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## **POPE LEO XIV AND THE HOLY SEE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE. VALUES, APPEALS, POSSIBILITIES**

**Storoška M.**

*PhD., Associate Professor,  
Associate Professor at the Department of Social Sciences  
Institute of Technology and Business in Prešov  
Prešov, Slovakia*

### **Introduction**

What is the current position of the Holy See in relation to military conflicts? This is an interesting question, if only because the Holy See, as one of the oldest sovereigns of international law, is also a state ruled by a bishop, in whose hands the political and religious functions of power are combined.

Unlike in the past, when the Papal State pursued a relatively active foreign and defense policy, today the Holy See generally acts as a spiritual authority on the international stage, protecting the principles of religious freedom and the natural law of Catholic believers in other countries. However, what is the Holy See's attitude to just war? It can be said that it is very cautious. It seems that, despite the fact that the doctrine of just war is part of the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church, as well as the latest version of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Catholic Church currently appeals more to avoiding war at all costs. In our article, we will try to take a closer look at the activities of the Holy See in the context of the war in Ukraine during the pontificate of the current Pope Leo XIV. The aim of the article, as the title suggests, is to point out the values that the Holy See upholds in this issue, the challenges and appeals that it uses, and the possibilities that it has at its disposal.

### **The Holy See and "soft power"**

In lay, but often also in professional discussions, we often find fundamental doubts regarding the role of the Holy See in international

relations. Usually we find arguments in the form of the absence of military power or its inherent connection with the Catholic Church, which is perceived as a certain negative and at least a problematic factor. In this context, it is appropriate to present five fundamental characteristics that do not make the Holy See a state, but thanks to which it acquires the character of a subject of international law [1, p. 60]. For the purposes of this article, we will present only one characteristic in more detail.

The first characteristic is that the public-law subjectivity of the Apostolic See in the international field results, among other things, in the right of legation, i.e. the right to establish international relations with states and between national organizations through its own diplomats [2, p. 170].

The second characteristic is that, like other states, the Holy See is also characterized by the *ius contrahendi* or *ius tractandi*, which governs the conclusion of international treaties. In this sense, the Holy See is competent to undertake commitments both in its own name and in the name of the Catholic Church operating in a given state, and the decision of the Holy See is binding on this Church [3, pp. 34-35].

In this sense, the Holy See is competent to undertake obligations both in its own name and in the name of the Catholic Church operating in a certain state, and the decision of the Holy See is binding on that church [3, pp. 34-35].

The third characteristic of the Holy See, which we will describe in more detail, is its initiatives, which involve mediation activities in the event of conflicts. "This activity aims at offering non-partisan service to the international community, since it seeks no advantage for itself but only the good of the entire human family" [4, 444b].

In addition, it is also about the implementation of arbitration, which is carried out by the Holy See in international disputes at the request of an external party or on its own initiative and which is accepted by the parties to the dispute [5, p. 1075]. The Holy See thus uses diplomacy, moral persuasion, international institutions and other soft power tools [6, p. 115]. The Holy See is called upon to these mediations for two reasons. The first reason is its neutrality and justice, and the second is its discretion. Here it should be added that classical diplomacy is carried out quietly and gradually. This is especially true for the mediating role in peace negotiations. The Holy See has neither economic nor military capacities and interests, although it has its own views on both issues. It has no export interests to support, nor any military treaties to uphold. In this respect, the Holy See is unique in that when it represents controversial positions, it does not have to consider the usual consequences. [7, p. 169].

Given the *de facto* absence of military force and based on the observation of its long-standing diplomatic practice, we can characterize the type of foreign policy it carries out as a specific application of soft power. Finally, the fourth characteristic refers to proper membership in international

organizations, and the fifth consists in enjoying jurisdictional immunity [1, p. 62 – 63].

It is also necessary to perceive the activities of the Holy See in connection with the war in Ukraine in these intentions.

