



Kingdom of the Netherlands



# **RELIGIOUS MINORITIES OF UKRAINE AND RELATIONS BETWEEN STATE AND RELIGION**

**ANALYTICAL NOTE BASED ON THE RESULTS OF SOCIOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH**

**within the project "Religious Minorities of Ukraine and Relations Between State and Religion" implemented by the Ukrainian Association of Researchers of Religion with the support of the Human Rights Fund of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in partnership with the All-Ukrainian Council of Religious Associations and the Department of Religious Studies of the NAAS Institute of Philosophy**

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## INTRODUCTION

*“The universe is diversity in unity”*

*(Honoré de Balzac)*

*“Any intolerance is a sign of weakness”*

*(M. Roerich)*

Ukrainian society is moving towards the development of civil society where religious minorities (hereinafter - RM) are its natural component, a prominent spiritual and social phenomenon that needs serious study.

First of all, it is reasonable to clarify the essence of the basic concept. There are, of course, some difficulties in defining Ukraine's “religious majority” or “religious minority”. Traditionally, religious minorities include religious movements that are represented by a limited number of their adherents and consist of only a few communities without an all-Ukrainian administrative center, and institutionalization of which is often sectarian in nature. Therefore, a religious minority in Ukraine can be considered an association of adherents of any religion (national or even world), which by their number make up a small part of the population of our country.

In addition, a religious minority is not a permanent entity. It is mobile since it may lose its minority status as a result of the growth in number of its adherents and/or territorial spread. Based on the history of certain religions emergence, it is definite that that there have always been religious minorities in Ukraine. But it is extremely difficult to accurately calculate the number of communities belonging to a religious minority, let alone the number of adherents. One thing is clear: religious minorities have been and are an element of the spiritual and social reality of our country starting from ancient times to the present. But at the same time they have not been well known in the Ukrainian existential and information field. On occasions, RM emerge contextually in modern media content as an object of interest becoming a topic of sporadic study in the discourses of some researchers of religion - philosophers, theologians, lawyers, historians, cultural scientists, sociologists. Information about RM can be found in the statistic handbooks of relevant public services. This year, the religious minorities of our state actually for the first time have been put in scientific spot light of the specialized focus research project “Religious Minorities of Ukraine and Relations Between State and Religion” where the sociological research has become an important and unprecedented component.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sociological research conducted within the research project “Religious Minorities of Ukraine and Relations Between State and Religion” was implemented as a variation of case study using three methods of information collection in order to combine quantitative methods aimed at identifying quantitative features of issues under research and qualitative strategy aimed at finding a variety of possible opinions, excellent experience of state and religious relations, behavior patterns, casual facts, regardless of the quantitative prevalence.

The task of the sociological research is to obtain information about the current and actual state of functioning of religious minorities in Ukraine, about the peculiarities of their communication with the State, about assessment of the implementation of declared legislative rights and freedoms with emphasis on religious minorities associations.

Quantitative methodology was laid down in the evaluation scales, according to which the average points were calculated, in particular, to determine assessments of the level of democracy of Ukrainian legislation in the field of freedom of conscience and the activities of religious organizations (hereinafter - RO); the level of enforcement of certain rights and freedoms; level of religious tolerance, mutual understanding in Ukrainian society; assessments of state and religious relations in Ukraine. The average points were calculated on ordinal scales as the arithmetic mean of the respondents' answers, where 1 point is the maximum negative opinion, and 5 points is the maximum positive opinion.

Qualitative strategy was implemented in unstructured “open” questionnaires (requiring a text answer with a description of realistic examples of communication with public authorities; a range of issues; proposals for amendments to the Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” in order to improve the situation of religious minorities; potential steps to harmonize inter-religious relations and religious tolerance in Ukraine, etc.).

Detailed answers about the life and functioning of religious minority communities were obtained as a result of two focus group discussions with believers.

Sociological information was collected by the following methods: questioning of religious minority communities through Google forms using rating scales and unstructured questions; focus group discussions with believers of religious minority communities (two were attended by seventeen participants representing eleven denominations of religious minorities); expert survey - questioning through Google forms using rating scales and unstructured questions.

The questioning covered two target groups of respondents:

- believers of religious minority communities - 211 questionnaires (the selection of respondents was based on self-identification principle);
- experts – 135 persons.

The experts were: 1) representatives of central and local executive bodies, local self-government bodies (on religious issues) - 50 persons; 2) leaders of religious minority communities - persons with administrative and organizational experience - 52 persons; 3) specialists on issues regarding freedom of conscience and religion (particularly, scientists, lawyers, theologians, media representatives, etc.) - 33 persons.

