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# SPIRITUALITY AS A POLITICAL INSTRUMENT

THE CHURCH, THE KREMLIN, AND  
THE CREATION OF THE 'RUSSIAN WORLD'



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ISBN: 978-951-769-541-1  
ISSN: 2242-0444  
Language editing: Lynn Nikkanen

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## SUMMARY

This Working Paper analyses the way in which the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church use the claims related to spirituality in their public diplomacy in domestic and foreign policy matters. A key impetus for the study has been the “conservative turn” in Russian politics since 2012, when the state leadership placed traditional, spiritual-moral values at the core of the political discourse and thus paved the way for the Russian Orthodox Church to become an even more influential actor in politics.

The “Russian World” concept has been an important keyword both for representatives of the Kremlin and the Church alike in recent years. The emphasis on conservative values functions as a partial support basis for the current state leadership, which benefits from the high level of trust that the Church enjoys as an institution. In domestic politics, the Church has used formal institutions for promoting legislative changes which aim, for example, at condemning offending religious people’s feelings and decreasing punishments for domestic violence.

In the foreign policy context, the actors support each other in representing the distinctive Russian values that contradict the “Western” ones – a move that can be seen as a securitization process. The “Russian World” concept functions as a geopolitical metaphor that resembles the concept of Holy Rus, reinforcing the idea of spiritual connections between all Russians, not only within the borders of today’s Russian Federation. In Ukraine, which both the Kremlin and the Church consider to be a part of the Russian World, the Church has been compelled to consider the division of Ukrainian Orthodox Churches and possible losses for the Moscow Patriarchate. In Syria, the Church has expressed strong support for the Kremlin’s actions.

The interests of Church and state are not always fully congruent. The Church is not merely the Kremlin’s puppet; it functions as its own, sometimes internally divided entity. Thus far, it seems that both the Kremlin and the Church have benefitted from their cooperation. The Working Paper concludes that by consolidating spiritual values as being reminiscent of a state ideology, the Russian Orthodox Church and the state leadership have made it increasingly difficult to change the course of the “conservative turn” in the future. The “spiritual” legacy of Putin’s era will have a long-lasting influence on Russian politics.

## INTRODUCTION

This Working Paper examines how the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) have used spirituality in their public diplomacy both domestically and abroad, and under what conditions their endeavours have converged. A key motivation for this study is the notion that within the past five years the traditional Russian “spiritual-moral” values have become an important instrument for political agitation, reminiscent of a state ideology.<sup>1</sup>

The change in the political atmosphere manifested itself in 2012 when President Vladimir Putin’s third term in presidential office started. A mass protest movement, triggered by fraud in the Duma elections the previous autumn, preceded the presidential inauguration and provided a pretext for the Kremlin to “tighten the screws” in relation to society.<sup>2</sup> The so-called colour revolutions in former Soviet republics had overthrown incumbents in a number of countries, which made the Russian political leadership cautious. Simultaneously, the financial crisis of 2008 had hit Russia relatively hard, and the liberal project under President Dmitri Medvedev had yielded feeble results. It was amid these circumstances that the Kremlin switched course – a move that scholars have variously described as “ideological”, “cultural”, or a “conservative turn”.<sup>3</sup> The ROC’s support for the Kremlin contributed significantly to this process of stressing the conservative, traditional values of the nation over liberal ones.

In December 2015, spiritual-moral values (*dukhovno-nravstvennye tsennosti*) were explicitly defined as a matter of national security: the new Russian National Security Strategy includes characterizations on Russian identity and spirituality. The Strategy suggests building Russia’s “spiritual potentiality [...] in the polycentric world”, and categorizes the “destruction of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values” as one of the main threats to state and public security.<sup>4</sup> The term “spiritual-moral values” occurs eleven times in the text, whereas in the previous Strategy of 2009 it was not mentioned once.<sup>5</sup> Jardar Østbø has shown how the state securitized this allegedly shared value basis of the nation in order to resist the foreign influence in the country, a process which

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1 The authors would like to thank Dr Kaarina Aitamurto, Dr Katri Pynnöniemi, and Dr Mikhail Suslov for their invaluable help and comments during the writing process.

2 Roberts, Sean (2012): “The first 100 days of Putin’s presidency see a tightening of the screws.” FIIA Comment, 9.8.

3 Engström, Maria (2014): Contemporary Russian Messianism and New Russian Foreign Policy. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 35:3, 356–379, 357; Robinson, Neil (2017): Russian Neo-patrimonialism and Putin’s ‘Cultural Turn’. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 69:2, 348–366, 348–349.