### **Methodology**

For the purposes of this article, we chose as a research method a quantitative content analysis of the websites of the Holy See, specifically the Magisterium subsection, where various formats of statements of Pope Leo XIV and official representatives of the Holy See are found, as well as an analysis of the Vatican News website.

In addition, we included in our research one text that was not found on the mentioned sites, but contained the personal opinion of Pope Leo XIV. on the issue that is the subject of our research. In addition to the above-mentioned method, we also worked with analysis, synthesis and comparison.

The research was thematically limited to issues related to the war in Ukraine and the Holy See's positions on this topic, and was also limited in time to the period from the beginning of the pontificate of Pope Leo XIV to September 2025.

We coded the found texts, a total of 314, according to the theme that prevailed in the individual statements, while the coding was fixed into thematic areas according to the overall style of the given information, which was a tool of strategic institutional communication of the entity, which is the Holy See headed by the Pope.

The aim of the article was to analyze the above-mentioned strategic institutional communication through publicly disseminated content with the intention of providing the most objective information possible about the values, challenges and possibilities that the Pope and the Holy See profess in this area, of course taking into account the possibilities and, in principle, only with an orientation towards the challenges that the Pope and the Holy See can operate with.

At the same time, for the sake of correctness, we state that we have used a more general bibliographic notation (given the number of sources). Within the bibliography, we only provide general links to websites where multiple sources are located under individual numerical references. The specific names and dates of publication of reports or holding of individual events are given in the text of the article.

### **Results**

A total of 106 statements were found in the above-mentioned sources that correspond to the issues associated with the war in Ukraine. These are, of course, statements that vary in depth and scope. These statements were classified into five thematic areas. These were areas that included the issues of condemnation and naming of the war, statements about the suffering and pain of the Ukrainian people, appeals to achieve an end to the war and also

to achieve peace, calls for a return to the desired state and other calls associated with the war/wars.

The data obtained by us was divided according to the source, into statements obtained from the Vatican News website and statements obtained from the official website of the Holy See, while these were also classified according to the format of the statements that were made at regular prayer to the Angel of the Lord, or antiphon Regina Caeli, general audiences, speeches and homilies.

As mentioned above, we also took into account one letter from the Pope, which was not published in the above-mentioned sources. In other formats, statements regarding Ukraine are not mentioned, or are mentioned very marginally and with a very general informative value. At the same time, it should be noted that several statements in press releases correspond to a certain extent with the original statements of Pope Leo XIV. and official representatives of the Holy See, since they partly take over and comment on these official positions.

In the case of Vatican News press releases, numbering 53, the condemnation and naming of the war is mentioned in seven places, of which 5 are papal statements, 1 is a statement by the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, and 1 is a statement by the Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs at the Secretariat of State, Msgr. Daniel Pachó.

The second circle, which contains statements about the suffering and pain of the Ukrainian people, is present in press reports in 12 cases. In all of these cases, these are statements by Pope Leo XIV.

In the area that deals with the issue of the appeal to end the war and achieve peace, there are 17 reports, where there were 12 statements by the Pope, 3 statements by the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Parolin, 1 statement by the Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs at the Secretariat of State Msgr. Daniel Pachó, and 1 statement by the Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union Archbishop Bernardito Auza. In the other area that deals with the issue of calls for a return to the desired state, there are 6 reports, where there were 4 statements by the Pope, 1 statement by the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Parolin, and 1 statement by the Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union Archbishop Bernardito Auza.

As for other calls related to war/wars, 11 statements were discovered in press releases, 7 of which came from the Pope and another 4 from other representatives, namely from the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, the Holy See's permanent observer to the UN, Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, the Director of the Holy See's Press Office, Matteo Bruni, and the Dicastery for the Ministry of Charity.

In the second case, we are talking about opinions, where 53 statements were found in the official statements of Pope Leo XIV, which seemingly simplifies the determination of the results. Nevertheless, it should be

emphasized here that in this case we are talking about different formats in which the Pope expresses himself in public.

