

# Legalization of the UGCC in the Light of Relations between the Greek Catholics and the Soviet Authority in Years 1988 – 1989

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In analysing the process of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church's (UGCC) exit out of its underground existence, it is worthwhile to observe the changing attitude of the Soviet authority towards the question of the UGCC's legalization: from very negative declarations to attempts of constructive solving the religious problem in Western Ukraine.

Some aspects of the legalization question, especially the relation of the underground church and Soviet state, were explained by the researchers B. Botsiurkiv<sup>1</sup>, M. Bourdeaux<sup>2</sup>, V. Jelens'kyj<sup>3</sup>, V. Paschenko<sup>4</sup>, and J. Stots'kyj<sup>5</sup>. However, up to now there is no complex research devoted to this theme, especially to the relations of the Soviet authority to the UGCC's legalization and rehabilitation. The sources are mainly represented by the unpublished documents from the archives of Communist Party in Lviv, published

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- 1 BOTSJURKIV, B.: The Ukrainian Catholic Church in the USSR at Time of Gorbachev. *Więź*, 1991, number (no.) 11 – 12, page (p.) 150 – 171.
  - 2 BOURDEAUX, M.: Ukrainian Imbroglia. *Tablet*, 1990, May 12, p. 4.
  - 3 JELENS'KYJ, V. J.: *Religion after Communism. Religious and Social Changes in the Process of Transformation of Central and Eastern European Societies: Focus on Ukraine*. Kyiv 2002, p. 288.
  - 4 PASCHENKO, V.: *Greek Catholics in Ukraine (from 40<sup>th</sup> of XX c. till now.)*. Poltava 2002, p. 616.
  - 5 STOTS'KYJ, J.: *The Religious Situation in Ukraine: Problems and Tendencies of the Development (1988 – 1997)*. Ternopil' 1999, p. 120.

documents in the periodical edition, interviews with the participants of these events, and by materials of the personal archives.

The purpose of this article is to present and analyse the attitude of different levels of Soviet representatives (local and general) to UGCC's legalization as well as the reaction of the hierarchy, clergy, and active laity on some declarations of the Soviet authority.

As a result of the Soviet authority's repressive pressure, the UGCC formally "stopped its existence" at the uncanonical Lviv sobor of March 8 – 10, 1946 through "reunion" with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The Ukrainian Greek Catholic hierarchy, and the part of clergy and laity which refused the imposed "orthodoxing" by the authorities, never accepted "liquidation" of their church. After Stalin's death and with the liberalization of the totalitarian regime in Khrushchev's "thaw", the Ukrainian Greek Catholics started to work towards UGCC official legalization. Numerous declarations of laity and clergy, unlawful public worship, the open pastoral activity of the underground Greek Catholic priests affirmed that the underground church declared and struggled for the renewal of its rights. The democratic transformation in the context of Gorbachev's new politics allowed the Greek Catholics to decisively speak out about the church legalization. So on August 4, 1987, two bishops, 19 priests and a great number of laity formally affirmed "*the departure out of underground*"<sup>6</sup>. The legalization movement headed by the Defence Committee of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church's Rights<sup>7</sup> during 1988 – 1989 got more attention and international publicity.

The state authority viewed the Greek Catholics' movement for the recognition of their rights only like "*the political affair of the anti-Soviet power*" inspired by the aggressive circles in the West. Konstantyn Harchev, the head of the Religion Affair Council of the USSR Cabinet Ministers, at the meeting of International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights on January 24 – 29, 1988, declared; "*we have no intention to renew the fascism in the USSR*"<sup>8</sup>, and during a meeting with the Greek Catholic Bishop Ivan Margitych, he accented that their affair was only "*the protection for the*

6 Archive of the Institute of Church History (A ICH), file 455, Interview with Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk, October 22, 1996, Kolomyia, Ivano-Frankivsk region.

7 The Defence Committee of the UGCC's Rights was the informal organization, led by layman Ivan Gel – former prisoner of consciousness and human rights defender. Its aim was to fight for the legalization of the UGCC.

8 Konstantyn Harchev against the recognition of Ukrainian Catholic Church (UCC). *The news from Rome*, 1988, no. 3, p. 4.

