



## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND TOLERANCE IN THE INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICES

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### Abstract

This paper presents the recent survey results among 160 international students of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. The survey aimed to analyse the international students' opinion concerning the religiosity of Ukrainians to distinguish the existing or possible problems in cross-cultural communication in higher education. Obtained data was generalised, analysed and compared with the results of the similar surveys conducted among Ukrainian respondents. The comparison revealed that religiosity, religious tolerance and religious freedom of Ukrainians, as perceived by international students, are noticeably lower than reported by Ukrainians themselves. The authors believe that the presented Ukrainian case is representative and valid for some neighbouring countries with cultural and historical connections with Ukraine and can contribute to the establishment of good international educational practices.

**Keywords:** internationalization of higher education; religion; tolerance; freedom; cross-cultural communication; Ukraine; international students; multicultural communicative environment.

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### Introduction

Religious tolerance and freedom appear to be the important factors that should be taken into consideration when it comes to the internationalization of higher education. Internationalization, first of all, means the establishment of a multicultural communicative environment comfortable for its main actors and suitable for its main purpose – effective education. Real practices of the establishment of such



a comfortable environment, in fact, reveal numerous complications. They mainly originate from the cultural differences between incoming students and local dwellers, whose declarative tolerant and friendly attitude to all foreigners turns out to be not so real. This paper presents the case of Ukraine concerning really existing problems on religious and cultural grounds in the establishment of good communicative practices in the field of international higher education. To meet this purpose it was decided to collect and analyze information on how religious freedom and tolerance may become the factors of real impact on the establishment of good communication and the quality of international education. Authors focused on two sources of information: official statistics concerning religions in Ukraine and the results of the survey among the international students of the leading Ukrainian University – Taras Shevchenko University of Kyiv conducted by authors themselves. The experience examined in this article, in the authors' opinion, can be valid not only for Ukraine but may be productively used to improve the educational practices of many other countries (Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Baltic countries, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and other European countries of Slavic origin that were under the influence of USSR) Such validity derives from the geographical location of Ukraine (between West and East) and its cultural and historical connections (Ukraine is an “intersection” of main European and Slavic cultures and one of the main scenes of tragic pages of European history in 20<sup>th</sup> century). The detection of those problems along with the development of the strategy for their resolution becomes even more pertinent due to the effect of a recent outbreak of the global emigration crisis.

Ukraine is the country that for the recent decades underwent profound reforms towards democratic changes and internationalization of all the spheres of public life, including higher education (Liashenko, 2018). One of the cultural peculiarities of Ukraine is that religion always played an important role in social life. When it comes to Ukraine's integration to the world community, the religious aspects of cross-cultural communication are crucial elements that should be taken into consideration. This question becomes more and more relevant due to the substantial increase in the number of foreigners who arrive in Ukraine for different purposes. (Umland & Novak, 2018) The most popular reasons why foreigners arrive in Ukraine are education, business and tourism. All these activities require a good level of social interaction and communication. In case when foreigners are representatives of the cultures which are somehow close and familiar to Ukrainian culture it makes no difficulties to establish good communication. However, some difficulties in cross-cultural communication may take place if foreigners represent entirely different cultures.

In recent years, Ukrainian higher education has become increasingly popular among representatives of the Middle East, Northern Africa and Southeast Asia countries. This tendency is evidenced by the increased number of international students coming from these regions enrolled in Ukrainian higher education institutions. (Table 5) Due to the essential cultural and religious difference, sufficient attention should be paid to establish good communication practices and avoid possible conflicts on cultural and religious grounds. Good and comfortable communication is an important condition of effective educational practices. Acquaintance with the religious traditions of Ukraine and peculiarities of Ukrainian religious culture appear to be of big importance in terms of successful adaptation of international students in Ukrainian socio-cultural and educational environment. Such importance is determined by the key role of religiosity in the historical development and a present condition of Ukrainian culture in general (Aliaiev, 2016). Ukrainian cultural studies reveal the profound influence of Orthodox Christian religion on the other elements of culture such as arts, science, education, philosophy, etc. (Druzenko, 2014) The recent inquiries on the religiosity of contemporary Ukrainians show that for the last years its level substantially increased to the level on which the influence on the social life becomes visible. (Krindatch, 2003; Yelensky, 2004; Tytarenko, 2018)

Another important aim of this paper is to contribute to the development of a successful strategy of cross-cultural communication between Ukrainians and representatives of Eastern cultures (Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Egypt, India and others) who arrive in Ukraine for educational purposes. Such a strategy may be realised by the means of overcoming the misunderstandings on the religious grounds. For this purpose, it is necessary to inquire on the religious aspects of the big general question: “Whether



Ukrainian culture is open for cross-cultural communication?" This paper appears to be a reflection of this inquiry.

Such inquiry, in the authors' opinion, includes clarification of the following related issues. a) Ukrainian religious culture from the perspective of an international student (tolerant or aggressive, friendly or troublemaking in terms of everyday life and professional activity); b) other religions from the perspective of Ukrainian religious culture; c) international students' experience of communication with Ukrainian religious culture (positive or negative impressions, problems and difficulties); d) is it necessary to take into account the religious culture of Ukraine in the professional activity performed by foreigners in Ukraine?

To clarify the aforementioned issues authors decided to take the following steps: a) to analyze the peculiarities of Ukrainians' attitude to religion, religious tolerance and freedom; b) to design a questionnaire to collect the necessary data from the international students; c) to form a representative sample of international students, who have a sufficient communication experience with Ukrainian religious culture; d) to conduct an anonymous survey among the representative sample of international students; e) to analyze the collected data and compare it with the results of recently conducted surveys among Ukrainian population concerning religious issues; f) to evaluate obtained results.

The following results were successfully processed and generalised.

### Sources

The first step of our research was to examine and analyze the existing statistics about the present state of Ukrainian religiosity. Several sources were observed for this purpose and one of them was eventually chosen as most representative – the sociological reports provided by the by authoritative Ukrainian sociological organization Razumkov Centre<sup>8</sup> which has been conducting the surveys on religious issues in Ukraine for more than a decade.

Due to the recent surveys on the religious diversity of Ukraine conducted by the Razumkov Centre (Mischenko, 2018; Razumkov Center, 2018) the general level of manifested religiosity of Ukrainians is relatively high. One of the important traits of Ukrainian religious life is that the residents of different regions of Ukraine are not equally involved in religious life. Western regions (Lviv, Ternopil, Chernivtsi, Rivne, Ivano-Frankivsk, Zakarpatska and Volyn oblasts) traditionally show a higher level of involvement into religious life (90.7%) than central (70%) (Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Zhytomyr, Poltava, Vinnytsia, Cherkasy, Kyrovograd, Khmelnytskyi oblasts), southern (58.5%) (Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kherson oblasts and Crimea) and eastern (63.3%) (Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts) regions respectively. This tendency has historical roots and remains stable for a long time. The most widespread religion in Ukraine is Christianity. Recent surveys show that the level of religious freedom and tolerance of Ukrainians is relatively high.