Inserting a message into a moment of prayer or the proclamation and explanation of the Word of God is different and much more complex than doing it during a message or a public audience. In this case, too, individual statements were grouped into categories, as was the case with press releases.

Condemnation and naming of the war was recorded in 11 cases (*Angelus/Regina Caeli prayer – 4, General Audience – 1, addresses – 4, homily – 1, letter – 1*). Statements about the suffering and pain of the Ukrainian people were recorded in 8 cases (*Angelus/Regina Caeli prayer – 3, General Audience – 2, addresses – 2, letter – 1*). The appeal to achieve an end to the war and the achievement of peace was made in 16 cases (*Angelus/Regina Caeli prayer – 10, General Audience – 2, addresses – 2, homily – 1, letter – 1*). As for the calls for a return to the desired state, there were 6 calls by the Pope (*Angelus/Regina Caeli prayer – 2, General Audience – 1, addresses – 3*). Finally, as for the issue of other calls that were associated with the war, there were 14 statements by the Pope (*Angelus/Regina Caeli prayer – 7, General Audience – 2, addresses – 3, homily – 1*).

### Discussion

The discussion is divided into two parts. The first contains statements by Leo XIV, which he made on various occasions, and the second contains statements that are found in press releases. In our case, we began the discussion with the Pope's statements themselves, because they are authentic, and then we presented the press releases. However, we will discuss the press releases more briefly, since most of them are taken from reports or comments on the statements of Leo IV. Of course, in the second case, we will pay special attention to the statements of other official representatives of the Holy See.

Pope Leo XI. **names** war in various ways in his statements. He even speaks of a Third World War, which he named in this way in his address during the Regina Caeli prayer in May 2025, when he spoke of the dramatic scenario of a Third World War, referring to his predecessor Francis. He strictly demands that world leaders stop wars with the imperative "Never again war!" [8, 11.05.2025]. He speaks of the tragedy of war, which he calls an irreversible catastrophe (abyss). In other statements, he speaks of war as barbarity, savagery, defilement, the spreading of death and destruction, and the collective suffering of entire nations. According to him, every war (quoting his predecessor Pope Francis) is a defeat. He also warns that we must never get used to war. We can lose everything through war [8, 07.09.2025].

Pope Leo XI also **condemns** war in various ways. He says that there are no "distant" conflicts. He condemns war by saying that war does not solve problems, but rather intensifies them and causes deep wounds to nations, while emphasizing that God does not want war. War never brings peace or security [8, 22.06.2025]. He condemns war as a temptation to resort to

powerful and sophisticated weapons and as a path that will lead the combatants to barbarism that far surpasses the barbarities of previous times [9, 18.06.2025]. In his voice, the Church rejects the Manichean ideas that are so typical of the mentality of violence [10, 14.05.2025].

His condemnation of war is very strong, when, using the example of Cain and Abel, he asks: *"Brother, sister, where are you? Where are you in the "business" of wars that destroy the lives of young people forced to take up arms. And with these weapons to target defenseless civilians, children, women and the elderly, to destroy cities, countryside and entire ecosystems, leaving behind only rubble and pain?"* [10, 12.07.2025]. Finally, he condemns war because war prevails under the weight of violence, hunger and war, and literally forces people to beg for peace. This is a powerful call that commits to prayer and action so that all the violence of war may cease and so that those who suffer may find peace again [11, 15.09.2025].