*political agency, especially Ukrainian Diaspora*”<sup>9</sup>. Representatives of the authority affirmed that the decision of this problem belonged exclusively to the sphere of church intercommunication as Greek Catholics “voluntarily” united with ROC, and therefore the state had no need to re-establish the UGCC<sup>10</sup>. With the intensification of the international pressure and activation of claim legalization at the end of 1980s, the authority in Moscow began to admit the possibility of recognizing of the UGCC, providing it would propagandize the ideology of the Soviet authority and deny “*the Roman orientation*”<sup>11</sup>. Jurij Smirnov, a representative of the Religion Affair Council, advanced the opinion about permission for registration of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic community. In September 1988 the possibility for *uniates* “to act legally” was declared, and a little later, in June 1989, after adopting the new religious legislation it was promised that registration of the UGCC community would begun<sup>12</sup>. Even M. Gorbachev on his visit to Poland acknowledged that in religious sphere the Soviet authority had made many mistakes. Also during his speech at plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Ukraine (September 28, 1989) he hinted at the necessity of seeking a dialogue with ideological opponents<sup>13</sup>.

However, party-state leaders of the UkrSSR remained at the old positions and definitely deprecated legalization of the UGCC, accusing Greek Catholics of “*the nationalistically-political and antisocial activity*”. So the secretary of the Ternopil regional committee, V. Ostrozhynskij in the report of July 28, 1988 declared that registration of the UGCC would lead up to “*serious split*”, cause “*the fermentation ... and transition of Orthodox laity*”, “*the fight for churches*”, and “*the destabilization of morally-political situation*”<sup>14</sup>. The representative of the Religion Affair Council in Lviv region, Ju. Reshetylo giving journal *Ludyna i svit* (A Human and the World) an interview, called *Greek Catholicism – “exclusively political phenomenon*”, whose adherents chased “*quite political aims: the split of people for*

9 Delegation of UCC with Vatican’s representatives in Moscow. *The Ukrainian Press Service*, 1988, no. 7 – 8, p. 6 – 7.

10 Short news. *The News from Rome*, 1988, no. 12, p. 6.

11 DATSKO, I.: Pope John Paul II and Ukrainian Catholic Church. *The news from Rome*, 1988, no. 10, p. 1 – 7.

12 DRABYNKO, A.: *Orthodoxy in the Post-totalitarian Ukraine*. Kyiv 2002, p. 288.

13 JELENS’KYJ, V. J.: *Religion after Communism*, p. 79. PASCHENKO, V.: *Greek Catholics in Ukraine*, p. 480.

14 The Ukrainian Catholic issue raised at Soviet Central Committee Conference. *Keston News Service*, 1989, 3. 8., p. 6.

*religion denomination...*” He underlined that clergy “*should leave political intrigue*”<sup>15</sup>. The Party functionaries of Lviv region in analytical document *For the Greek Catholic question* foresaw that permission for registration of the Greek Catholic community would lead to such undesirable consequences:

- cross out “*the centuries-old fight of the Ukrainian nation against union and Catholicism*”,
- consolidate “*anti-Soviet, anti-Russian, petty bourgeois and nationalistic moods*”,
- open the way for penetration of western stereotype of thinking and life mode,
- strengthen the influence over “*the enemy west centre*” – patriarchy UGCC and Vatican,
- bring to renewal not religious but “*religiously-political organization*”, which constantly “*served the occupants*” and “*accreted with Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism*”,
- provoke “*fermentation*” in the surroundings of Orthodox believers most of whom would return to Greek Catholicism and cause the stroke to “*loyal and peacemaking*” position of the ROC<sup>16</sup>.