Recently published report (Razumkov Center, 2018) provides the following figures on the religious self-identification of Ukrainians. 72% of Ukrainians report themselves as believers. At the same time, 11.5% of the respondents declared hesitation between belief and unbelief. 4.7% of declared being unbelievers and 3% declared being convinced atheists. This information in comparison with the results of the similar surveys of the previous years has shown that for the recent three years the quantity of believers has slightly increased. The quantity of hesitating population remained at the same level, whereas the quantity of atheists has slightly risen. It is noteworthy that the quantity of unbelievers and respondents who have an indifferent attitude to this issue has decreased. More detailed information on these statistics could be found in the following table (Table 1) as well as in the referred report.

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<sup>8</sup> Here and further in the article, when it comes to the statistics concerning Ukraine, authors refer to the paper "Features of Religious and Church - Religious Self-Determination of Ukrainian Citizens: Trends 2010-2018." As it is claimed in the report "The study was carried out in all regions of Ukraine, except Crimea and the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. 2,016 of Ukrainians aged 18 and over were polled. Theoretical error of the sample does not exceed 2.3%." (Razumkov Center, 2018, p.3)

**Table 1.** Religious self-determination of Ukrainians 2014-2018 (% of respondents)

| Whether you go to church or not, who do you think you are? | UKRAINE |      |      |      |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|------|------|
|                                                            | 2014    | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
| Believer                                                   | 76.0    | 71.4 | 67.1 | 71.7 |
| Hesitating between belief and unbelief                     | 7.9     | 10.1 | 11.7 | 11.5 |
| Unbeliever                                                 | 4.7     | 6.3  | 4.1  | 4.7  |
| Convinced Atheist                                          | 2.5     | 2.7  | 2.5  | 3.0  |
| I don't care about it                                      | 4.9     | 7.2  | 8.2  | 5.3  |
| Hard to answer                                             | 3.9     | 3.9  | 6.3  | 3.7  |

67% of respondents, who declared being believers, identify themselves as Orthodox (Eastern) Christians (76% of residents of the western regions and 40% of the residents of eastern regions). 9.6% identify themselves as Greek Catholics (40% of the residents of the western regions). Roman Catholics comprise 0.8% of believers. 2.2% of respondents identify themselves as Protestants. Other religions appear to be less popular and represented. For instance, Islam (which is widespread in the Middle East, Northern Africa and Southeast Asia) is not represented at all<sup>9</sup>, Judaism has only 0.4% of adherents. Buddhism, Hinduism and Paganism are represented by 0.1% of believers each. Another important figure is the number of respondents who report themselves as non-adhering of any religion (11%). The relative majority of such respondents reside in Southern regions of Ukraine (20.2%) and the Eastern regions (15.8%). More detailed information could be found in the following table (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Religions in Ukraine 2014-2018 (% of respondents)

| What religion do you identify yourself with? | UKRAINE |      |      |      |
|----------------------------------------------|---------|------|------|------|
|                                              | 2014    | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
| Eastern Orthodox                             | 70.2    | 65.4 | 68.2 | 67.3 |
| Roman Catholic                               | 1.0     | 1.0  | 1.0  | 0.8  |
| Greek Catholic                               | 7.8     | 6.5  | 7.8  | 9.4  |
| Protestant                                   | 1.0     | 1.9  | 0.2  | 2.2  |
| Judaism                                      | 0.1     | 0.2  | 1.3  | 0.4  |
| Islam                                        | 0.2     | 1.1  | 0.2  | 0.0  |
| Buddhism                                     | 0.2     | 0.0  | 0.1  | 0.1  |
| Hinduism                                     | 0.0     | 0.2  | 0.1  | 0.1  |
| Paganism                                     | 0.0     | 0.0  | 0.0  | 0.1  |
| Unspecified Christian                        | 6.3     | 7.1  | 7.0  | 7.7  |
| Other                                        | 0.0     | 0.2  | 0.4  | 0.1  |
| Not affiliated with any religion             | 12.5    | 16.3 | 12.6 | 11.0 |

<sup>9</sup> This statement is valid for the survey conducted in 2018. In previous years there were more representatives of Islam among residents of Ukraine (0,2% - in 2017; 1,1% - 2016; 0,2% - 2014). However, this figure has never exceeded 1.5% of believers.



|           |     |     |     |     |
|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| No answer | 0.7 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.9 |
|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Another noteworthy issue concerning Ukrainian religious culture is the declared level of the religious freedom and religious tolerance of modern Ukrainians. Recent surveys have shown that the level of religious freedom and tolerance of Ukrainians is relatively high. The aforementioned survey included several questions that touch upon this issue as well. Two of them appear to be significant for the purposes of this paper. The first question asked respondents' opinion on religious tolerance in general. The second was about the respondents' attitude to particular religions "What is your attitude to the following religions and religious currents?" (positive, negative, indifferent or other). The following tables (Table 3, Table 4) show the statistics concerning these questions.

**Table 3.** Religious tolerance in Ukraine 2014-2018 (% of respondents)

| Which of the following statements most reflects your beliefs?                                                                                | UKRAINE |      |      |      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|------|------|
|                                                                                                                                              | 2014    | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
| The only true religion is the one that I practice.                                                                                           | 4.5     | 9.3  | 6.1  | 9.3  |
| Only religions traditional for our country have the right to exist.                                                                          | 10.9    | 11.5 | 17.2 | 14.1 |
| All religions have the right to exist as different ways to God.                                                                              | 30.0    | 28.2 | 24.8 | 30.7 |
| Any religion that proclaims the values of goodness, love, mercy, and does not endanger the existence of other people has the right to exist. | 43.7    | 50.0 | 47.2 | 44.0 |
| Other                                                                                                                                        | 0.9     | 3.1  | 1.8  | 1.7  |
| No answer                                                                                                                                    | 9.7     | 0.6  | 0.1  | 0.4  |