Based on the previously given definition of RM in the research, the term “religious minority” meant associations of believers of a certain denominational orientation, which religious and cultic practices have their own self-sufficiency and identity and do not achieve dominance in the religious environment by their number, prevalence and influence. The concept of “religious majority” covered believers of such religious organizations, which were widely and numerously represented within the territory of Ukraine, in particular, believers of the OCU, UOC(MP), UGCC, RCC, some Protestant denominations. In the context of such conceptual approach, the following was referred to religious minorities operating in Ukraine:

- religions (religious organizations) of national minorities (Judaism, Karaite Judaism, Islam, Armenian Church, German and Ukrainian Lutherans, Roma religion, Old Believers, etc.);
- new religious formations: neo-Christian movements, orientalist religions, esoteric associations, neo-pagan beliefs, synthetic neo-religions, Scientology movements, etc.;
- regional religious minorities of the denominations predominant in Ukraine (for example, communities of the UGCC, OCU, etc. in the Eastern regions of Ukraine or the UOC(MP) in Galicia).

In the course of research, believers were invited to have a look at the definitions of “religious majority” and “religious minority” and were allowed to position themselves, on self-identification principle, as believers and their own religious community (as a “religious majority” or “religious minorities”) and participate or refuse to participate in the research.

Thus, on the basis of self-identification, representatives of about twenty religious denominations referred themselves to religious minorities. According to the feedback received from religious minorities (participation in the survey) and FG participants, as well as to the results of the expert survey, the research geographically represented the entire territory of Ukraine (except for the Autonomous Republic of Crimea) - 23 regions (excluding Ivano-Frankivsk) and the city of Kiev. The chosen method and the obtained results gave the opportunity to “see” the RM believers with their assessments, needs and requests.

## CONSIDERATIONS ON THE DEFINITION OF “RELIGIOUS MINORITIES”

According to the participants of focus group discussions, the criteria for defining a religious community as belonging to religious minorities are the following:

- numerical inferiority in relation to representatives of other religious communities in a country;
- unequal treatment of religious organizations on a par with other, primarily Orthodox churches;
- the desire to “seek perfection” by creating new religious communities.

At the same time, the regional context was emphasized, when a religious organization is not widespread at the national level, but it is quite prevalent at the regional level both in terms of the number of communities and the number of believers.

The opinion was expressed that the use of the term “small communities” as opposed to the term “religious minority” was more appropriate.

## ASSESSMENT OF UKRAINIAN LEGISLATION IN THE FIELD OF FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND ACTIVITIES OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Ukrainian legislation in the field of freedom of conscience and the activities of religious organizations on a 5-point scale, where 5 is the highest score; and the scores were the following: 3.6 and 3.7 points, respectively. Expediency of updating the legislation in order to increase the level of democracy at 3.4 points, and believers at 3.0 points, where 5 is completely perfect legislation (Fig. 1.)

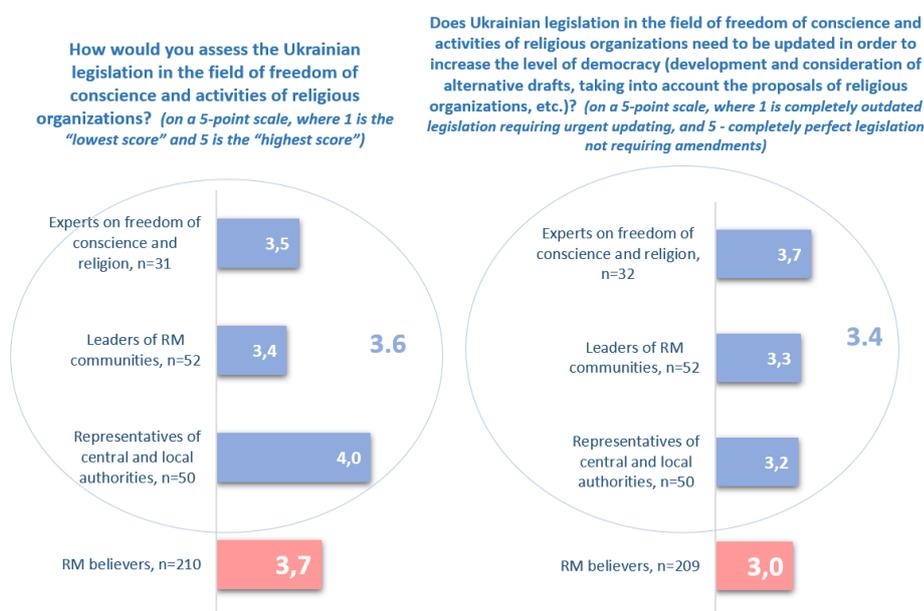


Fig. 1. Assessment of Ukrainian legislation in the field of freedom of conscience and activities of religious organizations, *points*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hereinafter: average points are calculated in the SPSS program by weighing the answers calculated as a percentage on a 5-point scale. Calculations were made according to the shares of respondents provided answers, “n” is the number of persons who provided answers

The equality of all religions was estimated by experts at 3.4 points out of 5, the RM believers - at 2.6 points. Separation of the Church from the State - 3.2 points of the experts against 2.7 points of the RM believers (Fig. 2).

