



# Report: 3d Ecumenical Social Week in Lviv – Ukraine 2010

This is a brief report of the Ecumenical Social Week 2010, which was held in the metropolis of Lviv in Western Ukraine, 4-10 October 2010. Preparations for the 4th Ecumenical Social Week are already well on the way, but it is still worth while to look back and see what was accomplished last year. First, because it is an interesting attempt at shaping the common good. Second, because it is an important contribution to Ukrainian society as such.

The Social Week is a lay movement, which, following the papal social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), originated in France in 1904. Its main goal was to promote the Church's social thinking, and to apply and to adapt it to the problems of our time. This example has been followed outside France in countries like Italy, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. After the fall of communism, the French Social Week inspired new initiatives in Poland, Slovenia, and Ukraine. Its focus rests on the Christian social teachings, but also attracts sympathiser from outside the Churches.

Interestingly enough, the Ukrainian Ecumenical Social Week is founded on a local tradition as well, which was cut short however by World War II and the Communist rule over Western Ukraine. The first Social Week came about in 1939. Fostered by the Major Archbishop of the Greek



Catholic Church Andrey Sheptytsky, he chose the theme of Christian patriotism based on love and cooperation regardless of denominational and political divisions. In this manner Sheptytsky wanted to oppose Communism and Fascism.

Goal of the Ukrainian Ecumenical Social Week today is: "The attainment of society's prosperity through social policy improvement by...uniting efforts of authorities, community, Church and business."

*Frans Hoppenbrouwers.*

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# Ukraine's Slow Slide to a Third World Status

*Church's social teaching needed more than ever*

**For the third consecutive time, the metropolis of Lviv in Western Ukraine witnessed an Ecumenical Social Week. From 4 until 10 October 2010 representatives of different confessions, and mostly Church based NGOs gathered to reflect upon their social responsibility. This event was initiated by the Institute of Ecumenical Studies at the Ukrainian Catholic University. Director of the institute is the French-born Antoine Arjakovsky. Communicantes supported various projects of the Institute.**

Theme of the 2010 Ecumenical Social Week was *Trust, responsibility, philanthropy* – in Ukraine, these three notions are either inadequately practiced or all together unknown, even as concepts.

This unfamiliarity clearly demonstrates how society, twenty years after the fall of communism, has barely recovered from fifty years of totalitarian repression. In this respect, Ukraine is no exception to the rule: in all former communist countries the sense of social responsibility or philanthropy is poorly developed. Trust in one another has an equally bad record.

## **Courageous**

The Ukrainian context remains complicated, and, therefore, organising an Ecumenical Social Week is a truly courageous thing to do. Though there are some, so to say, constant factors: economic decline, serious social problems and ecumenical disagreement – ever since the presidential elections of February 2010 the political thermometer indicates some stormy weather as well.

Taras Kurzio, a commentator of Ukrainian society and politics, labels the development since February 2010 as a degenerative process of *creeping authoritarianism* and a *re-KGBisation* of Ukraine. He sees the secret service SBU moving towards the more repressive Russian FSB-model. During the re-

gional and local elections of 31 October 2010, president Viktor Yanukovich failed his first democracy test, Kurzio concluded.

Increased pressure is not just felt but goes accompanied with actions of the police, judiciary and secret services. Human rights and feminist NGOs, historians and academics, journalists, the political opposition and foreign foundations are targeted. Educational institutions and prominent citizens, who follow an independent course or vent criticism may well receive a visit from the SBU. Thus in May 2010, an officer went to see the rector of the Ukrainian Catholic University, Father Boris Gudziak. While students prepared for anti-Government protests, the SBU man asked Gudziak to advise his students not to engage in illegal activities.

The all together poor state of the civil society clearly comes to light in the metropolis of Lviv: with more or less one million inhabitants the city allegedly counts just one hundred well-functioning NGOs, including sport clubs and organisations providing leisurely activities. This is less than the number of church buildings – about 110.

## **Responsibility**

In spite of all these complications, the Ecumenical Social Week wants to instil in the church leaders and faithful the notion that Church as a whole, and believers individually, have a responsibility for the society they live in, and that they can and must actively contribute to it.

Furthermore, the main organisers – the Institute of Ecumenical Studies and the Lviv Polytechnic University – want to bring together politicians, civil servants, NGOs, the world of business, and the educational sector in their care for the common good. Unlike the French example, on which it was modelled, the Ukrainian Ecumenical Social Week sought to be ecumenical from the very start – not the least because the director of the In-

stitute of Ecumenical Studies is the Orthodox Frenchman Antoine Arjakovsky, driving force behind the Ecumenical Social Week.