**Table 4.** Tolerance towards particular religions 2018 (% of respondents)

| What is your attitude to the following religions and religious currents? | Positive | Indifferent | Negative | did not think about it | Did not hear about this religion (denomination) | No answer |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------|----------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Orthodoxy                                                                | 78.3     | 14.7        | 1.1      | 5.7                    | 0.1                                             | 0.1       |
| Greek Catholicism                                                        | 41.7     | 38.7        | 3.6      | 15.4                   | 0.5                                             | 0.1       |
| Roman Catholicism                                                        | 36.2     | 41.6        | 4.0      | 17.0                   | 1.0                                             | 0.0       |
| Protestantism                                                            | 19.0     | 44.7        | 12.7     | 20.8                   | 2.6                                             | 0.1       |
| Islam                                                                    | 14.1     | 43.5        | 18.6     | 22.3                   | 1.4                                             | 0.1       |
| Judaism                                                                  | 13.0     | 45.1        | 13.5     | 25.1                   | 2.8                                             | 0.4       |
| Evangelical and Charismatic churches                                     | 13.0     | 39.9        | 16.2     | 23.6                   | 7.2                                             | 0.2       |
| Eastern religions and spiritual practices (Buddhism, Yoga, etc.)         | 16.2     | 41.5        | 9.9      | 27.9                   | 4.3                                             | 0.2       |

## Methodology

*Survey.* The method authors used for conducting the research is an anonymous survey using the questionnaire. The survey was conducted in November 2019 in Kyiv (Ukraine). 160 respondents were divided into two groups (74 in the first session and 86 in the second) were asked about their impression of Ukrainian religious culture and their experience of cross-cultural communication. Each session was supervised by three members of the research team who provided the respondents with the informational support. Collected data was fragmented analyzed and double-checked by responsible members of the team. The fragmentation was necessary because the questionnaire contained questions concerning different aspects of cross-cultural communication (educational, religious, political, etc.).

Only 156 of 160 collected questionnaires were considered as valid. Other 4 profiles were not valid because the respondents provided their personal data. As it was mentioned before, the research presented in this paper is focused only on the religious aspects.

*Sample.* The respondents chosen for the survey at the moment of the survey were the international students of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. Such choice of the sample authors made for the following reasons. Education appears to be one of the main purposes for foreigners to stay in Ukraine, mainly because of good quality and fair prices. For recent years, the number of international students in Ukraine exceeded 50000 and remains stable. Kyiv, being a capital, is currently one of the most attractive Ukrainian cities for foreigners. It holds the 2-nd position in the all-Ukrainian rate (11479 international students in 2019) after Kharkiv (14354 in 2019) (See Table 5).

**Table 5.** The number of international students by region of Ukraine (2016-2019)\*

| Region                 | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 | 2018-2019 |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Totally                | 52019     | 48836     | 54382     |
| Vynnytsia              | 2013      | 1881      | 1983      |
| Volyn                  | 45        | 41        | 53        |
| Dnipro                 | 2722      | 2985      | 3519      |
| Donetsk                | 99        | ---       | 1007      |
| Zhytomyr               | 40        | 35        | 27        |
| Transcarpathian region | 475       | 895       | 1224      |
| Zaporizhzhia           | 2014      | 2228      | 2343      |
| Ivano-Frankivsk        | 1817      | 1590      | 1645      |
| Kyiv region            | 39        | 38        | 56        |
| Kirovohrad             | 143       | 80        | 65        |
| Lugansk                | 202       | 258       | 297       |
| Lviv                   | 1447      | 1498      | 1563      |
| Nikolaev               | 841       | 676       | 799       |
| Odessa                 | 5342      | 5286      | 5847      |
| Poltava                | 1560      | 1527      | 1533      |
| Rivne                  | 279       | 301       | 231       |
| Sumy                   | 1540      | 1675      | 1951      |
| Ternopil               | 1713      | 1731      | 1977      |
| Kharkiv                | 15541     | 13466     | 14354     |
| Kherson                | 138       | 152       | 113       |
| Khmelnysky             | 9         | 11        | 23        |
| Cherkasy               | 716       | 637       | 715       |
| Chernivtsi             | 1083      | 1210      | 1559      |
| Chernihiv              | 6         | 18        | 19        |
| The city of Kyiv       | 12195     | 10772     | 11479     |

\* See - (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2018; State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2019).

Most of the international students that study in Ukraine are enrolled in Medicine (See Table 6).

**Table 6.** The most popular universities among international students 2019 (number of students)\*

| University                                                                              | Number |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Kharkiv National Medical University                                                     | 4432   |
| Karazin Kharkiv National University                                                     | 4363   |
| Odessa National Medical University                                                      | 3780   |
| Bogomolets National Medical University                                                  | 3601   |
| Zaporizhzhya State Medical University                                                   | 2665   |
| State Institution «Dnepropetrovsk Medical Academy of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine» | 2443   |
| National Pirogov Memorial Medical University                                            | 2276   |
| Interregional Academy of Personnel Management                                           | 2079   |
| I. Horbachevsky Ternopil National Medical University                                    | 2050   |
| Bukovinian State Medical University                                                     | 1723   |

\* See - (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2018; State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2019).

Not to be focused only on medical students and to make the sample more representative authors decided to poll the respondents from different specialties.

Such a target sample could be formed of the international students of any non-specialized university. Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv was chosen for the survey because it appears to be one of the largest higher education institutions in Ukraine which accommodates the representative number of non-single specialized international students (1675 - December 1, 2019). The sample of 160 respondents is 10% of the general number of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv international students (Table 7)

**Table 7.** Dynamics of change in the number of international students of bachelor, specialist and master's degree at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (2009-2019) (number of enrolled international students)\*

| Period                 | Number |
|------------------------|--------|
| 2009/10                | 560    |
| 2018/19                | 1291   |
| pitched on<br>12/01/19 | 1675   |

\* See - (Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, 2019).

Moreover, the sample represents almost all countries that hold leading positions in the rate (Table 8) of origin of international students in Ukraine.

**Table 8.** The number of international students in higher education institutions 2016-2019

| Country*     | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 | 2018-2019 |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| India        | 5885      | 7666      | 10693     |
| Azerbaijan   | 8823      | 6679      | 5423      |
| Morocco      | 2854      | 3529      | 4719      |
| Turkmenistan | 6288      | 3669      | 3798      |
| Egypt        | 1114      | 1884      | 2628      |
| Iran         | 193       | 332       | 1382      |
| Turkey       | 1427      | 1393      | 1586      |
| Iraq         | 1319      | 943       | 596       |
| USA          | 251       | 248       | 263       |
| Bangladesh   | 56        | 74        | 82        |

\* The countries from which respondents come from and the countries with the highest student enrollment rates in Ukraine are selected (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2018; State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2019).