The Soviet authority during 1988 – 1989 tried the most effectively to use the ROC as an opposition to Greek Catholics. The Orthodox *dvadtsiatky*<sup>17</sup> easily received permission for registration particularly in that settlement where the UGCC’ faithful actively acted and aimed to register their communities. So, for example, Orthodox parishes were registered in villages Kalynivka (Javoriv’s’kyj district), Dorozh (near Drohobych), Prybyn’ (Peremyshlans’kyj district), Nediľna (Starosambir’s’kyj district), Vystovychi (Sambir’s’kyj district), Susoliv (Sambir’s’kyj district), Mshana (Horodots’kyj district), Kupych Volja (Nesterov’s’kyj, now Zhovkiv’s’kyj, district), in which underground Greek Catholic communities actively acted<sup>18</sup>. Such steps of the ROC with authority permission not only unsatisfied spiritual and religious needs of people, but also far stronger deepened

15 RESHETYLO, J.: Religion or Policy. *Liudyna i svit*, 1989, no. 1, p. 18 – 22. The Interview with the representative of the Religious Affair Council of the UkrSSR Ministers’s Board in Lviv region J. J. Reshetylo. *Liudyna i svit*, 1990, no. 2, p. 33 – 35.

16 The State Archives of Lviv region (DALO), fund (f.) p-3, opys 62, sprava 370, folio 47 – 52.

17 According to the Soviet law twenty inhabitants were necessary for the registration of a religious community.

18 The news from Ukraine. *The Ukrainian Press Service*, 1989, no. 2, p. 7 – 8.

the confrontation between the UGCC on the one hand, and the authority along with the ROC on the other hand.

However, the tension of religious situation in Western Ukraine forced rare representatives of the local authority to look for a practical way for a constructional solution of growing problem. For witnessing Ivan Gel (a head of the Defence Committee) and a head of the Lviv government Bogdan Kotyk, from the beginning of 1989 actively helped the UGCC legalization movement giving confidential information about the authority steps against Greek Catholic activists<sup>19</sup>. The closer collaboration was arranged about at the meeting on September 15, 1989 with members of editorial staff of unofficial periodical – almanac *Evshan-zila* (Iryna and Ihor Kalynets', Ivan Grechko) and the magazine *Kafedra* (Michael Osadchyy) with B. Kotyk and the first secretary of Lviv Communist Committee Viktor Volkov. Just formally the talk was to be about these periodicals, but on the suggestion of both authority representatives the legalization question was discussed and the common document which later had to be represented in Moscow was prepared<sup>20</sup>. Two main demands were set:

- recognition of so-called Lviv sobor 1946 all the decisions illegal by the Soviet authority and ROC hierarchy;
- return of St. George Cathedral church in Lviv and other churches.

According to achieving agreements the role of “arbiter” in possible future controversies between clergy and communities had to belong to civil authority. The document is finished with the hope that the conflict could be avoided, if “*the historical injustice*” to Greek Catholics were removed and with the statement that “*the legalization of the UGCC is the really first important step on the way to lawful state and the mutual understanding with the world*”<sup>21</sup>.

The head of the underground church, the Archbishop Volodymyr (Sterniuk), on his side, tried through deputies from Lviv (Rostyslav Bratun, Jurij Sorochyk and Oleksander Vakarchuk) to raise a question of the UGCC at *Verhovna Rada* (Supreme Council) of UkrSSR<sup>22</sup>.

On the background of the fight of Greek Catholics for their rights, the Orthodox communities and priests in the Western Ukraine began to

19 A ICH, file T-29, Interview with Ivan Gel, October 21, 2003, Lviv.

20 Personal archives of Ivan Grechko. The letter of Ivan Grechko to archimandrite Ljubomyr Guzar from September 6, 1989.

21 Personal archives of Ivan Grechko. The Information about the state and needs of UCC in UkrSSR the day before its legalization from August 15, 1989.

22 PASCHENKO, V.: *Greek Catholics in Ukraine*, p. 489.

convert to the UGCC. One of the first was rev. Michael Nyskohuz, the parochial priest in Stara Sil' Staryj Sambir district, who together with the community, on May 5, 1989, declared to join the underground church<sup>23</sup>. However, the most famous and significant event for the other Orthodox parishes was the transit of Transfiguration church community in Lviv on October 29, 1989, at the head of rev. Jaroslav Chuhnij who the day before had been canonically taken by the Archbishop Sterniuk<sup>24</sup>. That day rev. Stepan Gryn'kiv with his community Schyrets' (town near Lviv) also transited<sup>25</sup>, on November 8, the jurisdiction of Archbishop Volodymyr was taken by rev. Ihor Kohut, the parochial priest in Dobrosyn and Pylly (Nesterovsky district)<sup>26</sup>. In sum, by the end of November 1989 in the Lviv region only more than a hundred ROC parishes joined the UGCC<sup>27</sup>.

