



By: *The Editorial Board*

Pope Leo XIV inaugurates a new diplomatic vision



The **inauguration** of Pope Leo XIV was not only a religious event but also a moment with significant political implications at a time of high international tensions.

The new pope is taking the lead at a time when conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine, are redefining the global order, and his first steps and messages clearly point to a change in the foreign policy course of the Catholic Church.

This inauguration is therefore significant not only for the believers but also for international relations, as the Vatican continues to play an important role as a moral and diplomatic actor.

Around 200,000 pilgrims and the world's highest representatives gathered in St. Peter's Square on Sunday to attend the ceremony at which the US-Peruvian Cardinal Robert Prevost officially became the 267th head of the Catholic Church.

Among the most prominent guests were the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy; US Vice President JD Vance; the Spanish royal couple, Felipe and Letizia; the Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni; the Israeli President, Isaac Herzog; and representatives of European and Asian countries.

This impressive diplomatic gathering clearly showed the importance that the Vatican attaches to the new pontificate.

However, what attracted the most attention in political and geostrategic terms was not only the magnificent ritual but also the fact that the first head of state received by Pope Leo XIV after his inauguration was the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

This act is not just a formality of protocol but a powerful political signal that cannot be interpreted in any other way than as a clear indication of the new pope's priorities with regard to the current global crises – particularly the war in Ukraine.

The legacy of Pope Francis

President Zelenskyy's **meeting** with Pope Leo XIV during the ceremony has a multi-layered symbolism. Firstly, it is a gesture of support for Ukraine as a sovereign state that has been fighting against Russian aggression for more than three years.

The Pope, as the spiritual leader of over a billion Catholics around the world, lends this support not only moral but also political weight.

This direct and immediate support leaves a deep impression, particularly in comparison to the attitude of the previous Pope Francis towards the war in Ukraine.

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During his pontificate, Pope Francis was repeatedly **criticised** for his restraint and his often ambiguous statements regarding the conflict in Ukraine. His calls for "peace at any price" were often interpreted as an indication of passivity towards Russian aggression and, in some cases, even as implicit support for Moscow.

One of the most obvious examples was his statement that Ukraine should show "the courage of the white flag" in the negotiations, which was strongly condemned by the Ukrainian authorities and many Western allies.

While Pope Francis tried to reconcile diplomacy and spiritual messages, his approach left the impression in the global public that the Vatican does not want to interfere openly in the conflict but is trying to maintain a neutral position.

In practice, however, such an approach has led to the impression that the Church is moving away from its clear support for Ukraine and not taking a firm stand against the Russian invasion.

The Vatican offers an active role

In this context, Pope Leo XIV's behaviour was a clear departure from previous papal policy. His US-Peruvian background and the positions he held in the Roman Catholic hierarchy—in particular as Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America—point to a man who knows the complexities of contemporary political conflicts well and knows how to combine a spiritual role with practical diplomatic steps.

Pope Leo XIV's homily at the inaugural mass was a strong appeal for unity, reconciliation and love, but it also took a clear stance on ending conflict and the barriers that divide people.

When the Vatican expressed its willingness to be a platform for direct negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, it stressed that it would not just watch from the sidelines but wanted to play an active role in mediation.

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In view of the new global situation, this has several implications. Firstly, the Vatican is positioning itself as an important player in international diplomacy, with a particular focus on the moral dimension of the conflict.

Secondly, it further legitimises Ukraine's struggle to retain sovereignty because the Pope's support is significant, not only religiously but also diplomatically.

The factor of pressure on Moscow

As Ukraine is the main target of Russian aggression in the modern era, the support of

Pope Leo XIV could be an additional pressure factor for Moscow. Powerful international institutions, such as the Vatican, are gaining influence and can change the dynamics on the ground in the ongoing military conflict and stalled negotiations.

However, the situation is not straightforward. The Vatican will have to carefully balance its universal spiritual role with realpolitik. How to actively participate in the negotiations without jeopardising its position as a neutral mediator poses a major challenge.

There is also a risk of new tensions with the Russian Orthodox Church and other actors who view the Vatican with reservations.

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Nevertheless, the beginning of Pope Leo XIV's pontificate already shows that the Vatican will no longer be a passive observer of global conflicts.

His meeting with Zelenskyy and the clear message of support for Ukraine point to a new papal diplomacy that will not hesitate to stand alongside justice and peace, even if this requires clear political positions.

Implications for global politics

What particularly characterises the new pontificate is a well-thought-out consistency in the attitude towards armed conflicts and a clearly formulated moral position. Pope Leo XIV not only rapidly took the initiative to meet with President Zelenskyy but also made it clear in his communication with the public that Ukraine deserved not only sympathy but also active support.

This difference in approach is not trivial – it reflects the Vatican's new awareness of the role that this religious institution can and must

play in contemporary politics, particularly in a world facing aggression from great powers.



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On the other hand, it raises the question of how this change will affect the Vatican's relations with the Russian Orthodox Church and Russia as a state.

The diplomatic games so far have mostly been cautious and aimed at preserving as much religious coexistence as possible, but open support for Ukraine could cause a further rift between these institutions and states.

This rift could have far-reaching consequences not only in a religious but also in a political sense and change the balance of power in Eastern Europe.

At the same time, this new path taken by the Vatican raises the question of the role of Western countries in this conflict. Pope Leo XIV's support for Ukraine could further legitimise the pressure on Russia and encourage allies to increase their support for Kyiv.

As a moral authority with global influence, the Vatican's position provides additional impetus for political and diplomatic action, which is necessary for a lasting solution to the conflict.

Finally, it is important to remember that the Pope's actions have always had a profound impact on world politics – from the Cold War to the Middle East peace process.

For this very reason, this beginning of the pontificate must be seen not only as a ceremonial act but also as a serious political event that heralds a new era in which the Vatican will play a clear role not only as a spiritual leader but also as an active mediator in the struggle for peace and justice.