The following countries were represented in the survey: Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and the USA<sup>10</sup> (Figure 1)

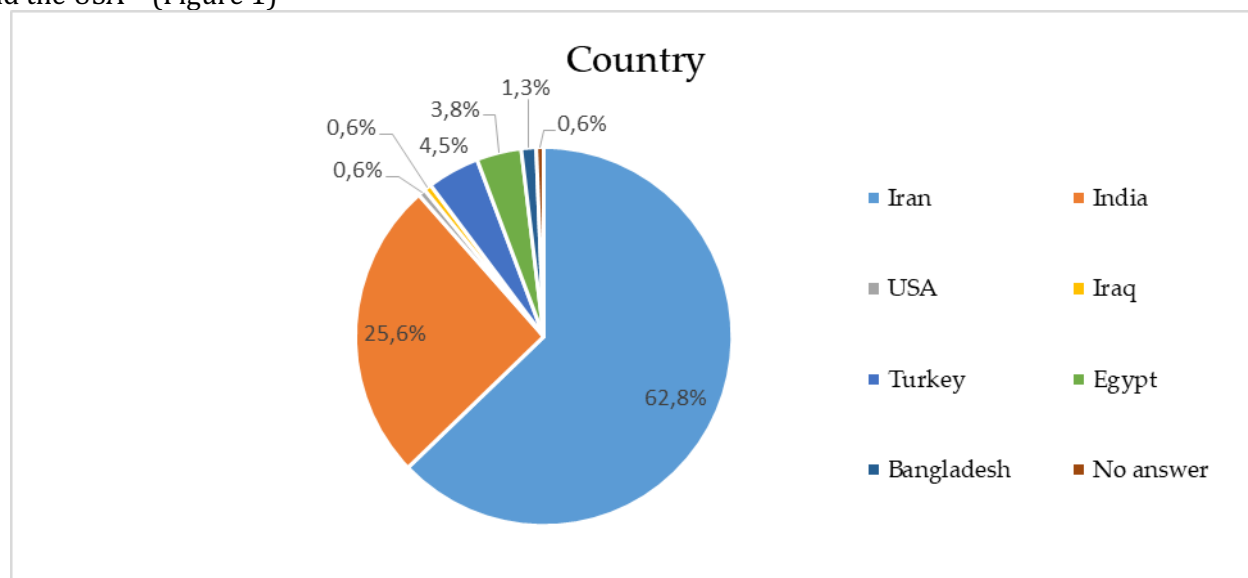


Figure 1. Origin of the respondents (number and % of respondents)

Most of the respondents at the moment of the survey were in the age between 18 and 30. The percentage of gender representatives among respondents was 58% males and 40% females. All the respondents by the time of the survey have been living in Ukraine for at least 1 year and had sufficient experience of communication with the representatives of the local culture. Moreover, all the respondents have recently completed a university course on Ukrainian culture which means that they were able to form a basic opinion on the role of religion in Ukrainian society. The English language competencies of respondents were confirmed by the results of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv entry exams (Figure 2, Figure 3)

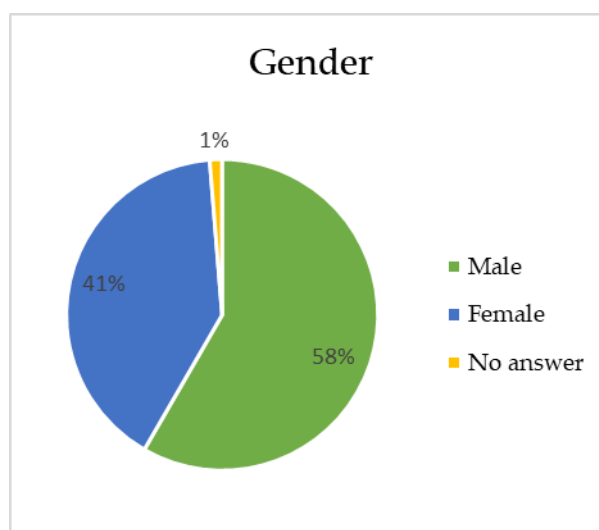


Figure 2. Gender of respondents (number and % of respondents)

<sup>10</sup> One of the respondents declared that his country of origin is the USA.

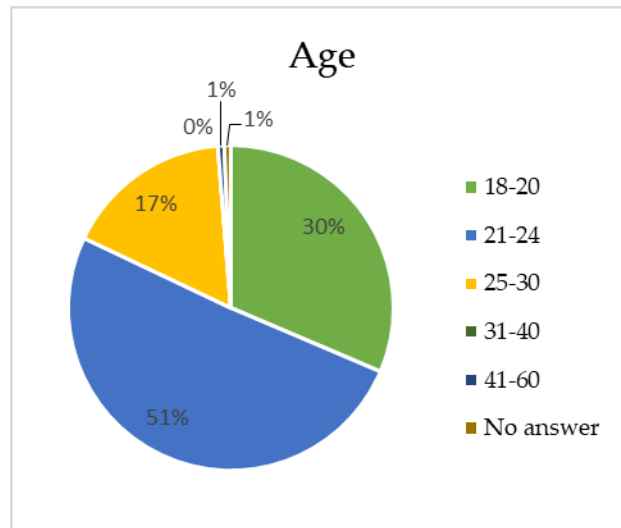


Figure 3. Age of respondents (number and % of respondents)

*Questionnaire.* The questionnaire was designed to collect the data based on personal opinion and experience rather than commonly held stereotypes. This authors' intention influenced the wording of the questions and their meaning. Since the purpose of the survey was to compare results with the Ukrainians' declaration concerning the same issues, the questions were formulated typically for correspondent Ukrainian surveys. The meanings of the main concepts used in the questions (religion, freedom, tolerance, intolerance, superstition, etc.) were explained in advance to the respondents by the supervisors to avoid misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

### Findings

The level of religious freedom and tolerance of Ukrainian religious culture appears to be an important factor that has to be taken into account in the evaluation of the openness of modern Ukrainian society for cross-cultural communication. The vast majority of the international students from the Eastern cultures are representatives of the religions that are mostly not widespread and popular in Ukraine (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and others). As it was mentioned before, such a situation often leads to misunderstandings which may occur due to the cultural differences. Religion sometimes appears to be an essential ground in this regard. Authors claim that to find out the roots of the potential difficulties in the cross-cultural communication it is necessary to ask international students about their opinion on the peculiarities of Ukrainian religious culture and how comfortable do they feel being a representative of a particular religion in Ukraine.

To collect the international students' opinion it was decided to form a representative sample and conduct a survey. As a result of a conducted survey, authors received 156 of 160 valid anonymous answered questionnaires (profiles). Whilst the questionnaire touched upon different aspects of cross-cultural communication, in the frames of this paper authors focus on the questions that touched upon the religious aspects. The following questions were put to analyze international students' attitude to the religious culture of Ukraine and to distinguish possible grounds of the problems in cross-cultural communication.