Also Greek Catholics did not abandon the hope of the official recognition, especially because on December 1, 1989, the meeting between Gorbachev and John Paul II was to occur. The Roman Pope, from the first day of his service was for protecting the right of underground church, and before this visit – on October 5, 1989 – he declared again that “*without legalizing the Ukrainian Greek Catholic community, the democratization process will never be complete*”<sup>28</sup>.

According to the internal and external factors mentioned above, the Soviet power was forced to recognize the right of UGCC's religious liberty. On November 28, 1989, on the Lviv television Ju. Reshetylo announced the Statement of Religious Affair Council of the USSR Minister Cabinet. It was published in the central newspapers of the western Ukrainian towns: on November 30, in the Lviv newspaper *Vilna Ukraina* (Free Ukraine), on November 29 – in the Ivano-Frankivsk *Prykarpatska Pravda* (Prykarpatska Truth) and on December 1, – in Ternopil *Vilne zhyttja* (The Free Life),

23 A ICH, file 1296, Interview with Fr. Michael Nyskoguz, May 5, 2001, Chervonograd, Lviv region.

24 A ICH, file 358, Interview with Fr. Mykola Kostiuk, February 12, 1993, Stryj, Lviv region.

25 KACHUR, V.: Blissful of Justice. *Meta*, 1999, November 19, p. 4 – 5.

26 A ICH, file 1021, Interview with Bohdan Kohut, November 12, 1999, Lviv.

27 The Ukrainian Catholics in Lviv Demand the Legalisation of Church. *Keston News Service*, 1989, November 30, p. 4.

28 The speech of Pope John Paul II enounced to the bishop-participants of VI Ordinary Synod of October 5, 1989. *News from Rome*, 1988, no. 10, p. 3.

however, it was not on the first newspaper columns, but rather like a small paragraph<sup>29</sup>.

The statement said about the intensification of movement among the believers for the right of registration of the Greek Catholic communities in the 4<sup>th</sup> region of Western Ukraine. Authority, as though, being anxious about the wish of believers, could not miss that “some forces” tried to use them “*in aims wide of religious*”. All that, namely “unlawful” and “extremist” actions, “lighting of confrontation” among the different denomination believers, contradicts not only “*the Constitution, the law about cults, the international lawful acts, but also the Christian instructions*” (sic!). According to the Statement, the Greek Catholics got the right of foundation and registration of their community using “*all the rights established by the law for religious communities in UkrSSR*”. The authority demanded to restore “*all the worship buildings seized by the believers illegally*”, and afterwards to examine the transference of the church property “*calmly and well-considered, on the lawful principles*”. The question of community registration should be settled according to the desire of the believers. Also the necessity to hold “*the close public opinion poll*” was proposed in order to determine the denomination “*with democratic and public norms*” and creating “*the observing commissions*” in complements of the representatives of the local authority, religious community, the soviet officials, and non-registered organization. From local authority was demanded to keep the law and “attentive” investigation of applications<sup>30</sup>.

The main aim of the Statement from the November 28, was the solution of socially-religious crisis in Western Ukraine. But the authority had hidden intentions as well. Because of the official registration, the possibility to control the Greek Catholics, earlier deprived of wardship, appeared. Bohdan Botsiurkiv summarized at one of his researching that the Communist Party apparatus calculated maximally to seize UGCC revival process, to stop the dynamics of the Greek Catholic movement, to minimize “the losses” of ROC, and to remove the believers from nationally-democratic movement using the ability of the communist functionaries to use the bureaucratic procrastination in the time of registration of the

29 KOCHAN, N.: The Ukrainian Catholicism in Ecumenical Perspective. *The people rights in Ukraine*, 1996, no. 15, p. 14.

30 With Keeping of Legality. The Statement of the Religious Affair Council of the UkrSSR Ministers' Board. *Vil'na Ukraina*, 1989, November 30, p. 5.