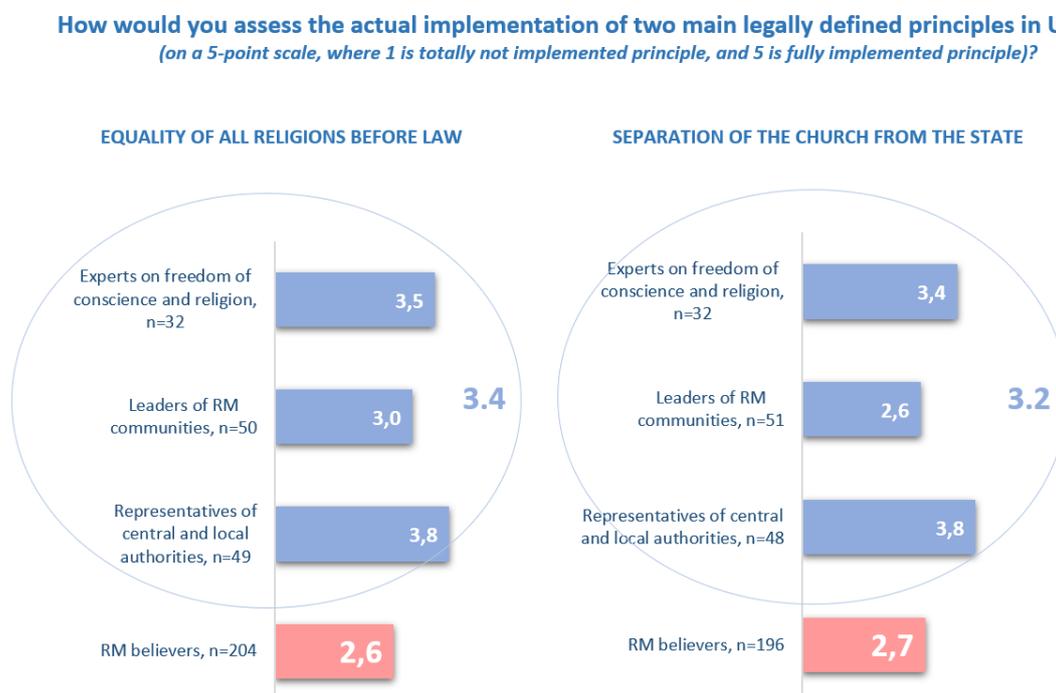


Fig. 2. Assessment of the actual implementation of the main legally defined principles in Ukraine: equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, *points*

### **ASSESSMENT OF THE ENFORCEMENT OF RIGHTS EQUALITY OF ALL BELIEVERS ASSOCIATIONS**

On a 5-point scale where 5 is fully implemented right, the total average score of the actual implementation of legal guarantees for the RM communities is 3.7 points, according to the estimates of RM believers (Fig. 3).

According to the answers of the RM believers, as of today the following rights are more exercised for the RM communities: related to participation in charitable activities (4.0 points), access to secular education (4.0 points), realization in the cultural sphere (3.9 points), possibility of pilgrimage (3.9 points), obtaining spiritual education (3.9 points), engaging in scientific activities (3.9 points). The RM rights regarding property issues are realized to a lesser extent - obtaining ownership or use (lease) of land plots, premises for ceremonial and everyday needs (construction, usage of house of worship, lease of premises for worship, etc.) - 3.2 points, meeting

religious needs of the believers during military service - 3.4 points, use of the media to promote their own activities, education, missionary activities - 3.4 points, for activities in the economic sphere (in particular, establishment and operation of societies and enterprises engaged in legal activities that bring financial income, etc.) - 3.4 points (Fig. 3).