1. "Do you consider the Ukrainians to be a religious nation?" This question was designed to clarify to what extent international students consider Ukrainians to be a religious nation due to the experience of the everyday and professional communication. The opinion of international students on this issue will allow concluding to what extent the declarative religiosity of Ukrainians coincides with what foreigners think about it.

The vast majority of the respondents declared that in their opinion Ukrainians are a religious nation (44%). Other possible options to answer this question ("No", "Difficult to answer") were represented al-

most equally: “No” – 26% and “Difficult to answer” – 24% respectively. Only 6% of the respondents ignored this question for some reason (Figure 4).

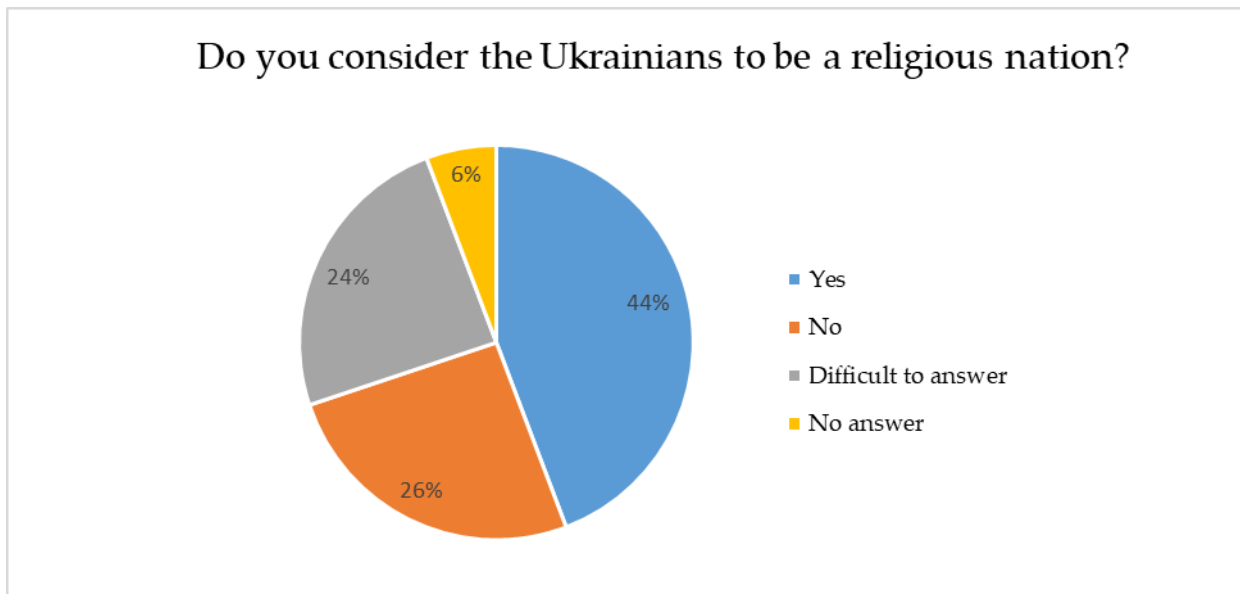
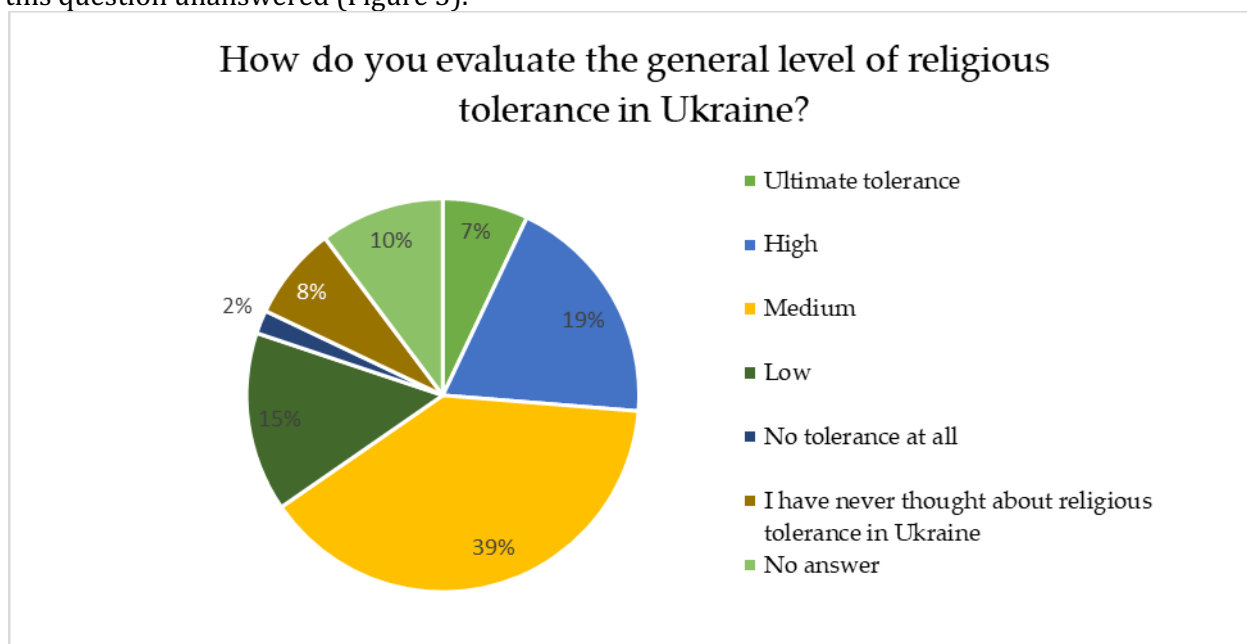


Figure 4. The opinion of the respondents concerning the religiosity of Ukrainians (number and % of respondents)

2. “How do you evaluate the general level of religious tolerance in Ukraine?” This question was put in order to evaluate how comfortable do the international students feel being the representatives of their particular religions in Ukraine and to what extent their answers to this question coincide with the answers to the similar question given by Ukrainians.

