscriminately with a closed national or ethic tradition and culture it is losing its eschatological flavour and potential to transcend national and cultural boundaries. Then Christianity is turned into a rigid and closed Christian tribal ideology which is of service only to the state, the nation, to any nationalistic and rigid or fundamentalist ideology. The global church can stay and serve as a unifying factor between different people of cultures, national identities or language groups only as long as it maintains this intercultural and eschatological outlook , in being “in the world, but not from the world”.[23] There are groups today on both sides of the conflict, Russia as well as Ukraine, who belong to that small sector of orthodox

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[22] See: https://www.oikoumene.org/news/500-churches-and-religious-sites-destroyed-in-ukraine-during-the-war#:~:text=At%20least%20494%20religious%20buildings,the%20Institute%20for%20Religious%20Freedom.; https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2023/february/ukrainian-churches-damaged-russia-war-religious-freedom-irf.html

[23] Pantelis Kalaitzidis: Orthodox Theology Challenged by Balkan and East European Ethnotheologies, in: Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age, Brill/Schöningh 2022, 108–159; in: https://brill.com/edcollchap-oa/book/9783657793792/BP000015.xml

Christianity which remains in critical distance to any nationalistic instrumentalization of orthodox faith from either political side and stresses the reconciling and unifying function of orthodox spirituality in all the different settings as well as the independence from any exclusive national loyalities. While it is certainly difficult to maintain this critical distance from the nationalistic mainstream in the context of an ongoing war, it is the task of religious peace ethics to connect to those who are potential bridgebuilders between the frontiers and who speak a language which can communicate both to the core of Christian values as well as to people on both sides of the conflict. Perhaps other orthodox churches and international orthodox networks, particularly might be from Serbian Orthodox tradition or Bulgarian orthodox tradition can play a mediating and convening role and provide a protected space and hospitality for those to talk with each other from both sides who cannot speak up in their own contexts and are also too limited in their free circulation that they can easily meet in one of the two countries. We should look again into the tradition of ecumenical peace and work camp tradition in the international Student Christian Movement (SCM) and early beginnings of the international ecumenical movement to see what of their traditional working methods and forms could be translated and used again for current approaches to reconstruct a common sense of learning and listening in rebuilding a mentality and common principles for peace ethics in Eastern Europe. A vital contribution could be provided by joint courses on ecumenical peace ethics by distant learning methodologies offered by an institution like Globethics or ecumenical scholarship funds for young intellectuals from both sides which would allow to study together in a third country and allowing for mutual listening and learning (like in the early phase of ecumenical scholarships WCC allowed for early peace building contacts between the younger generations of German churches and churches of the Allied Forces in the post Second World War period).

7) Strengthening people to people relationships on both sides by bringing together non-aligned civil society actors for joint ethics in truth and reconciliation committees

In a situation in which a full-scale war is fought and easily can be further escalating each day it is natural that the central state authorities want to exercise full control and keep all decisions in their hands. But in the long run even autocratic or full-scale totalitarian styles of governments must realize that they need the people as subjects of historical processes relating and supporting both war and peace. It is the people which have to pay the price of an ongoing war and it is the people which have to agree on conditions of a lasting peace which provides security and proper living conditions to all. It is democratic means which bring down despotic rulers, not a sanctions regime which leads to the hardening of frontiers on both sides and particularly a sanctions discipline which cuts ties and exchange possibilities with intellectuals, universities, city twin-partners and churches from both sides which are so desperately needed to prepare for a post-war scenario in long-term perspectives. There is a massive lack of attempts so far to bring together people to people from both sides, either in real presence (which certainly is more difficult), but at least digitally by zoom or other communication means and social media. War journalists and self-appointed military bloggers try to exploit the situation in offering themselves and their material as part of a more and more aggressive communication campaign which builds more enmity and hatred instead of sowing seeds of peace and more understanding. Why should it not become the task of churches to nurture the seeds of a civil society movement for peace, truth and reconciliation by installing social media platforms for bereaved parents of killed children, widows of soldiers killed, handicapped people from both sides having to cope with severe injuries due to the war, groups of people affected by post-traumatic diseases from both sides assisting each other and being assisted by pastoral and psychiatric experts? What the Parents Circle has done in terms of trauma healing between bereaved Palestinian and Israeli parents who have lost children due to terror attacks of the other side, can serve as an inspiring example. The occasion of the recent assembly of CEC in Tallin was a unique opportunity to explore joint activities in this regard for the future![24] The need for post-traumatic treatments, for counselling and also for family reunions and coping strategies for families which find themselves at opposite ends of the political spectrum is and will be immense. Religious communities and churches are known to be able to provide such services and also the needed protected safe spaces which can provide a vital means of healing and reconstruction. The experience of South Africa has shown that without properly installed Truth and