4 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, confirmed by Order of the President (No 683) on December 31, 2015, National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, III/43; II/7.

5 In addition, there are eight references to spirituality in the 2009 Strategy, but the 2015 Strategy includes 16 references altogether. National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020, confirmed by Order of the President (No 683) on May 13, 2009.

started after the political unrest in 2011 and has continued ever since.<sup>6</sup> In this changed setting, religion has acquired new political importance. Furthermore, the ROC has become an influential political actor, and the separation between Church and state is no longer clear-cut, even if Russia is a secular state constitutionally.<sup>7</sup>

This Working Paper focuses on the role of the Orthodox Church in Russian public diplomacy, namely the efforts to influence and diffuse information to domestic and foreign audiences and actors through various networks and means in order to attain certain goals. The paper sets out to examine how the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate uses its status to formulate and support the Kremlin's policies both domestically and abroad, especially in Ukraine. Previous research has shown that the ROC's status in Russia's domestic politics has grown, and it is duly being used as the Kremlin's political instrument, for example as one of the channels promoting Russia's interests abroad.<sup>8</sup> This paper contributes to the discussion by analyzing just how this channel has been used in recent years. The key term in this regard is the "Russian World" (*Russkii mir*), and the task is to trace the multiple meanings invested in this expression by Russia's political and religious leaders.

The source material for the Working Paper comprises official documents issued by the state and the Church, focusing especially on Kirill's Patriarchal era and Putin's third presidential term. The material includes commentaries, speeches and other public material produced by the main actors of the Church and the state. Some relevant federal-level legislative documents, as well as the National Security Strategies of 2009 and 2015, were also studied in order to analyze the influence of the Church on a more concrete level.

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6 Østbø, Jardar (2017): Securitizing "spiritual-moral values" in Russia. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 33:3, 200–216, 1–2; 13.

7 The Constitution of the Russian Federation, adopted on December 12, 1993, Chapter 1, Article 13.

8 Suslov, M. D. (2015): "Holy Rus": The Geopolitical Imagination in the Contemporary Russian Orthodox Church. *Russian Social Science Review*, 56:3, 43–62, 44; Garrard, John & Garrard, Carol (2008): *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent. Faith and Power in the New Russia*. Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford; Druzenko, Gennadii (2011): Geopolitics from the Patriarch. *Russian Politics & Law*, 49:1, 65–73.

## THE RUSSIAN WORLD – A KEY CONCEPT FOR THE STATE AND THE CHURCH

The term “Russian World” (*Russkii mir*) has played a crucial part in Russian politics for several years, despite its rather ambiguous meaning. In general, the concept refers to all Russians, united by a shared language and culture, and not only to those living within the political and geographical borders of the post-Soviet Russian Federation. It is, however, important not to take the Russian World concept as being equivalent to the Russian diaspora or Russian-speakers abroad – mainly because, as Mikhail Suslov points out, the diaspora is extremely heterogeneous in nature, and also because the concept has become an instrument of Russian foreign policy. As Igor Zevelev rightly says, the Russian World has a broader meaning than the closely connected concept of compatriot (*sootchestvennik*).<sup>9</sup>

Suslov explains that in the 2000s, the institutionalization of the Russian diaspora took place as the “proponents of the ‘Russian World’ [...] wanted to design it as a mechanism that translates the ‘presence’ of Russians abroad into the ‘influence’ of Russia abroad”. It was during this phase that the Russki Mir Foundation and the Rossotrudnichestvo were founded.<sup>10</sup> The former, established in 2007, aims to “reconnect the Russian community abroad with their homeland, forging new and stronger links through cultural and social programs, exchanges and assistance in relocation”. The foundation functions actively abroad, for example through “Russian Centers”, which are designed to spread the Russian language and culture “as important elements of world civilization”.<sup>11</sup> In 2009, the Russki Mir foundation and the ROC signed a cooperation agreement aiming to “strengthen the spiritual unity of the Russian World”.<sup>12</sup> As Suslov suggests, however, the resources directed to these institutions “should not be overestimated”.<sup>13</sup> In 2014, the Russian state leadership sought to legitimize its foreign policy actions in Ukraine and in Crimea by stating that it was acting as a guarantor of security in the Russian World. Zevelev argues that this marked a shift “from the articulation of a nation-state to a larger entity with uncertain boundaries” in the Russian government’s usage of the Russian World concept – which, according to him, was a counter-productive strategy as foreign governments started to regard the Russian World with suspicion or animosity.<sup>14</sup>

In order to dispel this political connotation from the usage of the term, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, for example, stated in a press conference in January 2016 that the Russian

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9 Zevelev, Igor (2016): “The Russian World in Moscow’s Strategy.” Center for Strategic and International Studies Commentary, 22.8.