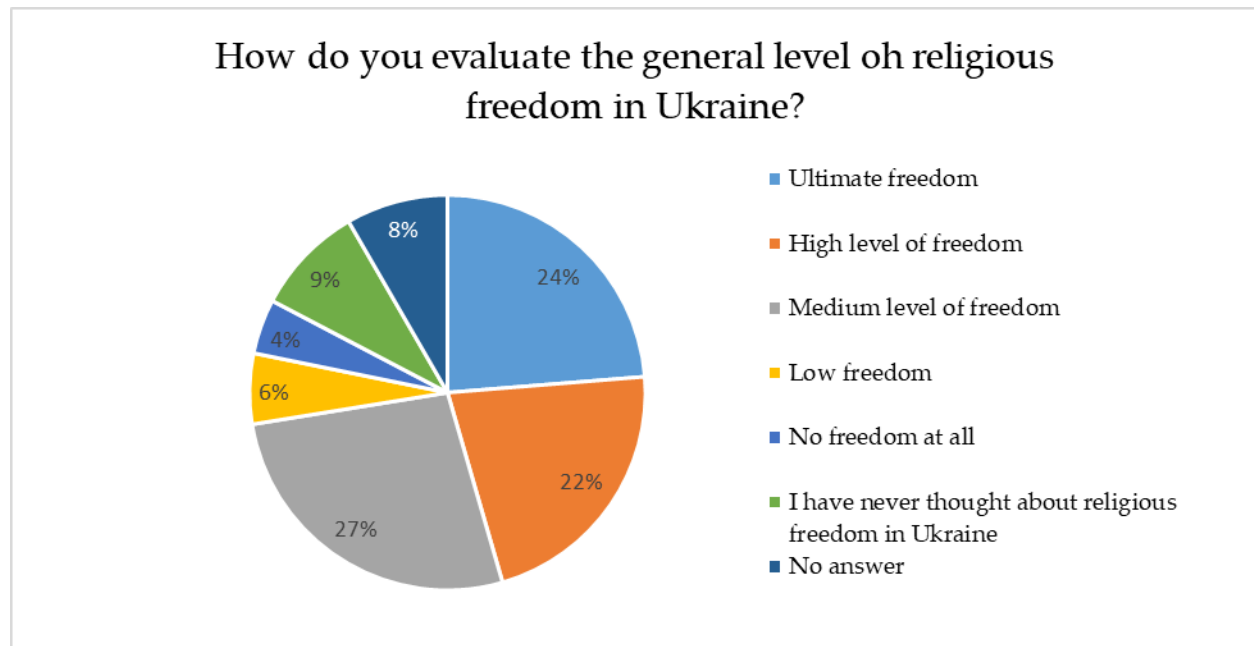
Respondents were proposed six possible answers to this question. Only a few respondents (7%) chose the option “ultimate tolerance”. A little more reported that the level of religious tolerance in Ukraine is high (19%). The most widespread answer was that religious tolerance is medium (39%). The positive answers to this question are more numerous than negative (65%) The negative answers comprise of options “low” (15%), “no tolerance at all” (2%). 8% of respondents declared their indifference to this question answering “I have never thought about religious tolerance in Ukraine”. 10% of respondents left this question unanswered (Figure 5).





**Figure 5.** Religious tolerance in Ukraine from the respondents' point of view (number and % of respondents)

3. "How do you evaluate the general level of religious freedom in Ukraine?" This question was mostly focused on the examination of international students' perception of Ukrainian society in terms of the realization of freedom. As well as in the case of religious tolerance the positive answers to this question prevailed on the negative ones. The main difference between answers to this related question is that in case of religious freedom more respondents stated its relatively high level. 24% of the respondents declared that in their opinion the level of religious freedom in Ukraine is ultimate; 22% stated that the level is high; 27% declared that religious freedom is on the medium level. Other answers are shared between options "low" (6%), "no freedom at all" (4%), "I have never thought about religious freedom in Ukraine" (9%). 8% of respondents ignored this question (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Religious freedom in Ukraine from the respondents' point of view (number and % of respondents)

4. "Have you ever experienced the cases of religious intolerance towards you in Ukraine?" The answers to this question have shown that among the group of respondents 15% experienced numerous cases of intolerance. 24% confirmed being involved in several cases. 35% of respondents declared no cases of intolerance towards them. 18% of respondents chose the option "difficult to answer" and 8% did not answer at all (Figure 7).

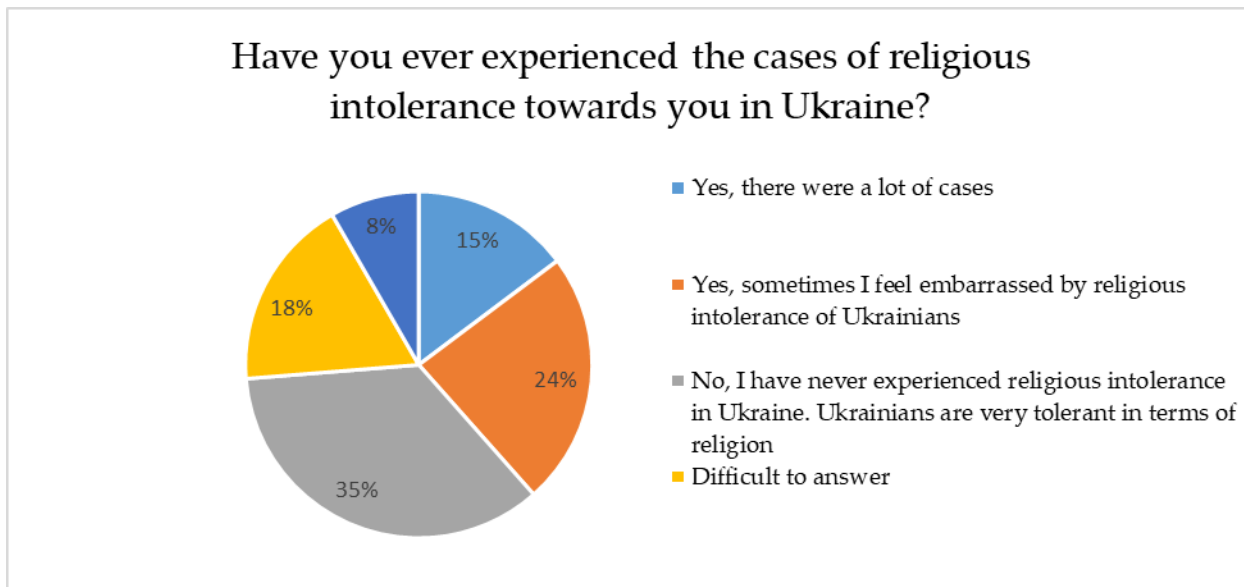


Figure 7. Cases of religious intolerance towards international students in Ukraine (number and % of respondents)

5. "Do you consider the peculiarities of religious life in Ukraine to be an essential factor that should be taken into account in frames of your future professional activity?" The options "yes" and "no", which were proposed as the main alternatives for answering this question, were chosen by an almost equal quantity of respondents – 35% and 35% accordingly. 22% of respondents showed their hesitation concerning this question by choosing the option "difficult to answer". 8% left this question with no attention (Figure 8).