**Assess, in relation to your particular religious community, the extent to which the following rights are exercised in real life today (on a 5-point scale, where 1 is totally not exercised, and 5 is fully exercised)?**



Fig. 3. Congregational assessments of the actual implementation of legal guarantee for the RM communities, which include the surveyed RM believers, scores  
 (\* Average points are calculated in the SPSS program by weighing the answers calculated as a percentage on a 5-point scale. Calculations were made in accordance with the shares of respondents who provided answers.  
 \*\*The total average score for the rights enforcement is calculated as the arithmetic mean of all assessments made by respondents for each verified right)

## ASSESSMENT OF STATE AND RELIGIOUS RELATIONS IN UKRAINE

Compliance with democratic standards of the current state of state and religious relations (Fig. 4), according to research experts, who are competent persons, professionals, specialists with direct and valuable experience in the field of freedom of conscience and religious organizations - 3.6 points.

How would you assess the current state of state and religious relations in Ukraine (on a 5-point scale, where 1 - does not meet democratic standards, 5 - fully meets high democratic standards)?

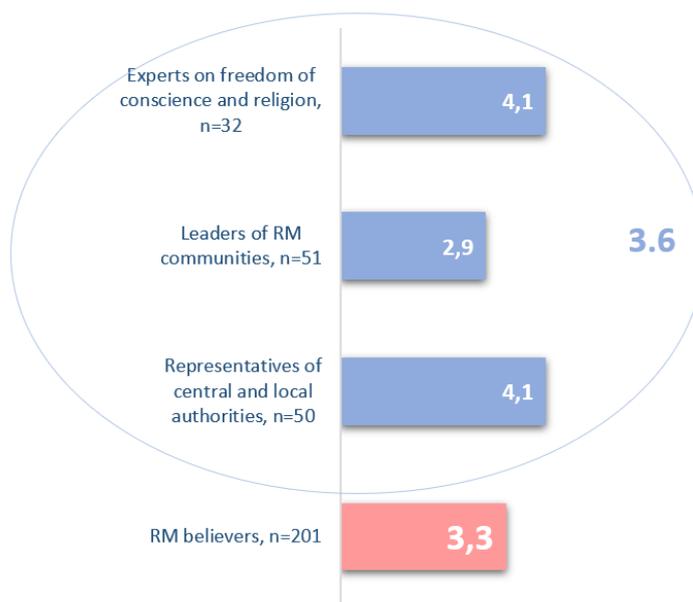


Fig. 4. Assessment of the current state of state and religious relations in Ukraine, *points*

## ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF STATE SUPPORT AND LOYALTY TO RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS and INTER-RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATIONS

According to assessments of the level of the State support and loyalty to ROs, given by both experts and believers of the RM, preferences in the assistance of government officials are received by ROs representing the religious majority, compared to religious minorities. Experts assessed the level of the State support and loyalty to ROs representing the religious majority in Ukraine at 4.1 points and gave 3.4 points to those representing religious minorities. Among the RM believers, the corresponding scores are 3.3 points against 2.8 points.

There were significant differences in the assessments of the level of the State support and loyalty to inter-religious associations, in particular, the All-Ukrainian Council of Religious Associations (AUCRA) and the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) made by all three categories of experts in an expert survey. The most optimistic scores

- 4.4 points out of 5 possible - belong to civil servants. The “independent” category of experts represented by scientists, lawyers, media workers (specialists in freedom of conscience and religion) believes that the level of the State support and loyalty to inter-religious associations is too small, but does not reach “good” score (3.8- 3.9 points). While the leaders of the RM religious communities consider this aspect of the interaction between the State and the RO through inter-religious associations “unsatisfactory” - 2.9 points.

### **ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF STATE-RELIGION AND INTER-RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION IN UKRAINIAN SOCIETY**

The existence of a disproportion in the level of communication between the State and the ROs representing the religious majority and religious minorities in the religious field of Ukraine in favor of the ROs widely and numerous represented within the territory is evidenced by the scores given both by experts - 3.9 points against 3.1, and the RM believers - 3.4 points against 2.9. As regards the subjects of communication, on the one hand, experts representing the authorities assessed the level of communication between the State and the RM as “satisfactory”, albeit “mediocre” - 3.7 points (but ROs from the religious majority gave 4.1 points) while on the other hand, experts-leaders of the RM communities and believers assessed it as “unsatisfactory” - 2.6 and 2.9 points, respectively (fig. 5).