The second area that emerges from the statements of Pope Leo XIV is **the statements about the suffering and pain of the Ukrainian people**. In fact, three days after his election, Pope Leo XIV first publicly expressed his sympathy for the Ukrainian people when he said: *"I carry in my heart the suffering of the beloved Ukrainian people."* [8, 11.05.2025]. In addition to this direct targeting of Ukrainians, he later said that he was thinking especially of those families suffering from the war, including in Ukraine [8, 01.06.2025]. His words that no armed victory can replace the pain of mothers, the fear of children, or the stolen future are also very powerful [9, 28.05.2025]. It notes that the Ukrainian people are suffering from serious attacks on civilians and infrastructure, and that our world continues to be wounded by wars in Ukraine and in many other regions of the world, calling for prayer that God will dry the tears of those suffering as a result of ongoing armed conflicts [9, 20.08.2025]. In his address to the Ukrainian pilgrims, he expresses his closeness to the beleaguered Ukraine, to the children, young people, the elderly and especially to the families who mourn their loved ones, and assures of sharing the grief over the captives and victims of this senseless war [10, 28.06.2025]. And finally, in another address to the members of the Synod of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, he notes the insufficiency of human expression of words of comfort for the families who have lost their loved ones in this senseless war [10, 02.07.2025].

No less important is the Pope's engagement in connection with **appeals for an end to war and the achievement of peace**. The analysis of this section will present positions that, in addition to calls for an end to war, include calls for the permanence and justice of a peaceful solution. In his first address on the occasion of the Regina Caeli prayer, he called for doing everything in one's power to achieve an authentic, just and lasting peace as soon as possible [8, 11.05.2025]. It is further stated that Ukraine is waiting for negotiations on a just and lasting peace [8, 18.05.2025]. In this spirit, there

is also an appeal for the need for de-escalation and inclusive dialogue [8, 08.06.2025], which is the only path that can lead to a peaceful and lasting solution [8, 15.06.2025]. In addition, the Pope calls for responsibility and reason not drowned out by weapons or war rhetoric, and for diplomacy that silences the weapons. [8, 22.06.2025]. In this spirit, he appeals to those responsible to renounce the logic of weapons and embark on the path of negotiations and peace, in order to silence the voice of war and raise the voice of brotherhood and justice [8, 31.08.2025]. I present this in particular because there have been constant calls from Ukraine not only to achieve peace, but to achieve a lasting and just peace, which Pope Leo XIV emphasized in his appeals.

In addition to the above, many other invitations are made. The Pope implores the enlightenment of those who govern and that they have the courage to make gestures of de-escalation and dialogue [8, 08.06.2025]. Of course, all of this carries with it pleas for prayers. He repeats several times his urgent calls for an immediate ceasefire and a serious commitment to dialogue [9, 28.05.2025]. He expresses the wish that illusory security, based on the threat of mutual destruction, will give way to instruments of justice, the practice of dialogue and trust in fraternity [9, 06.08.2025]. Finally, the spirit of all these appeals of Pope Leo XIV is reflected in his reasoning when he says: *"The true consolation we must offer to those around us is showing that peace is possible, and that it grows within each of us, if we do not stifle it. May the leaders of nations pay particular attention to the cries of so many innocent children and ensure them a future that protects and consoles them"* [11, 15.09.2025].

In addition to appeals for peace, individual statements also contain calls for a **return from war to the desired state of peace and tranquility**, which we have highlighted separately. In his first address as part of the Regina Caeli prayer on May 11, 2025, the Pope also appealed for all prisoners to be released and for children to return to their families [8, 11.05.2025]. The Pope prayed for Ukraine with Ukrainians: *"Today, we join our Ukrainian brothers and sisters who, with the spiritual initiative "World Prayer for Ukraine," are asking the Lord to grant peace to their tormented country"* [8, 24.08.2025]. In his call for fasting and prayer, which the Pope announced for August 22, 2025, he asks the faithful to pray to God to grant peace and justice to humanity and to dry the tears of those who suffer as a result of ongoing armed conflicts [9, 20.08.2025]. Finally, there are three addresses in which the Pope asks for prayers. Christ's peace is not the sepulchral silence that reigns after conflict; it is not the fruit of oppression, but rather a gift that is meant for all, a gift that brings new life. Let us pray for this peace, which is reconciliation, forgiveness, and the courage to turn the page and start anew. [10, 14.05.2025]. The Pope told the members of the Synod of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church that he constantly prays for peace to return to their homeland

as soon as possible [10, 02.07.2025]. Finally, in his general address to the participants of the 3rd World Meeting on Human Fraternity, he indicates what true peace does when he says: *“The answer cannot be silence. You are the answer, with your presence, your commitment, and your courage. The answer is choosing a different direction of life, growth and development”* [10, 12.09.2025].