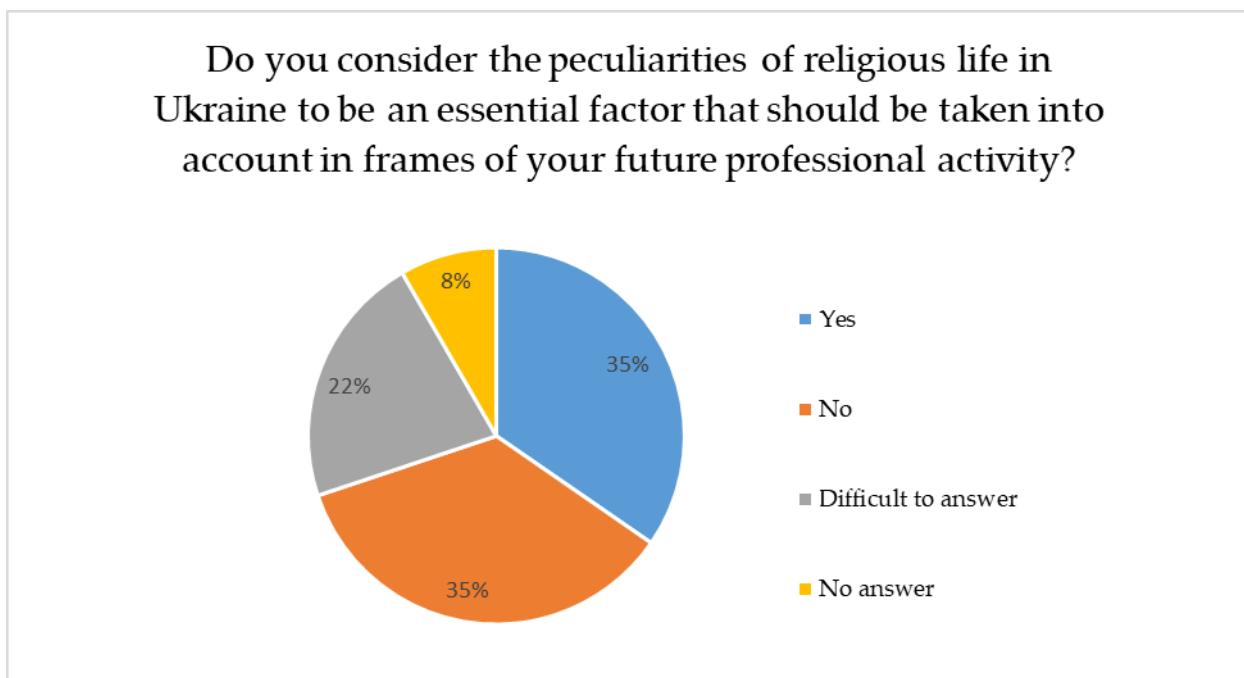


Figure 8. International students' opinion on the necessity of taking into account the religious issues in professional communication (number and % of respondents)

6. "What is your opinion on the prospects of religious culture in Ukraine (20-30) years?" The majority of respondents (35%) reported that religiosity will remain at the same level. 19% of respondents seem to be sure that the number of believers will decrease and 9% expressed an opinion that the dramatic de-

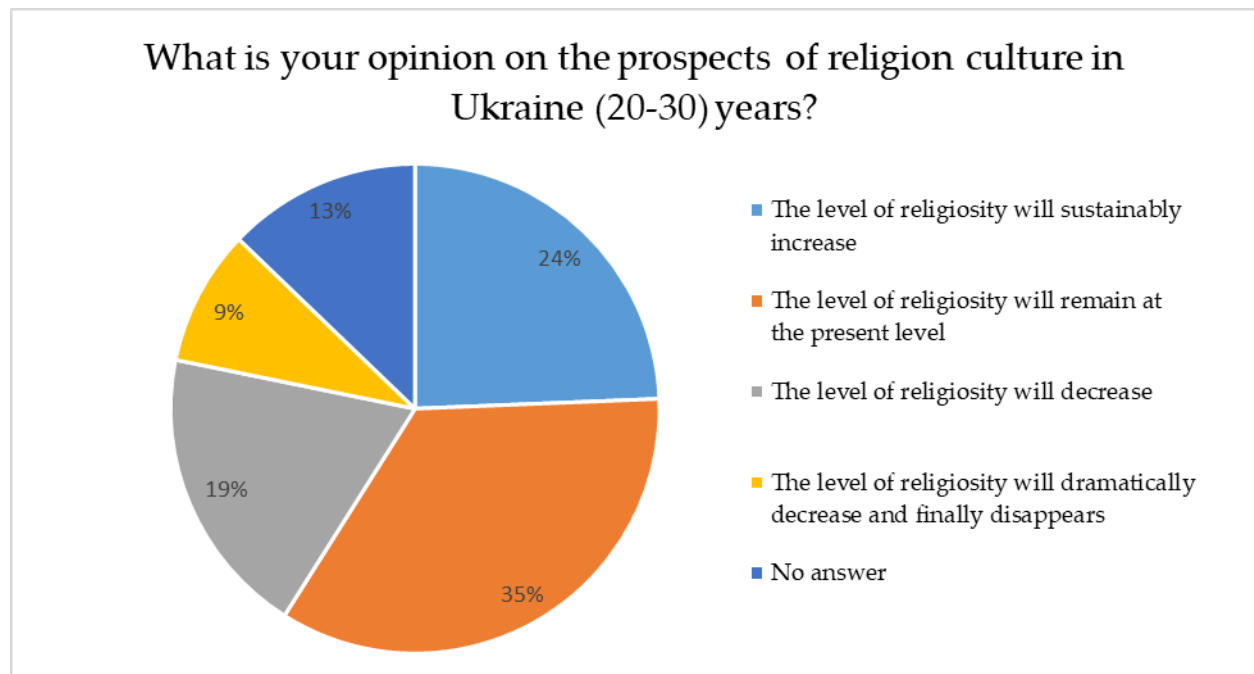


crease is expected. 13% decided not to answer this question and the remaining 24% made an optimistic claim.

