

## Ukraine. Msgr. Mokrzycki: "We are all Ukrainians. Religion must not be a cause of division"

(From Lviv) "We are all Ukrainians. No matter our rite or religious denomination, whether we are Latin, Kyiv Orthodox, Moscow Orthodox, Greek Catholic or Protestant: we are all Ukrainians. Three decades have passed since Independence and it would be wrong to say that the faithful of the Moscow Patriarchate are Russians and those of Kiev are Ukrainians. The people are suffering from the war and they must not be divided and set against each other." With these words Msgr.

**Mieczysław Mokrzycki**, archbishop of Lviv, delineated a new potential 'war front' in the country invaded by the Russians on February 24. He did so today during a meeting with a delegation from Aid to the Church in Need, chaired by its director, Alessandro Monteduro, on a solidarity visit to Ukraine (until May 7). Mokrzycki recalled that "two bills pending in Parliament envisage ousting the Russian Orthodox Church from Ukraine, which has caused a reaction on the part of Moscow's Patriarchate - also concerned about the possible confiscation of property."



*"I do believe that the Moscow Patriarchate has the right to be present in Ukraine, regardless of the positions expressed by its leaders, most notably Kirill", the prelate said. "Ukraine has the right to have a variety of rites and religious denominations in its midst. Citizenship is the binding element of the population and religion should not be a cause of division"* Monsignor Mokrzycki continued, adding that "the Orthodox Church of Ukraine came into being for political reasons. It did not stem from the grassroots level, from the people." "As Latin Church," noted the archbishop, "we are working to mend the rifts and divisions, even though we represent only one per cent of the population. We have very good relations with the Greek Orthodox Church in Moscow. Our dialogue with everyone is based on the awareness that war cannot be used to settle accounts between Churches. It's not what the people deserve. Vladimir Putin might go so far as to say that the Greek Orthodox Church of Moscow is persecuted in Ukraine and that he must defend it. This is something diabolical and it would further aggravate the situation." "Air raid alerts go off almost every day - said the prelate -. The latest was on the evening of May 3rd when missiles hit the city. We are not used to it, we are always afraid. People are taking shelter in cellars. There has been repeated shelling of the city.

**"Putin wants to seize not just a part of Ukraine, but the whole country."**

The underlying hope lies the Pope's visit: "Pope Francis has been praying for us since the outbreak of the war. His pilgrimage to Ukraine would be a precious and important event, to set foot on this bloodstained and martyred land. And to bless it. It would be a very meaningful gesture. All the Ukrainian people are awaiting him". **A solidarity hub.** Monsignor Mokrzycki is assisted in his pastoral ministry by his auxiliary bishop, Monsignor **Eduard Kava**, who has been cooperating with Caritas Spes since the outbreak of the conflict to welcome refugees, amounting to over 500,000 in the entire

region of Lviv. The diocese has provided hospitality for over 4300 of them. The bishop described the efforts made during the past two months of war to the Aid to the Church in Need delegation: "In the initial period we brought food and water to the refugees and we provided relief to up to 7,000 people a day from various parts of the city and the surrounding area. We also went to the war zones where we delivered 327 truckloads of medicine and food. This was made possible thanks to cooperation from Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, Germany, France, Italy and England." Msgr. Kava, with the help of volunteers, succeeded in creating a strong solidarity network, with Lviv acting as a veritable coordination hub. Relief supplies are stored in large warehouses and from there, according to the needs, they are sent to Kiev, Odessa, Kharkiv and other cities in the country. Where possible, aids are delivered by train.