Arjakovsky would like “to make people believe that they can influence the development of society.” Meanwhile, he clearly understands that this is an extremely difficult issue in the Ukrainian context. “Most people are convinced that their personal contribution is of no meaning at all”, he commented further.

The next Ecumenical Social Week of October 2011 is devoted to the issue of economic reforms and conscience. These economic reforms remain a pressing matter, and the country is reaching a point of no return. For Ukraine it will soon be bend or break. Will its leaders continue on the chosen path towards decline or will they start with genuinely far-reaching and fair economic reforms.

Both options are equally awkward, Arjakovsky admitted. “With no decisive economic action this country will become part of the Third World, but given the great poverty among a large part of the population, reforms will have a very unpleasant outcome for many. How should the Churches deal with this situation, and could they somehow help to smoothen out some of the serious consequences?”

All in all, for Ukrainians it is often complicated, sometimes impossible, to engage in real, meaningful, and healing action. However, the Ecumenical Social Week can raise greater awareness, inspire action and co-operation, and provide the necessary tools to make it possible to conceive of how Church, society and social responsibility are tied together. And that is no luxury at all.



*At a market of volunteer associations in the city centre of Lviv: organiser of the Ecumenical Social Week Antoine Arjakovsky (l.) talking with a foreign guest*

# The Ecumenical Social Week 2010

*Trust. Responsibility. Philanthropy*

***It is impossible to give a comprehensive account of this Ecumenical Social Week. There were so many meetings, presentations, and round tables to attend. With a 30 page program in English, there was much too much to see and to experience. The 2010 program was as ambitious as ever, but, due to decreased funding, slightly less abundant than the year before.***

Prominent guests had been invited. Among them were Marc Hardy of Notre Dame University; Assistant-Professor Romain Huët of the University of Rennes, France; the IMF's representative to Ukraine Martin Raiser; and Mrs Katerina Yushchenko, wife of the former Ukrainian President. They contributed greatly to conceptualise the theme.

## **Christian roots**

Martin Raiser drew attention to the invaluable importance of trust in social and economic life. Trust, Raiser modestly defined as "the willingness to open yourself to cheating by others". Actually, taking risks in life is based on trust. But, in Ukraine and Russia for example, trust is extremely low, inducing inefficient management strategies: ver-

## **The World Wide Web**

- Ecumenical Social Week  
*esw.org.ua*
- Institute of Ecumenical Studies  
*ecumenicalstudies.org.ua*
- National Concourse Philanthropist of the Year (only in Ukrainian)  
*blagodijnyk.org.ua*
- Successful Initiatives Observatory  
*initiatives.org.ua*
- Three Stories of Galicia  
*threestoriesofgalicia.com*
- Ukrainian Catholic University  
*ucu.edu.ua*

tical control, maximising short term profits or plain cheating.

Marc Hardy presented a short history of philanthropy, insisting on its Christian roots (caritas/charity). Like Raiser, he insisted on trust as "social capital", which bridges the distance between strangers. Creating and reinforcing relationships, we strengthen mutual understanding and tolerance. Philanthropy helps build bonds of trust: we put our believe in others and in their potential. Hardy also



*Friday 8 October 2010: Participants of the round table "Assessment of Charity: Moral or*

pointed out that Ukraine is on the 150th place of the “World Giving Index 2010”.

### **Lobby**

A vast divide exists between Ukrainian state and large parts of society, but an effort was made nevertheless at influencing state policy with respect to civil society. If you don't ask, you don't get!

At a plenary session, a council of experts gave their support to the proposal “Efficient legislation as a foundation for the development of civil society”. The ensuing discussion, however, made it clear that, for example, representatives of NGOs have little confidence in lawmakers and the lawmaking process. Most strikingly, this meeting between lawmakers and NGOs was poorly attended. Among the latter, discouragement mixed with distrust is surely the prevailing feeling.

### **Encouraging**

Two events highlighted the effort to put new ideas and methods into practice in order to change society. Sympathetic was a presentation of the “Philanthropist of the Year” contest (since 2007). A local initiative from Mykolaiv brought to light that, especially in regional

and local business circles, sponsorship, self-promotion or self-advancement is often mistaken for philanthropy. Meanwhile philanthropy as such draws just little attention.

A “Successful Initiatives Observatory” was presented in the course of the Ecumenical Social Week. It is yet another valuable initiative. This web-based database contains numerous well-managed NGOs throughout Ukraine. They can serve as an example for Ukrainians who want to become active in society themselves.