**Please assess the level of communication (dialogue) between the following entities:**  
*(on a 5-point scale, where 1 - no communication at all, and 5 - a high level of communication)*

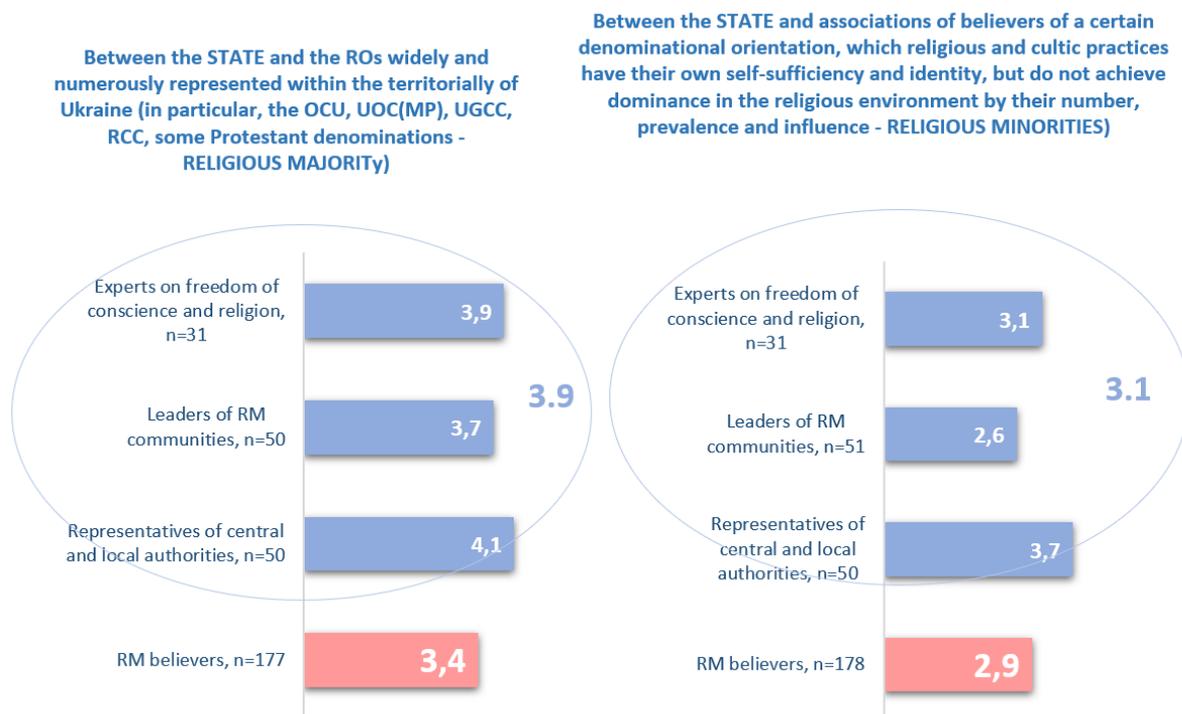


Fig. 5. Assessment of the level of state-religions communication in Ukraine, *points*

Almost identical and low assessments of the level of inter-religious communication were given by all target groups of the research: three categories of experts (both at the level of different denominations within one religion - 3.0 points, and between different religions - 2.9 points) and the RM believers (2.8 points). Herewith, assessments of the RM communities' leaders are the lowest - 2.6 points (Fig. 6).

**Please assess the level of communication (dialogue) between the following entities:**  
*(on a 5-point scale, where 1 - no communication at all, and 5 - a high level of communication)*

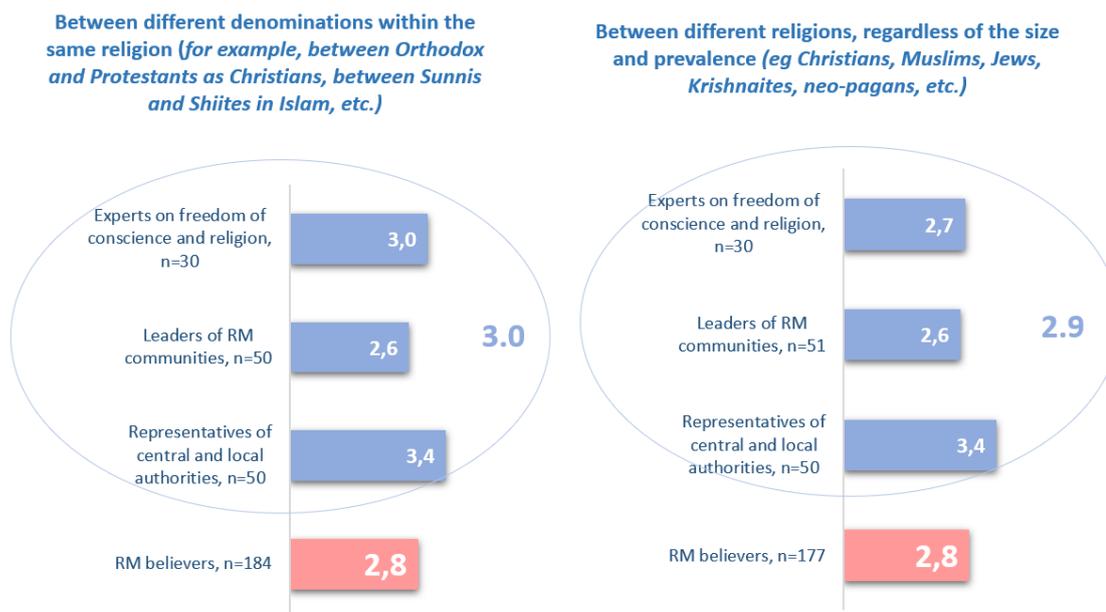


Fig. 6. Assessment of the level of inter-religious communication in Ukraine, *points*