[24] See: https://2023cecassembly.org/

Reconciliation Committees the traumatization and current impunity of perpetrators during years of cruelty and gross violations of human rights cannot be properly healed and dealt with.

8) Deepening the commitment for human rights work on both sides by establishing a joint Ukrainian Russian Human Rights Commission and War Crimes Monitoring - NGO in both countries

Tragically what is sacrificed first in a military escalation of regional conflicts and tensions is the validity of human rights, the rule of legal order and democratic principles of law, legislative frameworks and international human rights treaties, even the applicability of key achievements of humanitarian laws for prisoners of war and the avoiding of civil casualties, including the right for conscientious objection. The brutalization of the mental mindset goes hand in hand with a brutalization in media coverage, in behavioural standards of soldiers and superiors in the army as well as the general awareness of a universal code of conduct and ethical values within a given society. If it takes one year to reconstruct the physical damage a war has inflicted on one village or town, it might take ten years (this might be still optimistic) to reconstruct the inner mental realm of values and ethical standards which have suffered under the brutalization of images, behaviours and communication modes within that same community. The ethical civilization and set of values of humanity is a precious good which should never be taken lightly or neglected as something which is to follow political peace building automatically. Therefore, efforts for establishing networks of concerned peace ethics, democratic values, principles of good governance and standards of moral and ethical behaviours in a civilized humanity should be established as soon as possible on both sides of the conflict. Regaining common ethical values and orientations is part of rebuilding a society after its almost total collapse in a war like situation or in a totalitarian disfiguring of what the essence and dignity of a society should be. No society is exempt from criticism and potential for renewal in terms of the universal validity of human rights and the protection of human dignity even of the weakest member of human society, the children, the elderly, the differently abled people. This applies also for western societies. It should be explored whether deepening the commitment for human rights work on both sides can be strengthened by establishing a joint Ukrainian Russian Human Rights and War Crimes Monitoring - NGO in both countries and involving also other Western and Eastern European countries.

9) Settling the territorial disputes around the regions of Eastern Ukraine as well as Crimea by engaging in a five stages process of demilitarization

The gravity of the current conflicts and the claims which are laid on territories which belong to a different state demands for a comprehensive strategy for peaceful negotiations on settling the territorial disputes, which should at least involve the following five or six essential phases:

- exchange of all prisoners of war,
- commonly agreed ceasefire,
- withdrawal of foreign troops from Ukrainian territory,
- interim deployment of UN security forces in disputed territories,
- joint negotiation committee on a common security concept for neutral territories
- including guarantees for ethnic and language minorities which should enjoy life in territories they have lived in for decades, the complete renunciation of any enforced resettlement of populations or children against their will and possibilities to be educated in their mother tongue without being discriminated against.

10) Disarming political language: Renouncing any rhetorics of a "regime change," of a "wiping away" or "erasing" the national identity of the Ukraine or a perceived western intention for a "complete destruction of Russia" and reconstructing concepts of common security with the inclusion of Russia

Building for the potentials of a future peace and mutual win-win scenarios includes a mandatory disarmament of language and political rhetorics used to fuel the current conflict on all related sides. Thus implies a complete renouncing of any rhetorics referring to an intended "regime change," a "de-nacification", of a

strategy for “wiping away” or “erasing” the national identity of the Ukraine or also any ideological warfare rhetorics referring to any western intention for a “complete destruction of Russia” is demanded and should be publicly declared for by churches and religious communities as soon as possible (as was alluded to already in section 4). Constructing peace in this area again can only take place by returning to basic principles of the Paris Charter for a New Europe from 1990 and reconstructing concepts of common security in Europe with the inclusion of Russia, which a few years ago had already be laid out by the OSCRE process and the Helsinki principles.