Finally, **other appeals related to war, or wars in the world**, were also included in this article. Given that they are the longest in scope, I will mention them briefly, highlighting those related to Ukraine. According to the Pope, peace is the desire of all nations and at the same time it is the painful cry of those whose hearts are torn by war [8, 06.07.2025; 13.07.2025]. He entrusts to the Virgin Mary the innocent victims of conflicts and those leaders who have the power to resolve them [8, 27.07.2025]. It warns those responsible for the consequences of their decisions and calls for not ignoring the needs of the weakest and a general desire for peace [8, 10.08.2025]. He reminds believers in particular that we must not stop hoping and must not accept the dominance of the logic of conflict and weapons, while calling for efforts to end wars and promote peace [8, 15.08.2025]. Regarding Ukraine, he says: *“Sadly, the war in Ukraine continues to sow death and destruction. Even in recent days, bombings have struck several cities, including the capital Kyiv, causing numerous casualties. I renew my closeness to the Ukrainian people and to all the injured families. I ask everyone not to give in to indifference, but to draw close to them through prayer and concrete gestures of charity. ... We entrust all our injured, missing and dead, everywhere, to our Savior’s loving embrace”* [8, 31.08.2025]. In July 2025, the Pope refers to the words of the prophet Isaiah, according to which *“Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”* (Is 2:4). He wants this voice to be heard and at the same time rejects arrogance and revenge and invites us to the path of dialogue, diplomacy and peace [9, 25.06.2025]. As part of the commemoration of the Final Helsinki Act, the Pope talks about the need to conduct dialogue, strengthen cooperation and make diplomacy the preferred way to prevent conflicts and resolve them [9, 30.07.2025]. As part of his address to diplomats, he considers the word peace. The first word is *peace*. All too often we consider it a “negative” word, indicative only of the absence of war and conflict, since opposition is a perennial part of human nature, frequently leading us to live in a constant “state of conflict” at home, at work and in society. Peace then appears simply as a respite, a pause between one dispute and another. And that's not true. [10, 16.05.2025]. At the ecumenical meeting, Leo XIV said he was convinced that if we are in agreement, and free from ideological and political conditioning, we can be effective in saying “no” to war and “yes” to peace, “no” to the arms race and “yes” to disarmament, “no” to an economy that impoverishes peoples and the Earth and “yes” to integral development [10, 19.05.2025]. In his address to



representatives of the Aid Agencies for Eastern Churches, he stated, among other things, that our hearts bleed when we think of Ukraine, the tragic and inhumane situation in Gaza and the Middle East, ravaged by the spread of war. ... People must not die because of fake news. It is troubling to see that the force of international law and humanitarian law seems no longer to be binding, replaced by the alleged right to coerce others“ [10, 26.06.2025]. As part of the address to the Ukrainian pilgrims, who have already been mentioned here, words were also heard about the hard-tested faith of the Ukrainian people. According to the Pope, the answer is trust that God is with us and gives us his grace, that he will have the last word and that life will triumph over death. Finally, in his inaugural homily, the Pope says that in our time, we still see too much discord, too many wounds caused by hatred, violence, prejudice, the fear of difference ... . Look to Christ! ... Listen to his offer of love ... . This is the path to follow together ... with those who follow other religious paths, with those who are searching for God, with all women and men of good will, in order to build a new world where peace reigns! [11, 18.05.2025].

Within the Vatican News press releases, we find several positions on individual issues we have chosen. Only those that were not expressed in the above-presented statements of Pope Leo XIV will be presented here.