### **ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE BETWEEN RELIGIOUS MAJORITY AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN UKRAINIAN SOCIETY**

The level of religious tolerance among believers representing the religious majority and religious minorities is only 3.0 points, according to the results of an expert survey and according to the opinions of the RM believers. Herewith, every third expert (30.0%) and more than a third of the RM believers (33.3%) gave the lowest scores of the rating scale - 1 and 2 points, which means that the tolerance between religious majorities and religious minorities in Ukraine is almost absent. Some experts and the RM believers were sure that the level of tolerance is higher: 4 and 5 points (36.2% among experts and 38.2% among the RM believers, respectively), but more than a third convinced of lack of tolerance is too much for a state where religious citizens should recognize a pluralistic approach to the diversity of religious views and the right of everyone to freedom of religion, mutual respect and understanding. This mediocre level of religious tolerance

correlates with the feeling of and security of the RM representatives in their religious communities, which, according to the answers received, is only 3.0 points (Fig. 7).

**How would you assess the level of tolerance in Ukrainian society between believers of religious organizations representing the RELIGIOUS MAJORITY and believers of RELIGIOUS MINORITY communities (on a 5-point scale where 1 is no tolerance and 5 is a high level of tolerance)?**

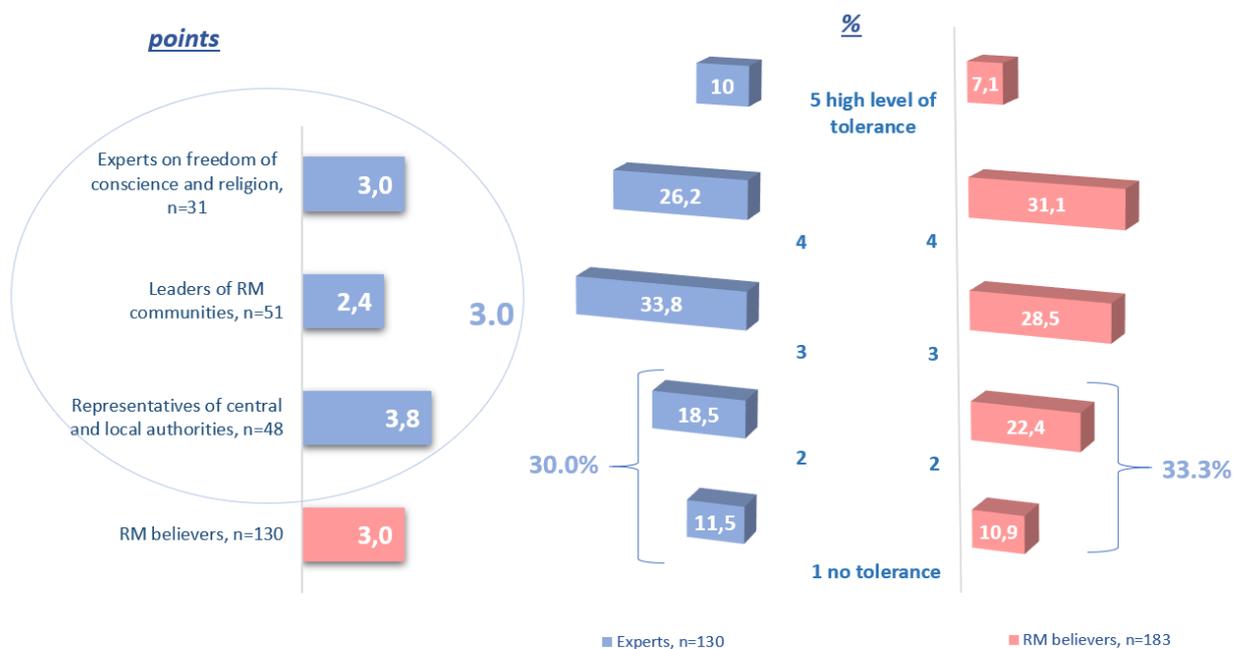


Fig. 7. Assessment of the level of religious tolerance between religious majority and religious minorities, *points*

### ASSESSMENT OF THE FEELING OF SAFETY AND SECURITY IN UKRAINE BY REPRESENTATIVES OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Safety is both a feeling and a reality. Safety is one of the basic needs of life and confidence today. Safety is a state of protection of vital interests and needs from any threats.