### **Some recommendations**

- First, creative methodology and didactics are needed to involve the general public, students, and specialists in abstract subjects and themes.
- Second, spreading the spirit of the Ecumenical Social Week in Ukraine must remain a key target.
- Third, it seems useful to invite more foreign guests from all of Europe. Sharing knowledge and experiences, their attendance may also benefit a sense of togetherness. Experiences from Eastern Europe are valuable, because of the common history of oppression and of rebuilding Church and society.



*Material Quality”. In the centre, the logo of the national contest “Philanthropist of the Year”*

# At the Margins of the Ecumenical Social Week

Cinema, Taizé, Art



*"Forgotten World". The destruction of Jewish life in Eastern Europe*

***In the post-communist era, Ukraine got familiar with new ideas, new concepts, new forms, and even wrote a new history for itself, with which it must now carve a path to a brighter future. There is, indeed, an overwhelming presence of the new. At the margins of the Ecumenical Social Week other activities had been organised, which illustrate the not uncomplicated renewal of society and of religious life. Participants could experience this themselves at various venues in the city centre of Lviv.***

These activities, which by and large appealed rather to the heart than to the head, offered a possibility to experience the transition of society from quite a different angle. Some of



*"Three stories of Galicia". A movie about selfless courage in times of war and hardship*

them – the documentary “Three Stories of Galicia”, the exhibition “Forgotten World”, a Taizé prayer day, and the art foundation *Symbolum Sacrum* – are highlighted here below.

In their own way, they illustrate the desire to overcome the wounds of the past and move ahead towards an open and more viable future for Ukraine.

## **Selfless courage**

In the past, the ethnic diversity of Galicia (a border region of Poland and Ukraine) never was one of a vibrant together of peoples, but rather of groups living their own lives, in separate spheres with few overlaps. Differences were exacerbated during World War II and artificially suppressed under communism.

The 2010 documentary “Three Stories of Galicia”, which was featured during the Ecumenical Social Week, clearly illustrated these divisions, but underlined the need to vanquish ethnic discord and celebrated the

human power to do so as well. Depicting the experiences of a Jewish man, a Polish priest and a Ukrainian woman partizan, the movie is a tribute to selfless courage in times of war and hardship. Even though their life stories were written on some of the darkest pages of European history, they bore witnesses to the goodness of man. The Ukrainian-born Jew Aharon Weiss, for example, tells how, after the war he and his family were asked to protect a member of the infamous collaborationist Ukrainian Auxiliary Police. He was the son of their Ukrainian neighbour Julia, who hid the Weiss family from the Germans.

The exhibition “Forgotten World” recalled the grandeur and destruction of Jewish life in Eastern Europe.

### Taizé

Towards the end of the week a so-called “Day of Trust” was organised together with two brothers of the French Taizé community. Especially meant for youngsters, it offered a chance of meeting with Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants from all over Europe in a genuinely ecumenical setting – something that was utterly impossible 10 to 20 years ago.

The morning was devoted to meditation and was followed by discussion in small groups. In the afternoon workshops were organised. Theme: “God calls us to transform the world, with great ambition but also with profound humility”. Among other workshops, the participants could visit the studio of the Lviv-based art foundation *Symbolum Sacrum*, lead by curator Mariana Kavinska.

### New Ukrainian Icon

The world of arts doubles the difficulties of transformation in Ukrainian post-communist society. It displays a great deal of stagnation. With respect to religious art this adds up to a double handicap. Generally speaking, the academic study of art is more preoccupied with copying of communist precedes-



“The New Ukrainian Icon”

sors than with personal creativity, while the painting of religious art is subjected to strict rules. And all this is often accompanied by a great emphasis on a need for a truly genuine Ukrainian style.

And this is where *Symbolum Sacrum* kicked in. The project “The New Ukrainian Icon” was designed several years ago to support artists, who wanted to put unconventional creativity into creating works of art based on Christian faith. The idea was to use the artistic language of today to appeal to people of today.



*Marc Hardy, Director of Nonprofit Executive Education at the University of Notre Dame, lecturing on the topic of philanthropy in the Aula Magna of the Lviv Polytechnic University*

### **Aim of Communicantes**

The Foundation Communicantes aims at connecting the Dutch Catholic Church community with fellow believers throughout Eastern Europe.

In order to achieve our goal we negotiate between project applicants and donors in the Netherlands; we support exchange in the fields of pastoral care and theology; we inform about current events in Church and society in East and West.

### **Collaborators**

**projects (honorary)**

Paul Wennekes M.Div.

**projects and publicity**

Frans Hoppenbrouwers M.Div.

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