10 Suslov, Mikhail (2017): “‘Russian World’: Russia’s Policy towards its Diaspora.” *Russie.Nei.Visions. Notes de l’Ifri* 103, 22–23.

11 Information Portal of the Russki Mir Foundation, 2017.

12 Blitt, R. C. (2011): Russia’s ‘Orthodox’ Foreign Policy: The Growing Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Shaping Russia’s Policies Abroad. *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law*, 33:2, 363–460, 387.

13 Suslov 2017, 23.

14 Zevelev 2016.

World is an “objective reality”,<sup>15</sup> and later that same year, that it has “nothing to do with nationalism”. According to Lavrov, the term is “part of our Foreign Policy doctrine of protecting compatriots, promoting the ideals and values of the ‘Russki Mir’ and representing our multinational culture”. Lavrov concluded by saying that the Russian people have a role in creating the country by preserving the traditions “and the legacy that our ancestors won, ultimately forming the ‘Russki Mir’”.<sup>16</sup>

The Church leadership has applied the concept in a manner somewhat similar to the state leadership, but there are also differences.<sup>17</sup> In the Church discourse, the concept of the Russian World resembles the concept of Holy Rus (*Svyataya Rus*’), the spiritual connection between all Russians. The Church’s contemporary usage of the term Holy Rus originates from A.V. Kartashev, a 20th century church historian, who described the term as the “qualitative self-definition of Rus–Russia”.<sup>18</sup> Suslov explains that the concept refers to “the system of values that has formed around the ‘striving for holiness’”, and works as a “geopolitical metaphor”:

“Today, the ROC actively presents itself as the sole integrative force in the space of the former Soviet Union and this force has no intention of simply aligning itself with the political schemes of others. The Church – in the person of its head, Patriarch Kirill – is developing its own geopolitical model: the ‘Holy Rus’ project.”<sup>19</sup>

Recent literature on the meaning of the ROC in Russia’s public diplomacy highlights that the Church has become a key operator in the “politicization of the Russian World”.<sup>20</sup> Patriarch Kirill has, since his inauguration in 2009, stressed the moral erosion of the West and the challenges of globalization.<sup>21</sup> According to Kirill, the ROC should strive to become a significant actor in international politics, thereby assuring a central role internationally for the Russian World. Gennadii Druzenko has analyzed how Kirill’s doctrine should be considered with Elder Filofei’s ideology in mind: “Moscow is the third Rome and a fourth there will not be”. According to Druzenko, this phrase grew to be the core ideology of the “gathering of Russian lands around Moscow”.<sup>22</sup>

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15 “Lavrov: the Russian world is an objective reality”, tvzvezda.ru, 26.1.2016.

16 “Lavrov: the term ‘Russki Mir’ has nothing to do with nationalism”, gazeta.ru, 25.4.2016.

17 Petro, N. N. (2015): “Russia’s Orthodox Soft Power.” Carnegie Council Publication, 25.3.

18 Suslov 2015, 45.

19 Suslov 2015, 44.

20 Ibid., 46; see also Malashenko, Alexey (2012): “Religion in Russia: Politicization and Disengagement.” Carnegie Moscow Center, 3.9.

21 According to Irina Papkova, Patriarch Kirill bureaucratized the ROC with administrative reforms, which centralized the ecclesiastical decision-making within the Moscow Patriarchate. Irina Papkova (2011): Russian Orthodox concordat? Church and state under Medvedev. *Nationalities Papers*, 39:5, 667–683.

22 Druzenko 2011.



Contemporary Russia is home to a wide range of neoconservative, right-wing clubs and activists, who use the Russian World concept in an imperialist, expansive manner. These figures emphasize the messianic nature of the Russian state, duly linking state and Church discourses to each other – while often formally functioning outside of them. The groups were organized after the cycle of colour revolutions, and as a reaction to the mass protests in Russia in 2011–2012 in particular, as they saw the need to stress Russia’s stance as an alternative to the West. According to Maria Engström, “[t]his view of Russia as an alternative and as a restraining factor in the chaos of international relations is in fact a ‘bureaucratic’, secular version of the messianic concept of *Katechon*”. The notion of *Katechon*, “the withholding”, is intrinsically linked to the political myth of Russia as the Third Rome, which describes Russia as the “shield” against the apocalyptic forces of chaos. The neoconservative thinkers, including older generation ones such as Alexandr Dugin, Alexandr Prokhanov, and Mikhail Leont’ev, and younger generation exponents such as Egor Kholmogorov, express views that have penetrated the mass media.<sup>23</sup>

It is difficult to evaluate the influence of a single figure, such as those mentioned above, on the political agenda-setting, but Engström suggests that the Russian Foreign Policy Concept, signed in February 2013, follows the messianic ideology promoted by the right-wing neoconservatives. As Engström explains, “[t]he new conservative doctrine is very anti-Western, but it is not a denial of Russia’s European identity; rather it is an argument for Russia’s true European Christian identity [...]”.<sup>24</sup> In this way, the influence those groups have on the media and society supports the Russian World discourses of state and Church.

