
European Churches' Letter to Putin and Zelensky calling for an "Easter" ceasefire

In a joint letter addressed to the Russian and Ukrainian presidents Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky, Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich, president of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), and Rev. Christian Krieger, president of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), have requested that a ceasefire be declared in Ukraine from midnight on April 17 (00:00 hours) until midnight April 24 (24:00 hours) so as to give Christians in Russia and Ukraine, "sisters and brothers in Christ", the opportunity to celebrate Easter in peace. Also on Wednesday, the two presidents of COMECE and CEC wrote to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow to inform him of the letter-appeal, expressing the hope that he will likewise support the initiative. **"This call – Hollerich and Krieger write in their letter to Presidents Putin and Zelensky - echoes that of Pope Francis on April 10, Palm Sunday, in St. Peter's Square: 'Put the weapons down! Let an Easter truce start. But not to rearm and resume combat but a truce to reach peace through real negotiations open to some sacrifices for the good of the people.'**" The ceasefire called for by the Christian Churches of Europe symbolically embraces the two Easters that Western and Eastern Christians celebrate on different dates, according to the Gregorian and Julian calendars, respectively on 17 and 14 April this year. "In a few days from now – reads the letter of the COMECE and CEC Presidents - Christians throughout the world will be remembering the passion and death of Jesus Christ and celebrating his resurrection. These Paschal celebrations lie at the heart of the Christian faith and are the high point of the liturgical year. They are central to the lives of the faithful. In 2022, Easter as fixed by the Gregorian calendar is on Sunday 17 April in Western Europe. In Eastern Europe, as fixed by the Julian calendar, it comes on Sunday 24 April. We would ask for a general ceasefire in the conflict between your two countries so as to give Christians in Russia and Ukraine, sisters and brothers in Christ, the opportunity to celebrate Easter in peace and dignity. *Such a truce would also be of benefit to all the citizens of both your countries, giving them a respite from the worrying uncertainty about the lives of their loved ones who are either fighting in the conflicts or affected by them. We are appealing to Christian leaders to join with us and support this initiative!*" Both CEC and COMECE presidents also informed Patriarch Kirill of Moscow about their appeal. "We asking for your public support to this initiative", reads the joint letter. *"You could demonstrate how much importance you attach to giving Christians in Russia and in Ukraine, sisters and brothers in Christ, the necessary respite to enable them to celebrate Easter in peace and dignity. After two years during which Easter has been celebrated with some restrictions due to the pandemic, we are hoping, with your support, to create the conditions that will allow all of us to celebrate those moments that are essential for all Christians, the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such a truce would also be of benefit to all the citizens of both your countries, giving them a respite from the worrying uncertainty about the lives of their loved ones who are either fighting in the conflicts or affected by them."*

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