Churches should also apply similar standards and political consistency in their approaches to ecumenical peace ethics: Why does the majority of our politicians vote for a military solution to the Ukraine conflict where a major part of the country is occupied by foreign Russian troops, whereas in the Middle East conflict, which also is the result of protracted wars since decades and reflects the history of two different processes of traumatization of both Jewish and Palestinian people, nobody would publicly dare to demand for a campaign to arm the Palestinian people although since many years a large percentage of their original territory is occupied by another army represented by Israels military? Churches should be sensitive and wise enough to avoid two different standards in situations which have to do with dimensions of a military occupation of claimed territory. Churches have learned from their involvement in different contexts that military arms export and military escalation never will provide a solid ground for a lasting system of peace and justice for both sides, therefore it needs to be spelled out what potential solutions might provide which primarily resort to diplomatic means and negotiations centred on relevant approaches to peace and justice.

11) Preparing innovative mental, political and cultural channels for reopening scientific, cultural and religious dialogue and higher education cooperation between both countries, Ukraine and Russia, including their western and Asian neighbours

Western European Governments and the US government have been fast to impose ever more and new rounds of sanctions on Russia with the understandable intention to avoid being accused to contribute to financing the war by making business with Russia in the fields of energy supplies, science and tourism. In the meantime, it has become clear that applying a rigid sanctions regime is a two-edged sword and has negative consequences not only for western countries and economies themselves (rising inflation rates and energy costs) but also hinder possible dialogue processes with leading intellectuals in Russia and on the other hand driving Russia and its struggling economy into the hands of its ally in the far East, i.e. into the hands of China. It is not of any advantage that western universities have blocked any major exchange with Russian universities and established exchange formats as this hinders the kind of critical dialogue and ethical and mental transformation process which need time, confidential spaces and trust building even in the midst of an ongoing war! Once again it becomes clear that regional conflicts of this world cannot be solved by the outdated spirit and order of a bipolar world order, a new geopolitical alignment even which puts America over against both of Russia and China, but only by new platforms of multilateral negotiations and an architecture of a multipolar world which has capacities enough not to get lost into endless regional conflicts which are unproductive for the survival of humankind, may they be in the Ukraine or around Taiwan in the Fast East, but do everything within given capacities to focus on the common priority issues of survival of humankind and a global ethics of peace, sustainability and climate justice.

12) **Preparing for a comprehensive educational rewriting of learning materials for history and political education on both sides (school books, university teaching handbooks, ethics handbooks) in order to avoid this conflict to be carried on and prolonged into the future generations**

Destroying a remaining genuine sense of brotherhood and sisterhood or at least historic commonalities between Ukrainians and Russians, which were there during several decades despite all political turmoil, has taken barely few weeks after the extremely violent aggression launched by Russia in 22 February 2014 and the subsequent full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 24 February 2022. The intention of forming a new alliance and affirming the alleged common cultural heritage of the Russkij Mir by means of launching a war can never be reached by violence. To heal the wounds of these huge and excessive transgressions of any civilized standards

of human behaviour a period of at least 10 to 20 years might be needed. It is realistic and imperative to face this long-term tasks of a historical process of rapprochement which essentially needs to involve to rewrite the narratives which have led and fuelled the war. Rewriting historical narratives which are then transmitted, continued and shared intergenerationally via school books and educational materials for adults as well as children is a monumental task which requires huge planning, sober discipline, precautionary means for fighting corruption and distortions, proper agreed standards and good controlling of joint school book commissions. Otherwise, the conflict and narratives of hatred and enmity will definitely continue into the next generations and might explode in a continuation of this conflict some generations later. Churches and religious communities which have a close affinity to how narratives are told, recollected, rewritten and shared have a key responsibility to launch a preparatory process towards formulating a draft Charta for Rewriting narratives of common Slavonic and national histories in a manner which does justice to history, but also try to heal current wounds (including conflicts within similar ecclesial traditions like currently between UOK and OKU in the Ukraine) – as otherwise the conflicts are doomed to persist for generations to come.