One more crucial concept in this regard is that of “canonical territory”, which has been disputed in the Orthodox world for decades. Historically, the concept refers to the territory on which the Church operates and to which its rights are limited. The original intent was to decrease the conflicts within the Church according to the “one city – one bishop – one church” principle, defined in the Canons of the Apostles. Today, this principle no longer holds true, as in many countries there are several Orthodox Churches operating in the same area. The Statutes of the Russian Orthodox Church define the jurisdiction of the ROC as including “persons of Orthodox confession living on the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Moldavia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Latvia, Lithuania, Tajikistan, Turkmenia, Uzbekistan and Estonia and also Orthodox Christians living in other countries and voluntarily joining this jurisdiction”.<sup>25</sup> Suslov distinguishes two competing interpretations of the concept of canonical territory: “On the one hand, ‘canonical territory’ crosses national and ethnic boundaries to encompass non-Slavic countries and ethnic groups. On the other hand, one can observe a tendency to associate ‘canonical territory’ with ethnicity rather than territory”.<sup>26</sup>

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23 Engström 2014, 359–362; 375.

24 Ibid., 376.

25 Wasmuth, Jennifer (2014): “Russian Orthodoxy between State and Nation.” In Krawchuk, A. & Bremer, T. (eds.): *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness: Values, Self-Reflection, Dialogue*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York & Hampshire, 17–27, 21–22.

26 Suslov 2015, 46.

In practice, the contemporary Russian Orthodox Church seems to interpret canonical territory as equating to the whole post-Soviet space or former Soviet Union (Georgia and Armenia excluded),<sup>27</sup> whereas the boundaries of the Holy Rus and the Russian World are less defined. The Russia-appointed Prime Minister of the Republic of Crimea, Sergey Aksyonov, recently criticized the lack of a “normative” definition for the Russian World, and stated that the concept is “not ethnic, not political, but civilizational”.<sup>28</sup> The lack of an explicit definition allows a certain flexibility in applying those concepts, which makes the definition and re-definition of the context possible, and therefore politically more operable.

In 2009, Kirill emphasized in his speech how spiritual connections are of greater value than national borders.<sup>29</sup> Speeches hailing Russia as the Third Rome and the heir to “Byzantium’s fallen orthodox greatness” have been promoted by both the Kremlin and the ROC.<sup>30</sup> In 2008, Father Tikhon (Shevkunov) directed a documentary film entitled *The Fall of an Empire – the Lessons of Byzantium*, which highlights anti-Western attitudes throughout history and reproduces the myth of Russia as the Third Rome. The documentary created a parallel between how the West destroyed the Byzantine Empire and the current state of world politics.<sup>31</sup> Father Tikhon is believed to be President Vladimir Putin’s confessor (*dukhovnik*), accompanying him on trips and assisting in organizing meetings.<sup>32</sup>

In relation to the canonical territory, it seems that the Holy Rus refers to a narrower understanding of the territory. In 2009, at the third assembly of the Russki Mir foundation, the Patriarch defined the core of Holy Rus as Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. This interpretation of the Russian World derives from the holy reverend (*svyatoy prepodobnyy*) Lavrentii Chernigovskii’s expression: “Rus, Ukraine and Belarus – that is Holy Rus”. Patriarch Kirill added that the ROC also regards Moldova as a part of the Russian World.<sup>33</sup> In Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kievan Patriarchate expressed its disapproval of the usage of the term after Kirill’s speech in 2009. Druzenko

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27 Wasmuth 2014.

28 “Glava Kryma predlozhit zakonodatel’no zakrepiť kontseptsiyu Russkogo mira”, RIA Novosti, 6.6.2017.

29 Petro 2015.

30 Clover, Charles (2013): “Putin and the monk”, *Financial Times*, 25.1., Klimov A. A.: “Cultural Mission of Orthodoxy.” Blogs of Senators, Council of Federation, 14.2.2017. See also Østbø, Jardar (2016): *The New Third Rome: Readings of a Russian Nationalist Myth*. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag.