Regarding the first circle of topics that we identified about the **naming and condemnation of war**, the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, presents the Holy See's position as one that is faithful to its mission of peace, renewing its call to resist the logic of violence and condemning the false realism that considers war inevitable. He condemns war as an act of the logic of violence with all its consequences [12, 04.06.2025]. Another official representative of the Holy See, Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs at the Secretariat of State, Msgr. Daniel Pacheco, describes the war in Ukraine as terrible [13, 19.09.2025]. This word may not seem to the layman as the strongest expression of horror, but if we take into account the diplomatic level, a similar expression was used for a part of her life by the British monarch Elizabeth II in 1992, which she described as "annus horribilis" – a terrible, horrible year [14, 24.11.1992]. As for the statement about the suffering and pain of the Ukrainian people, one can mention Leo XIV's expression of regret for the victims and the assurance of prayers when receiving Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in a private audience [15, 09.07.2025]. Furthermore, Pope Leo XIV, at a mass for young people in the Tor Vergata field, expressed his sympathy for those who suffer from wars, which are the most serious evil that covers many countries, including Ukraine, with blood [16, 03.08.2025]. In the above-mentioned Vatican news source, several positions were recorded in connection **with calls to end the war and achieve peace**. Pope Leo XIV and the President of the Russian Federation held a telephone conversation, in which the Pope called on Russia

to support peace, while the Pope also emphasized the importance of dialogue in finding solutions to the conflict [17, 04.06.2025]. The Pope also met with the other side in the form of a private audience with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, during which the conversation focused, among other things, on efforts to end the hostilities and find a just and lasting solution to the war in Ukraine [18, 09.07.2025]. In Castel Gandolfo, in response to a journalist's question about the summit between President Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, the Pope stated that we must strive for a ceasefire, for dialogue and diplomatic efforts [19, 13.08.2025]. Similarly, in response to a journalist's question in September 2025 in Castel Gandolfo regarding Russian attacks, the Pope said that someone was trying to escalate and confirmed the need to lay down arms, stop hostilities and sit down at the negotiating table [20, 23.09.2025]. Three statements by the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, were also registered. The first statement, referring to the Pope, emphasizes the effort to establish a just and lasting peace. Such a peace cannot be based on mutual fear and on a fragile balance maintained by arms, but on a deep and serious dialogue with respect for human dignity, with respect for international law, for justice and freedom [21, 04.06.2025]. In the second statement, the State Secretary spoke about finding solutions through multiple avenues and policies and emphasized the need not to succumb to hopelessness and resignation [22, 25.08.2025]. Finally, in the third position he speaks of the need to start a dialogue, where the Vatican can be a place for talks, which he highlights as a sign of great willingness to find all ways and means that can end the bloodshed in Ukraine [23, 05.09.2025]. Similarly, the Apostolic Nuncio to the EU, in an interview with Vatican media, reiterated the Pope's great interest in achieving a just peace in Ukraine [24, 23.05.2025]. The Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs at the Secretariat of State also spoke on the subject. He expressed concern about the terrible war in Ukraine and confirmed the need to give new life to multilateral diplomacy and international institutions whose role is to resolve disputes [13, 19.09.2025].

Regarding the appeals for **a return from war to the desired state of peace and tranquility**, there are several messages that we find in the Vatican News source. Pope Leo XIV spoke in Castel Gandolfo in August 2025, among other things, about the talks on a ceasefire for Ukraine. He mentioned the so-called soft diplomacy that the Holy See can use. He expressed a pragmatic attitude towards the war. *“The Holy See cannot stop them (wars)... but we are working, let's say, on 'soft diplomacy,' always inviting, encouraging the pursuit of nonviolence through dialogue and seeking solutions – because these problems cannot be solved by war”* [19, 13.08.2025]. He took a similar position when leaving for the Vatican, where he emphasized the need to work hard, pray hard and really look for a way forward in order to find peace [25, 19.08.2025]. Finally, he made a marginal

