



Latest update date 27 January 2022

The Roman Catholic Church of Ukraine (RCC)

Religious institution

All actors • Ukraine

[The Roman Catholic Church of Ukraine](#); diplomatic representative of the Vatican - Apostolic Nuncio Claudio Gugerotti.

Official position/functions regarding the conflict

Both globally and in Ukraine, the Roman Catholic Church reflects the diplomatic position of the Vatican. Most often its rhetoric can be heard in the public sermons and statements of the Pope; then it is repeated in the speeches of the Apostolic Nuncios in different countries where the RCC is represented.

The Ukrainian society, especially the pro-Ukrainian Christians of different denominations, expected a more decisive position of Rome regarding the armed confrontation in the east. Meanwhile, the Pope's statements remained quite restrained, albeit with a hope for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. [Rome's position became even more unambiguous after the meeting of Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis in Havana in 2016, at which the Russian aggression against Ukraine was not publicly recognized; only general statements were made about "the need for reconciliation in the confrontation on the territory of Ukraine". In a later interview, the Pope called the war in Ukraine a "hybrid" one, but he did not mention the role of Russia in it.](#)

Since 2015, Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti has been the appointed Papal Nuncio in Ukraine; before this appointment, he served in Georgia, a country with similar political issues. In his statements, he often [emphasizes the importance of “dialogue that recognizes truth,”](#) although without any specification, as well as the role of the humanitarian assistance from the Vatican.

Interests in the region of the conflict

The Roman Catholic Church has been trying to preserve its stable position in Ukraine without any attempts to expand as in the case of other Christian denominations. In the context of the military conflict in the east and the existence of the demarcation line, it is important for this church, together with the Nuncio, to maintain free access to its parishes in the territories that are not controlled by the Ukrainian government, while also to guarantee complete freedom and security for its believers in both the Donbas and Crimea.

Activity regarding the conflict

Since the beginning of the armed conflict, the RCC has maintained the ministry of military chaplains, which is significantly smaller in scale compared to the UGCC or the OCU – also due to the smaller number of Roman Catholics among the military. This ministry began to develop more dynamically after the conversion of Ihor Shtorm, the former Protestant pastor and founder of the First Battalion of Military Chaplains, to the RCC. Soon after that, having received permission to continue his chaplaincy, Shtorm organized the Christian Rescue Service on the grounds of the “House of Father Pio” in Kyiv. CRS develops programs directed at rehabilitation and support of the families of the participants of the military conflict.

[The main action that Gugerotti took regarding the conflict was his visits to the parishes in Donetsk and Luhansk;](#) however, those visits caused a number of questions and reprehension in the Ukrainian public sphere. In particular, he was accused of “supporting the occupiers,” especially because it was unclear how he had managed to get free access to the non-controlled territories. This issue calls into question the potential of this church as a mediator in the peacebuilding process, although the RCC has had similar successful experiences abroad. The official reasons for the access of the RCC representatives to the occupied territories are unknown, but, according to the informants, those were personal diplomatic agreements. Moreover, officially the visits were limited to celebrating masses, since a broader influence is not allowed.

The largest RCC’s humanitarian project during the conflict was the [initiative “Pope for Ukraine”](#), which in two years provided aid to many victims of the conflict in different parts of Ukraine. See details in chapter 8.

The top leadership of the RCC takes part in the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, supporting its [overall strategy of peacebuilding](#), as well as its [appeals to Vladimir Putin for the release of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners](#), its backing of [the president’s peace initiatives in 2014](#), and its [statement on providing aid to protect the Ukrainian state](#), among other initiatives.