Leaders of the RM communities assessed the feeling of safety and security for their own religious associations in Ukraine at 2.8 points out of 5, and the RM believers - “ordinary” believers - at 3.3 points (Fig. 8).

How would you rate the feeling of security and safety for your association of believers in Ukraine (on a 5-point scale, where 1 is a feeling of total insecurity and danger, and 5 is a feeling of complete security and safety)?

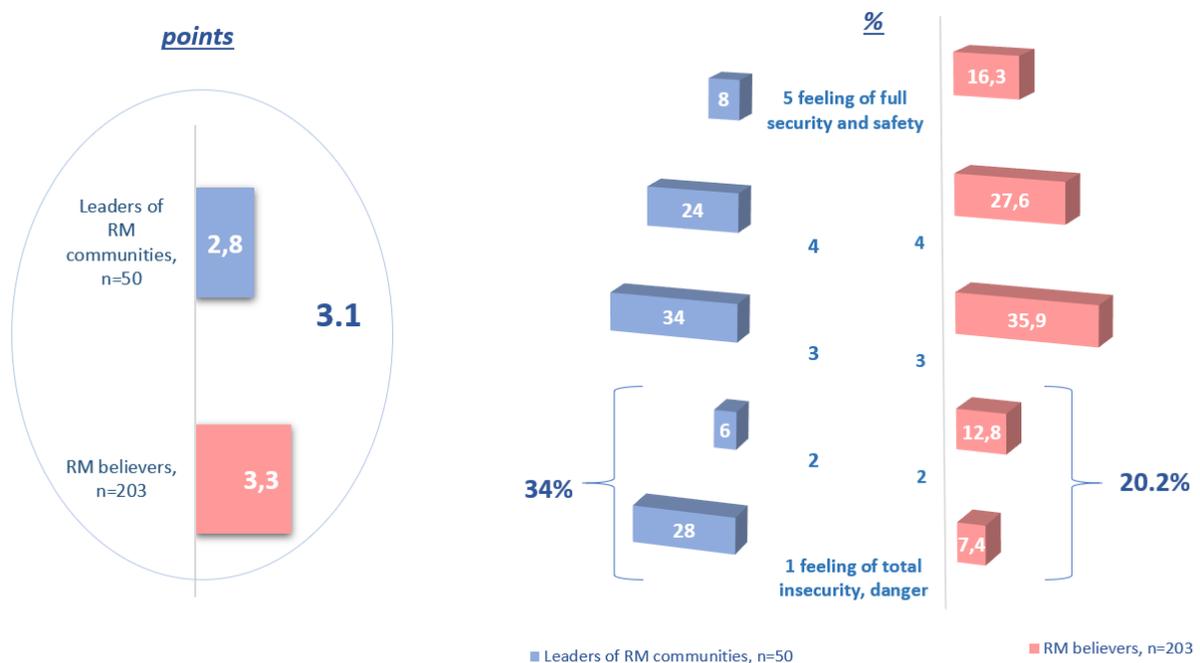


Fig. 8. Assessment of the feeling of safety and security by representatives of religious minorities, *points*

## URGENT PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

*“Problems of the minorities need to be better represented in the media. It is in the interests of the state, because the unifying message is constructive. The mass consciousness is stereotyped and rejects what it does not know. The state must clearly pursue the idea of unity of all Ukrainians, regardless of their religious identity”*

*(expert on freedom of conscience and religion)*

The main urgent problems of the RM are the following:

- violation (delaying/dragging/ignoring) of the enforcement of property rights - the right to obtain ownership or use (lease) of land plots, premises for ceremonial and everyday needs (construction, usage of house of worship, lease of premises for worship, etc.);
- difficulties (refusal) with registration/re-registration of ROs statutes - closely related to the problem of insufficient competence of specialists in religious studies, first of all, state registrars, lawyers, law enforcement officers, accountants, auditors and others, especially outside the capital;
- violation of the right to meet religious needs of believers during military service (in particular, chaplaincy, etc.);