31 Prokrovskaya, Anna (2008): “A Byzantine Warning. On the New Documentary Film, the Fall of an Empire – the Lesson of Byzantium.” Internet Journal of the Russian Orthodox Church 22.5.; “A Byzantine sermon”, *The Economist*, 14.2.2008.

32 Clover, Charles: *Black Wind, White Snow. The Rise of Russia’s New Nationalism*. Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2016, 300–301. See also “The best that Britain produces. Bishop Tikhon (Shevkunov) on the visit of Eton students to Russia”, Internet Journal of the Russian Orthodox Church, 2.9.2016.

33 The Presentation of Patriarch Kirill at the opening ceremony of the Third Assembly of the Russian World, Internet Journal of the Russian Orthodox Church 3.11.2009; Suslov 2015.

analyzed that the speech provoked the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to “choose between becoming Russian and looking for another denomination to satisfy their religious needs”.<sup>34</sup>

The Church’s usage of the term Holy Rus emphasizes the role of Orthodoxy in defining conservative values. The ROC builds these narratives upon history, referring to the “Historical Rus” and to the current state of the East–West relationship. According to Suslov, the concept of Holy Rus is based on “messianism of the covenant”, which is grounded in “self-sufficiency, autonomy and authenticity of the national culture”. Therefore, it possesses a foundation for anticolonial critique as colonialism, for its part, is based on “messianism of the mission”, and expansionism. Continuing the Soviet anti-imperialist tradition, Kirill has been criticizing Western missionary work as propagating “colonial ideology”.<sup>35</sup> His predecessor, Patriarch Alexii, also criticized Eastern Europe’s post-communist “invasion by foreign missionaries”.<sup>36</sup>

In the framework of public diplomacy, the ROC has promoted ideas that can be used in countering the Western influence in general, and endorsing the Russian World in particular.<sup>37</sup> One of the key concepts in this regard is “humanitarian sovereignty”, which emerged in the public discourse some years ago. As noted by Suslov, this term is rooted in the conceptualization of Russia as a “sovereign democracy”, which the Kremlin started to apply around 2007. At the 16th World Russian People’s Council in 2012, the Church stated how the humanitarian sovereignty of Russia “is its independence, its protection from the influence of ‘soft power’, which in the 21st century becomes the main tool for the expansion of external forces that are striving for world domination”.<sup>38</sup> During his Patriarchy, Kirill has criticized the concept of human rights by, for example, emphasizing the superiority of the Orthodox faith in relation to them.<sup>39</sup>

Here, it is important to note the Church’s geopolitical interpretation of the Russian World as referring to the “diaspora” and “Holy Rus”, which are combined by religious, linguistic and historical factors.<sup>40</sup> The cooperation between the ROC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs allows the Church to defend and deepen “Russia’s ‘spiritual’ values and the ROC’s interactions overseas”.<sup>41</sup> In addition, the ROC functions abroad through its Department for External Relations. As Robert Blitt posits, this Department functions in

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34 Druzenko 2011.

35 Suslov 2015, 47.

36 Luxmoore, Jonathan (2001): Eastern Europe 1997–2000: A Review of Church Life. *Religion, State and Society*, 29:4, 305–330, 313.

37 Suslov 2015.

38 The Cathedral Word of the XVI World Russian People’s Council, 13.10.2012.

39 Dolgov, Anna (2016): “Russia’s Patriarch Kirill: Some Human Rights Are ‘Heresy’”, *The Moscow Times* 21.3.; “Patriarch Kirill urged to defend faith from ‘global heresy of human-worship’”, *interfax* 20.3.2016.

40 Suslov 2015, 45.

41 Blitt 2011, 380.

practice in the manner of a foreign ministry, hosting various international organizations and ministries.<sup>42</sup> Even though the Church and the state interpret the Russian World in different ways, their interpretations do converge in the sphere of public diplomacy: in April 2017, at a reception for Orthodox Easter, Foreign Minister Lavrov expressed his appreciation for the contribution of the Church to, among other things, “unifying the Russian world”.<sup>43</sup> As Suslov posits: “[...] the ROC is considered a key partner of the state authorities in plans for the politicization of the ‘Russian World’”.<sup>44</sup>