communities<sup>31</sup>. Since the Statement did not correspond to the valid law of the official registration of the religious organizations and left uncertainty of the territory of spreading its action, the Religious Affair Council of the USSR Minister Board did not approve the decision of the Republican Council. Also the authority obstinately ignored the presence of church hierarchy structure and recognized the Greek Catholics only as “*the ordinary group of believers*”, which owing to the Statement got the right to establish the proper communities<sup>32</sup>. Western experts considered it legally ineffective until the adoption of the new legislation regarding liberty of conscience. After that, it would be possible to speak about “*the legalization of the UGCC*”<sup>33</sup>. As a result, on April 30, 1990, the majority of registration applications of Greek Catholic communities was sent back as “*incorrectly filled*”, and also in April, 1990, the Religious Affair Council modified the form of registration<sup>34</sup>.

The Head of the UGCC, Major Archbishop Myroslav Ivan, in his declaration from December 2, 1989, underlined the importance of proclamation of the Statement and called on Greek Catholics to submit the registration application “*as soon as possible*” and to “*distinctly*” identify themselves as the Greek Catholics on opinion poll, at the same time respecting the right of the Orthodox believers, particularly in building question<sup>35</sup>.

His locum tenens (acting head) in Ukraine, Archbishop Volodymyr (Sterniuk) agreeing with thoughts of the Church Head, foresaw the possible aggravation of the relations between the authority and ROC, hinting that their decision “*doesn't assist the pacification and respect to the authority*”<sup>36</sup>.

The Defence Committee in its declaration from December 4, 1989, rather negatively reacted on these conditions proposed to the Greek

31 BOTSJURKIV, B.: *The Ukrainian Catholic Church in the USSR at Time of Gorbachev*, p. 164 – 165.

32 KOLESNYK, M.: The Way Out of Dead End Siding. *Liudyna i svit*, 1990, no. 1, p. 9 – 10.

33 The Statement of the Defence committee of UGCC from December 4, 1989. *Ukrainian Press Service*, 1989, no. 12, p. 3.

34 BOTSJURKIV, B.: *The Ukrainian Catholic Church in the USSR at Time of Gorbachev*, p. 168.

35 The Statement of His Excellence Myroslav Ivan Lubachivsky of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of 1989. *Vyzvol'ny Shlyah*, no. 6, p. 711.

36 Personal archives of Ivan Grechko. The Statement of locum tenens (acting head) of the Galician metropolity of UGCC, bishop Volodymyr Sternjuk to people's deputy Rostyslav Bratun from December 9, 1989.

Catholics. In laity leaders' opinion, the authority did not adequately think through their demands to recognize the illegality of the Lviv sobor resolutions from 1946, admit the UGCC as the Church "sui juris", to understand its rehabilitation as an institution of not only individual persons, as the Head of the UkrSSR Religious Affair Council Mykola Kolesnyk suggested<sup>37</sup>, but also to return the Greek Catholics the property that belonged to them until 1946. The Committee members doubted the sincerity of the Soviet officials in their desire of solving the Greek Catholic question. Just long delaying in their opinion led up to the intensification of the religious situation and that led to the national and social disturbance. On the other hand, the UGCC representatives declared the authority aspiration of keeping "the right of ROC inviolability" in Western Ukraine, by "shy proposing" the Greek Catholics only the registration of individual communities and transferring them the former Rome Catholic churches (*kostely*) in use, which were all practically used like irreligious buildings (for example like warehouses, museums, clubhouses etc.), or were closed at all. That definitely could not satisfy the believers' needs and, moreover, would bring to the new conflicts – already between Catholics (Roman and Greek).

The local authority viewed the proclamation of the Statement from the November 28, as "the first step to normalizing the church community life"<sup>38</sup>, though the first Secretary of Lviv Party Local Committee Viktor Volkov recognized that it was adopted one year late.<sup>39</sup>

The representatives of ROC, in the person of Archbishop Kirill (Gundiajev), the Head of the Foreign Church Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchy, at the press conference of the November 28, 1989, did not mind the possibility of the Greek Catholics "to pray to God as they wish" taking into consideration the human right of the religious liberty. Therefore, they could be permitted to register their communities. However, on the other hand, the revival of "the union" in Western Ukraine, in his opinion, could mean the complete contradiction to the ecumenical spirit of the Vatican Council II, the comeback to "the medieval achievement methods" of the church unity, and this process could harm the Orthodox Catholic dialogue and cause the new divisions of the society<sup>40</sup>.