comment on the topic of returning from war to peace through Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, whom he appointed as his special envoy at the celebrations in Lviv on the occasion of the 650th anniversary of the establishment of the Metropolitan See in Halic. Through him, he called on believers to keep the commandments in the family as well as in public life despite the war, to cultivate Christian hope and to ask God for the gift of peace [26, 01.09.2025]. Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Parolin also spoke on this topic, presenting the Vatican's maximum neutrality, including its efforts to speak the truth, stand close to both sides, and above all help find a way to resolve the conflict [27, 28.07.2025]. Vatican news also brought news that concerned **other challenges related to war or wars in the world**. Pope Leo XIV, during a meeting with the Presidency of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union, expressed concern that greater spending on arms would negatively affect support for the most needy and vulnerable [28, 24.05.2025]. In an interview with journalist Elise Ann Allen, the Pope spoke at length about the need to gather many actors who will persistently and strongly demand that the warring parties come to the conclusion that enough fighting has been done and that other ways of solving the problem must be sought. The Pope also expressed his belief that we can never give up hope. While acknowledging the reality of evil actors and temptations, the Pope says it is possible to encourage people to look to higher values, true values. According to him, the United Nations should be the place to address many of these issues. But at the same time, he notes that it is widely accepted that this organization, at least for the moment, has lost the ability to bring people together on multilateral issues. For Pope Leo, it is important to constantly remind ourselves of the potential that humanity has to overcome the violence and hatred that increasingly divide it [29, 14.09.2025]. Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Parolin commented on the Istanbul Summit, stating that the failure of this summit cannot and must not mean the end of efforts to stop the war. The Holy See is faithful to the mission of achieving peace. At the same time, he once again calls for resisting the logic of violence and expresses concern about destabilization. The Cardinal perceives the legitimacy and necessity of protecting the sovereignty and security of each country, but at the same time asks the question to what extent armaments strengthen the building of trust between nations and help build lasting peace. He also warned against an arms race and the feeding of fear. Finally, within the framework of understanding the issue of the right to self-defense, he emphasized that it must be accompanied by the obligation to minimize and, if possible, eliminate the basic causes of conflicts [21, 04.06.2025]. The sources also recorded a statement by the director of the Holy See's press department, Matteo Bruni, as part of information about the phone call between the Pope and the Russian President, where he stated that the two discussed the humanitarian situation, as well as the need to facilitate aid

where needed and the ongoing efforts to exchange prisoners [17, 04.06.2025]. Another expression of his is found in the talks held between the Holy See and Italy, where the parties expressed, among other things, a common commitment to efforts for peace in Ukraine [30, 02.07.2025]. The latest news that touches on this topic is the food aid that the Pope sent to certain areas (Kharkiv) in Ukraine that were devastated by heavy rocket attacks and drone strikes [31, 16.07.2025]. To conclude the discussion, we present a letter sent by Pope Leo XIV to the President of Ukraine on the occasion of Ukraine's Independence Day, in which one can sense the Pope's immense desire for peace to be achieved as soon as possible.

*„To His Excellency President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy:*

*With a heart wounded by the violence that ravages your land, I address you on this day of your national feast. I wish to assure you of my prayer for the people of Ukraine who suffer from war—especially for all those wounded in body, for those bereaved by the death of a loved one, and for those deprived of their homes. May God Himself console them: may he strengthen the injured and grant eternal rest to the departed. I implore the Lord to move the hearts of people of good will, that the clamour of arms may fall silent and give way to dialogue, opening the path to peace for the good of all. I entrust your nation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace.*

*His Holiness Pope Leo XIV“.* [32, 24.08.2025].