During Putin’s third term in particular, the Kremlin has underlined the importance of spiritual-moral – and even explicitly Orthodox – values among the people. In 2013, in the meeting of the Valdai Club, Putin laid out the mission Russia envisaged for the 21st century: being the Orthodox power (*pravoslavnaya derzhava*). He stated that “our progress is not possible without a spiritual, cultural and national identity, otherwise we are not able to resist the external and internal challenges”.<sup>45</sup> The current discourse, in which the Church also participates, emphasizes how the West is detached from Christian values, which causes moral erosion, while Russia will counter this trend and defend moral principles.<sup>46</sup> Adding the emphasis on spiritual-moral values to the key state documents, such as the National Security Strategy, strengthens the “humanitarian sovereignty” discourse and at the same time creates an even more robust counter-argument among Russians to “Western values”. In January 2017, Foreign Minister Lavrov stated that the West is promoting “post-Christian”, “all-permissive” values that are “foreign to Russia”. He also highlighted how Russia is fighting for the rights of Christians, but Europe does not appear to be concerned about this matter.<sup>47</sup>

As stated above, the meanings afforded to the Russian World by the state and the ROC are not mutually exclusive; instead, they clearly converge in the way in which both actors counter Western influence. The Church uses the concept of humanitarian sovereignty as a means of avoiding “sociopsychological and cultural dependence”,<sup>48</sup> which is a reference to Western influence. At the same time, the state makes various references to the Russian

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42 Ibid., 366.

43 “Russian diplomacy invariably receives the support of the Russian Orthodox Church. We highly appreciate the ROC’s contribution to strengthening the country’s moral authority, to creating an unbiased image of our country, to unifying the Russian world, and promoting the Russian language and culture.” Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s speech at a reception for Orthodox Easter, Moscow, 18.4.2017.

44 Suslov 2015, 46.

45 Meeting of the “Valdai” international discussion club, 9.9.2013.

46 Petro 2015.

47 Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to media questions at a news conference on the results of Russian diplomacy in 2016, 17.12.2017. In February 2017, Andrei Klimov, Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council Committee of International Affairs, wrote a long blog post about the moral erosion of the West, asking, for example, “should we calmly look at [...] the moral abuse of traditional values by overly liberal politicians in the EU?” Klimov 2017.

48 Suslov 2015, 48.

World in order to stress the roles of the Russian people and the state, when disputing human rights, for example. The state has thus politicized the term Russian World: in this new context, the concept not only refers to Russians, united by a common language and culture, but also has instrumental value in both domestic and foreign politics. The Church's usage of the term mainly refers to the concept of Holy Rus, the spiritual unity of the Russians, but it also has geopolitical connotations. In this regard, the state and the Church use the concept of the Russian World and its various interpretations as a way of propagating anti-Western and conservative religious values.

## THE COOPERATION OF THE ROC AND THE STATE: THE DOMESTIC CONTEXT

Despite the secular state characterization in the constitution, Church and state have long been closely interconnected. The Russian state has assisted the Church financially and in constructing monasteries and parishes, but otherwise the Russian Orthodox Church does not receive direct funding from the state. However, in 2013–2015, the ROC received the largest share of state grants reserved for non-profit organizations.<sup>49</sup> Suspicions about corruption in relation to the high leadership of the Church have also been voiced – for example, concerning Patriarch Kirill’s rumoured fortune of 4 billion USD.<sup>50</sup> The interconnectedness of state and Church is not only confined to the real or suspected financial flows, but is also visible in the way in which key political figures work closely with the Orthodox Church to plan legislation and propaganda campaigns.<sup>51</sup> This section analyzes the domestic aspect of the political connections between Church and state, as well as their practical applications of the Russian World idea.

Mikhail Sitnikov has analyzed how the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the secular school system, for example, may result in “a new totalitarianism based on a politicized form of Orthodoxy”.<sup>52</sup> According to Sitnikov, the new methods of introducing religion into the Russian school system “clericalize” the previously secular system. The introduction of religiously infiltrated courses into the school system has been growing in the 21st century. In addition, Patriarch Kirill participates in the renewal of the Russian school network in 10 different countries. The aim is to form a network of international schools using Russian educational standards.<sup>53</sup> The project is led by the Federal Agency Rossotrudnichestvo, which operates under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In July 2009, Rossotrudnichestvo and the Russkii mir foundation signed a cooperation agreement, the objective of which was to “strengthen the position of the Russian language in the world” and “support people interested in the cultural and spiritual life of the Russian World”.<sup>54</sup>

Melissa Hooper recounts how, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been a growing tendency towards religious legislation in the former Soviet states. Since 2012 in particular, the ROC has been supporting Putin and underlining conservative religious values in the media. In 2012, Kirill declared on Russian television that “liberalism will lead to legal collapse and then the Apocalypse”. In recent years, the ROC’s influence on legislative processes has been documented, for example, in several projects that restrict the rights of sexual and gender minorities, as well as restrictions on considering

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49 Filipov, Dimitry (2017): “The Ministry of Religious Propaganda – The Russian Orthodox Church in Putin’s Russia”, *The Met Society* article, 13.2.