37 KOLESNYK, M.: *The Way Out of Dead End Siding*, p. 9 – 10.

38 The Interview with the representative of the Religious Affair Council of the UkrSSR Ministers' Board in Lviv region J. J. Reshetylo. *Liudyna i svit*, 1990, no. 2, p. 33 – 35.

39 The interview with the first Secretary of Lviv Communist Party Committee V. O. Volkov. *Liudyna i svit*, 1990, no. 2, p. 29 – 31.

40 KOCHAN, N.: *The Ukrainian Catholicism in Ecumenical Perspective*, p. 15.

The final UGCC recognition at legal level occurred on June 15, 1991, in Kyiv after the approval of the Statute of the UGCC, which gave the Church all the rights of the religious organizations according to the legislation. However, legalization did not mean rehabilitation<sup>41</sup>.

Therefore, we should underline, that the attitude of the state authority to the Ukrainian Greek Catholics was contradictory and varied greatly in different levels, ranging from complete negation of the rights to exist, to understanding the necessity of the recognition, and to secret assisting the process of legalization.

For the leaders of the USSR, the discrepancy between the declared liberalization of church social life and continuing discrimination of citizens on religious grounds threatened them with the loss of the international prestige and sympathy with the world society. At the same time, the rapid intensification of the legalization movement with hunger strikes in Moscow, unlawful worships, and mass meetings clearly showed that legalization could happen by means of concrete, on-the-ground accomplishments, on whose course the authority would have no influence.

It is possible to affirm, that the state permission to register Greek Catholic communities was issued rather post factum and was motivated more by the foreign policy situation (especially by the visit of M. Gorbachev in Rome), than the aspiration of the Soviet authority to make advances towards the legal demands of hierarchy and believers. However, the seemingly insignificant but very important concession of the Soviet authority in the legislative and moral plan, served as a sign of the transition of overwhelming majority of the Orthodox priests and parishes in Western Ukraine within the jurisdiction of the UGCC bishops in 1989 – 1990.

## Resumé

### **Legalizácia Ukrajinskej gréckokatolíckej cirkvi na pozadí vzťahov medzi gréckokatolíckymi veriacimi a sovietskou mocou v rokoch 1988 – 1989**

Príspevok sa zaoberá problémom legalizácie Ukrajinskej gréckokatolíckej cirkvi (UGKC). Autor opisuje vzťahy medzi gréckokatolíckymi veriacimi a sovietskymi mocenskými orgánmi v rokoch 1988 – 1989. Ana-

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41 The Statute of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was ratified. *Vira bat'kiv*, 1991, 23. 6., p. 1.

lyzuje postoje sovietskych predstaviteľov na rôznych úrovniach (miestnej aj národnej) k legalizácii UGCC. Autor vyzdvihuje fakt, že tieto vzťahy bývali rozporuplné a pohybovali sa medzi úplným popretím práva na jej existenciu a pochopením nevyhnutnosti uznať, ba dokonca tajne asistovať v procese jej legalizácie. Taktiež analyzuje oficiálne *Vyhlásenie Rady pre náboženské otázky pri Výbore ministrov ZSSR*, na základe ktorého mali gréckokatolícki veriaci právo založiť a zaregistrovať svoju komunitu. Ignorovalo ale otázku hierarchie v rámci gréckokatolíckej cirkvi, uznanie nezákonnosti rezolúcie ľvovského soboru v roku 1946, rehabilitáciu cirkvi ako inštitúcie (a navrátenie znárodneného majetku) a nedefinovalo rozsah tejto iniciatívy. Na druhej strane bolo ale oficiálne *vyhlásenie* veľmi dôležité pre legalizáciu UGCC, pretože umožnilo gréckokatolíkom obnoviť infraštruktúru svojej cirkvi.