## Results and Discussion

All the aforementioned data leads us to visibly controversial conclusions. According to the data presented in the Razumkov Centre's report, 74% of Ukrainian respondents perceive themselves as moderately or highly tolerant persons in terms of religion. However, authors presume two hidden aspects (or modes) of actual religious tolerance in Ukraine. The first mode represents the informational, ideological and legislative public image of the subject. This means that in Ukraine the politically and ethically "correct" way of religious self-representation exists explicitly in social narratives and communicational practices and implicitly in the culturally-induced self-determination. This statement is justified by the international students' point of view regarding general questions about Ukrainians' religious tolerance. Namely, answering the question on the religious tolerance of Ukrainians the majority of the respondents (65%) believe that locals appear to be moderately tolerant which well corresponds with the Razumkov Centre's conclusions. This is the "outer" or "imaginative" mode of religious tolerance in Ukraine.

At the same time, when it comes to the real practice of everyday communication, it turns out that 56% of foreign respondents declared at least one case of actual religious abuse. This figure has to be commented on. Due to Figure 9, 15% of the respondents reported on the numerous cases of religious intolerance towards them. 24% of respondents claimed that they were abused on the religious grounds at least several times. Moreover, 18% of respondents were unable to deny any act of religious intolerance towards them. The last statement derives from the authors' common opinion that the option "difficult to answer" means rather an affirmative claim. Otherwise, the respondents should have answered in a more definite way (meaning "no"). This means that probably they tended to interpret some particular communicative situations concerning religion as rather embarrassing then neutral. Aforementioned figures have led the authors to the common conclusion that second "inner" or "practical" mode of the religious tolerance in Ukraine exists simultaneously with explicitly declared one (the first mode mentioned above).



**Figure 9.** International students' opinion on the necessity of taking into account the religious issues in professional communication (number and % of respondents)

In the authors' opinion, the proposed hypothesis explains the discovered inconsistency between declared religious tolerance of Ukrainians and the real state of things (i.e. numerous acts of intolerance and

abuse in cross-cultural communication. Another proof of the two-mode hypothesis is the fact that respondents even being the victims of embarrassing and abusive behavior or interaction reproduced the common narrative on the "high-level tolerance" of locals. Authors assume that such conformism derives from probable incoherence of common narrative practices in Ukraine, and needs further exploration in broader research.

It is noteworthy, that international students in their opinion are likely to reflect the common Ukrainian narratives concerning religiosity. As an example, it could be noted that the figures concerning the perception of Ukrainians' religiosity rate obtained by authors' survey (Figure 4) do not coincide with the data presented by Razumkov Center research – 44% and 72% of respondents accordingly. Thus, two aforementioned modes of perception of religious tolerance derive from the broader Ukrainians' attitude to their religiosity itself. In their narrative practices and core beliefs, Ukrainians seem to be religious and tolerant. Nevertheless, in everyday practices, they represent a much lower level of mentioned features.

The same conclusion could be applied also to the visible inconsistency in Ukrainians' and international students' perception of religious freedom in Ukraine. Religious freedom in Ukraine is guaranteed by the constitution<sup>11</sup> and additional laws. (Druzenko, 2014) The reality of religious freedom is confirmed by the present religious diversity in Ukraine. Nevertheless, foreign respondents declared that its level appears rather poor (37% of respondents chose the options "medium", "low", "no freedom at all"). More detailed further inquiry on this particular issue is considered to be necessary to provide more profound justification of the stated hypothesis.

One of the consequences of the presented discrepancy is that the international students, who have been living in Ukraine for several years, do not believe in Ukrainians religiosity and tolerance. It is shown in the answers concerning the necessity of taking into account the peculiarities of Ukrainian religious culture in their professional experience. More than half of the questioned international students (57%) declared that religious aspects could be ignored when it comes to professional activity such as medicine, law, business, etc.

Regarding further perspectives of religion in Ukraine it is noteworthy that, despite the tendency of a global crisis of religious faith and its influence on the global economic and political processes (Shwed, 2019), in Ukraine, the level of religiosity sustainably increases. (Razumkov Center, 2018) When it comes to the international students' opinion on the prospects of religion in Ukraine they mostly declared positive expectation for the growth of the religiosity level of Ukrainians. Such opinion declared by the international students may be the result of their subjective perception of the religion's role typical for their national cultures. For instance, the typical for Eastern cultures perception of religion as an everlasting and inevitable part of social reality. An important detail that must be clarified in further research concerning these expectations is what mode of Ukrainians religiosity in terms of proposed hypothesis tends to increase in the forthcoming decades.

One of the important conclusions that authors came to is that obtained results and formulated the "two-mode" hypothesis might be relevant not only for better understanding and improvement of Ukrainian international educational practices. This experience and conclusions might be valid for the international education of many ex-soviet and European countries that were the part of "Warsaw Pact". Such a conclusion could be made due to the cultural similarities of most of the Slavic countries as well as the social and educational practices commonly inherited and preserved from being under the Soviet influence.

### **Further Research**

After consideration of all obtained findings and results, the authors concluded that for further development and justification of a proposed hypothesis it would be necessary to conduct similar surveys in the other countries whose educational and social and cultural practices have much in common with Ukrainian. In order to make further research more representative and specify some particular sections of collected data, the additional questionnaires and interviews might be added. Additional questionnaires

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<sup>11</sup> Article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine determines that "Everyone has the right to freedom of personal philosophy and religion. This right includes the freedom to profess or not to profess any religion, to perform alone or collectively and unimpededly religious rites and ceremonial rituals, and to conduct religious activity." (Constitution of Ukraine, 2020)



and interviews should be designed to specify a) the religion of respondents; b) representatives of which particular religions experience difficulties in cross-cultural communication; c) the real cases of religious intolerance, their causes and solutions. Another aspect of the future development of this research is the dynamic monitoring of future changes in the provided statistics.

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## РЕЛІГІЙНА СВОБОДА ТА ТОЛЕРАНТНІСТЬ У МІЖНАРОДНІЙ ПРАКТИЦІ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

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### Анотація

У цій роботі представлені результати недавнього опитування, проведеного серед 160 іноземних студентів Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка. Метою опитування було проаналізувати думку міжнародних студентів щодо релігійності українців, щоб визначити існуючі чи можливі проблеми міжкультурної комунікації у галузі вищої освіти. Отримані дані були узагальнені, проаналізовані та порівняні з результатами аналогічних опитувань, проведених серед респондентів України. Порівняння показало, що релігійність, толерантність та релігійна свобода українців у сприйнятті іноземних студентів помітно нижчі ніж у сприйнятті самих українців. Автори вважають, що представлений кейс є репрезентативним та релевантним також для деяких сусідніх країн, які мають культурно-історичні зв'язки з Україною та можуть сприяти встановленню належних міжнародних освітніх практик.

**Ключові слова:** інтернаціоналізація вищої освіти; релігія; толерантність; свобода; міжкультурне спілкування; Україна; іноземні студенти; полікультурне комунікативне середовище.