As can be seen from the above, the current actions of Pope Leo XIV and the Holy See correspond in principle to the procedures that we have noted in several authors who deal with this issue and which we have cited in the article. According to Šekerák [1], the Holy See uses its status as a subject of international law. Within the framework of its relations, the Holy See is active in concluding international treaties, whether with states or other organizations through its diplomats. It also acts through its diplomats in other spheres such as mediation activities. At the same time, he accepts commitments either in his own name or in the name of the Catholic Church. Here we agree with the statements of Čitbaj [2] and Vokálová [3]. For our topic, however, the most important are the mediation activities established by the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church [4]. This is the assistance of the Holy See, in the sense of service to humanity, in finding solutions that can prevent the emergence of international conflicts or, in the case of those that have already arisen, find a way to resolve them. Together with Duda [5], we can state here that this may be an independent activity of the Holy See or an activity for which the Holy See is requested. Perhaps the most accurate account of the Holy See's actions is given by Matlary [7], who, among other things, lists the reasons why the Holy See is a credible institution for such activities. As she states, the Holy See appears to be neutral, just and discreet, and does not have to consider various economic, military or other aspects when carrying out these activities.

Despite several negative or simplistic views, or even criticism of the Holy See for not being very vehement in its statements, we must state that the diplomatic means at the disposal of the Holy See can only be classified as means of so-called soft power. This can then affect the methods, effectiveness and time factor of mediation activities.

### **Conclusion**

After many centuries, the Holy See is still an active participant on the global political scene. It has a unique institutional and legal status, and it represents the Catholic Church, headed by a leader – the Pope, who, thanks to his position, has access to global politics. Throughout human history, the position of the Holy See has changed and evolved, but it has always played a significant role in international relations. In some respects, we can indeed see that the Holy See and the Pope play an even broader role in international relations today than in the past. The confirmation of the legal status of the Pope and the Holy See on the global stage and the intensity of the media focus on the global role of the Papacy have strengthened the importance of this actor even today. The assessment of the diplomatic and foreign policy activities of the Holy See as a subject of international law, to which the status of recognized neutrality can be attributed, cannot be one-dimensional. As the description of its selected steps and initiatives in the international field shows, in our case primarily on the issues of achieving peace in Ukraine, each activity must be analyzed independently of each other, taking into account the historical and geopolitical context.

It is also important to realize that the Holy See and the Pope and their political activity are important and significant for a simple fact. The Pope leads a Church that is essentially present all over the world. The Holy See is one of the few sovereign entities that has a presence and reach in practically every country in the world. In the terminology of diplomacy, this means that the Holy See has interests almost everywhere, but it also has an institutional presence and resources in practically every political context imaginable. Given the topic of the Russian-Ukrainian war, this fact can be weakened in a certain perspective, because it is a conflict between states that, in a Christian context, predominantly profess Orthodoxy, and therefore the Pope's voice does not have as much influence there as it does in the case of states with a Catholic majority.

Finally, there is always the use of “soft power”, which is the ability to shape the preferences of others. This “soft power” involves persuading others to want (accept) the outcomes you want to achieve. However, the method is discussion, not coercion. It is the ability to attract others by how you interpret your interests and the interests of other parties, and this attraction can then often lead to consent and agreement. Based on the facts we have presented in this article, it can be said that the current Pope Leo XIV is doing very well in this regard. Although he is always careful to express his views and those of the Church in moral rather than political terms, he is persistently involved in

the processes. As a result, the Church he leads is also involved in global political debates on complex issues, in our case primarily on the issues of achieving a just and lasting peace in Ukraine.

I would like to end this article with a quote from Pope Leo XIV, who says this in his video message of September 12, 2025: *“The globalization of indifference ... today seems to have transformed into a globalization of powerlessness. Faced with injustice and innocent suffering, we are more aware, but we risk remaining immobile, silent and sad, overcome by the sensation that nothing can be done. What can I do, in the face of such great evils? The globalization of powerlessness is the offspring of a lie: that history has always gone this way, that history is written by the victors. But that is not true: history is devastated by the powerful, but it is saved by the humble, the righteous, the martyrs, in whom goodness shines forth and authentic humanity resists and is renewed”* [33, 12.09.2025].

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