- insufficient level of legal protection (unimpeded appeal to courts and law enforcement agencies, filing lawsuits, initiating legal proceedings, etc.);
- difficulties in exercising the right to activity in the economic sphere (in particular, the incorporation and operation of companies and enterprises engaging in legal activities that generate financial income, etc.);
- difficulties in exercising the right to acquire and use religious objects, in particular, restriction of the “permissive” list of objects for import by Christian, mostly Orthodox, tradition;
- orientation of enforcement the right to meet the ritual and ceremonial needs of believers (especially in relation to holidays and weekends in the state), first of all, of the Christian tradition;
- oppression in the exercise of the right to participate in charitable activities (including volunteering, particularly work with at-risk groups - drug and alcohol addicts, former prisoners, etc.);
- contravention of principle of “equality of all religions, denominations and religious organizations before the law” in correlation with the principle of “the state education system in Ukraine is separated from the church (religious organizations) and is of a secular nature”;
- violation of the right of believers to self-expression and/or prejudice of the public and/or denial of employment due to the appearance of believers required by their faith (especially for Muslim women);
- presentation of unconfirmed or biased information about religious minorities in the media as a source of negative public opinion in relation to the RM. On the opposite side is the lack of educational information about religious minorities to form a positive public opinion and increase the level of religious tolerance;

**PROPOSALS FOR AMENDMENTS IN THE LAW OF UKRAINE “ON  
FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS” IN  
ORDER TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITY  
COMMUNITIES**

*“A number of legal provisions to ensure freedom of religion and equality of all denominations are still purely declarative, especially at the regional and local levels.”  
(expert on freedom of conscience and religion)*

Given that a significant number of respondents emphasized “de jure” the existence of prescribed and declared equal rights for all representatives of the multi-religious field of the state, but “de facto” only their partial implementation, study participants had the opportunity to express their opinion on potential and necessary changes in Ukrainian legislation in order to improve the actual operation of religious minority communities. Areas and challenges that should be noted first of all were the following: education, charity/customs control, tax benefits, chaplaincy/alternative service, state support of RM initiatives, registration/re-registration, burial law (for Muslims).

Among the main mechanisms for harmonizing inter-religious relations in the religious field of the state and in order to increase the level of religious tolerance in society in general, both religious minorities and experts specified the following: education and enlightenment; unbiased attitude of the media and the use of media discourse as a source of tolerance at the inter-religious level, at the level of forming public opinion; creation (and support of existing) of various thematic platforms for inter-religious dialogue, exchange of information, experience, necessary contacts, etc., organization and holding of special events; strengthening the activities of inter-religious organizations as VVRO with the expansion of representation of the RM communities; introduction of certain legal and organizational and administrative changes.

## CONCLUSION

*“Diversity is created by the Lord and there are many of these differences: in language, in geography, in food, in culture, in clothing... When we talk about spiritual practice, there are differences in the prophets, in the scriptures, in people's ideas about God, his names, in the ways of worship. It is impossible to achieve unity at the external level. The only thing we need to understand is where this unity is - in our spiritual nature. We are all spiritually equal... If we understand who the Lord is, we will love Him, and naturally we will love all his creation and not only people, but the whole environment. But it all starts with inner harmony.”*

*(Society for Krishna Consciousness - from focus group research materials)*

Religious minorities, as full participants in the religious field of Ukraine, maintain and build ties and interaction in modern civil society to strengthen their position and positive prospects for development. These ties and interaction can be constructive - support for government programs, national ideas, social service, inter-religious, inter-cultural, inter-ethnic dialogue in the process of building civil society, participation in the development and implementation of measures to solve global problems, promote public morals and individual morality, etc. But they can also be destructive - self-isolation, immersion in the world of own existence and indifference to social processes, intolerance, aggression and hostility against people of other faiths, anti-state, anti-social, anti-Ukrainian activities, etc. According to the nature of the established ties and interactions, there will be social consequences. What will be the last, it remains to be seen. But there is no doubt that the nature of this type of relations will directly depend on the legal provision of freedom of conscience and religious freedom in general and the freedom of religious minorities in particular and the positive image of religious minorities in public opinion.

Unfortunately, the existence of the democratic law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” is not always ensured by an appropriate mechanism for its implementation, which leads to delays in community registration, permission to build houses of worship or return those once belonged to religious minorities, to the arbitrariness of local power structures that do not always comply with existing legislation, sometimes demonstrate legal ignorance in the field of state and church relations, religious freedom, etc., which was confirmed by the results of sociological research.

Modern Ukrainian civil society has a public need for renewed and deepened legal, philosophical, ethical, political, religious, cultural, sociological and even secure understanding of the new principles of interaction between the state and religious organizations, especially religious minorities. Implementation of all principles of state and religious relations, mutual information, constant dialogue will contribute to the improvement of these relations as a cooperative (partnership) model of relations in the context of pluralization and democratization of religious life.