50 Pomerantsev, P. (2012): “Putin’s God Squad: The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics”, *Newsweek*, 9.10.

51 See e.g. Hug, A. (ed.) (2016): *Sharing Worst Practice: How Countries and Institutions in the Former Soviet Union Help Create Legal Tools of Repression*. The Foreign Policy Centre: 33.

52 Sitnikov, Mikhail (2011): *Orthodox Bolshevism*. *Russian Politics & Law*, 49:1, 83–90.

53 “L. Glebova: It is necessary to create a comprehensive system of teaching the Russian language?”, *rs.gov.ru*, 20.3.2017.

54 “Rossotrudnichestvo and Russki Mir signed a contract”. *Russki Mir* foundation website, 2017.

abortion.<sup>55</sup> The Church and private funds promoting traditional Orthodox values are not only aimed at restrictive legislative changes, but also organize other events, such as anti-abortion campaigns.<sup>56</sup>

An example of the convergence of state interests and Orthodox values was the Pussy Riot case in February 2012, where a punk group presented a “prayer” in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, criticizing the president and the partiality of the Orthodox Church in the Russian authoritarian regime. While many Western commentators seemed to be “unanimously inspired by the youthfulness and rebellion of these courageous Russian feminists”,<sup>57</sup> in Russia, public opinion generally opposed the performance.<sup>58</sup> However, the long prison sentences that the performers – all young women, many of whom were mothers – were subjected to, were also criticized. The case was significant in the way that it was quickly turned into an example of a threat towards Russian traditional values, orchestrated abroad.<sup>59</sup> The Russian Foreign Ministry explained the West’s reaction to the event by stating that “in the postmodern West, many forget about the Christian roots of Europe, and at the same time [the West] does not want to respect the feelings of followers of other faiths [...]”.<sup>60</sup>

However, the Pussy Riot case also demonstrates the diversity of views that prevail within the Russian Orthodox Church. Some of the Church leaders, such as Father Tikhon, condemned the performance, but signed a petition to reduce the severe sentences.<sup>61</sup> Protodeacon Andrey Kuraev, an active blogger representing the more liberal wing of the Church, also spoke up for the rights of the band members. In late 2013, Kuraev aggravated the Church’s higher ranks by claiming that there was a “homosexual lobby” within the ROC, and criticizing how sexual abuse is not dealt with adequately in theological educational institutions. Later, Kuraev was accused of “provocative publications” and dismissed from his post in the Moscow Theological Academy.<sup>62</sup> Whereas it seems that the career aspirations of the liberal representatives of the ROC

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55 Hug 2016.

56 “Mamochka, mne nozhku rvut. Kak vrachi, Tserkov’ i fond Vladimira Yakunina boryutsya s abortami.” Meduza 2.5.2017.

57 Yusupova, Marina (2014): Pussy Riot: a feminist band lost in history and translation. *Nationalities Papers*, 42:4, 604–610, 604.

58 Ibid., 605–606.

59 Hutchings and Tolz point out that along with the event, “apocalyptic visions of moral breakdown” pervaded the Russian TV programmes of different genres. Hutchings, Stephen & Tolz, Vera (2015): *Nation, Ethnicity and Race on Russian Television. Mediating post-Soviet difference*. Routledge, London and New York, 195–196; 214–216.

60 “The Russian Foreign Ministry explained the West’s reaction to the Pussy Riot case as a conflict of civilizations”, lenta.ru, 23.8.2012.

61 Clover 2013.

62 “Homosexuality in Russia: Orthodox apocalypse”, inosmi.ru 14.1.2014.



have been thwarted, there have been cases of extreme conservatives being expelled as well. For instance, Vsevolod Chaplin, the head of the Department for the Cooperation of Church and Society, was relieved of his duties in December 2015, after making sexist and pro-Stalinist comments.<sup>63</sup>

In February 2013, in a meeting of the Council of Cooperation with Religious Associations, the then head of the Presidential Administration, Sergei Ivanov, expressed his concerns about several provocative crimes against people's religious convictions – a statement that can be seen as a direct commentary on the Pussy Riot case. These crimes included, in his words, vandalism in churches, terrorist acts, and attempts to intimidate the clergy. Notably, the meeting highlighted the importance of the prevention and identification of such offences<sup>64</sup> – which hints that the Council was simultaneously speaking for increased surveillance aimed at citizens.

The Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations, as well as the Interreligious Council in Russia, are examples of institutions that were founded in the 1990s when the Church and the state started to seek closer connections after their separation in the USSR.<sup>65</sup> In 1994 and 1995, Patriarch Alexii also made cooperation agreements with the Defence, Interior and Emergencies Ministries, and the Federal Border Guards Service. At least in the Pussy Riot case, it seems that the statements by the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations did play a role in the legislative process that subsequently evolved. Namely, in June 2013, Putin signed a Federal Law that made offences against believers' feelings punishable by imprisonment.<sup>66</sup> Since its adoption, the law has been applied several times, for instance in spring 2017 when a Russian video blogger received a three-and-a-half-year suspended sentence for offending religious feelings by playing Pokémon Go inside the Church of All Saints in Yekaterinburg.<sup>67</sup>

Another significant topic for the ROC on the domestic front has been the traditional family model and the reinforcement of its status in society. In March 2016, the Russian Orthodox Church Commission on family issues made an appeal that posits how the traditional concept of family and moral values is under ideological and legislative attack. According to the Commission, the family itself is the safest place for women and children, and legislative acts introduced to prevent home violence are thus “not aimed

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63 Davies, Katie (2016): “‘There Are Some People You Should Kill’: The Russian Priests Supporting Stalin”, *The Moscow Times* 17.8.; “Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin dismissed from his post as head of Synodal Department for Church and Society Relations”, *Internet Journal of the Russian Orthodox Church* 24.12.2015.

64 Meeting of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations, 12.2.2013.

65 Garrard & Garrard 2008, 248.

66 Amendments to the Criminal Code and certain legislative acts with the aim of protecting religious convictions and feelings, 30.6.2013.

67 “Ruslan Sokolovskiy prigovoren k uslovnomu sroku.” *Sova Center* 11.5.2017.



against violence, but against the family”.<sup>68</sup> In February 2017, Putin signed a new law easing the penalty for domestic violence.<sup>69</sup>

Both Church and state have also been suppressing other, smaller religious groups in Russia. The Orthodox Church has utilized activist Aleksandr Dvorkin’s anti-cult movement as reinforcement against “non-traditional” religions. The Church started to refer to the new and active religious movements with the clearly negative term “totalitarian sects”, coined by Dvorkin in 1994 in order to prevent those groups from operating freely in Russia.<sup>70</sup> The suspicion towards these religions has not disappeared, and in some cases has even intensified during the past few years. In July 2016, Vladimir Putin signed the so-called “Yarovaya Act”, a raft of laws mainly increasing surveillance in order to fight terrorism. The legislative changes included limitations on evangelical activities, again weakening the position of the “non-traditional” religions in Russia.<sup>71</sup> In April 2017, the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses were banned with a court decision.<sup>72</sup>

Both the state and the ROC embrace the narrative that traditional, spiritual values unite the Russian world and therefore need to be defended. In the domestic context, the narrative seems to benefit from the fact that the traditional-conservative “camp” in society is generally stronger than the liberal one, as Elena Chebankova has shown.<sup>73</sup> The emphasis on spirituality in the political rhetoric speaks to and seeks support from all of those who intuitively support conservative values – and not only the active Church-goers. Moreover, the trust in the ROC within society is high overall.<sup>74</sup> Hence, it seems that the emphasis on spirituality, affirmed by both state and Church, can have a long-standing impact on domestic politics.

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68 “Appeal: The Patriarchal Commission on Family, Maternity and Childhood Protection to Public Organizations and Politicians” 12.3.2016.

69 “The President signed the Federal Law ‘On Amending Article 116 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation’”, 7.2.2017.

70 Elkner, Julia (2005): “Spiritual security in Putin’s Russia.” *History & Policy*, Policy Papers, 1.1.

71 The legislative act was criticized because of the hasty processing of the law and the vague text in the law that enables various interpretations. See e.g. Sibireva, Olga (2017): *Problemy realizatsii svobody sovesti v Rossii v 2016 godu*. Sova Center report, 30.3.

72 Sergazina, Ksenia (2017): “Zapret Svideteley legovy, ili kto sleduyushiy...” *Sova-center Commentary*, 21.4.

73 Chebankova, Elena (2015): *Competing ideologies of Russia’s Civil Society*. *Europe-Asia Studies* 67:2, 264.

74 Although over 70 per cent of Russians identify themselves as Orthodox, only 7 per cent attend religious services once or more per month. In September 2016, the ROC was the fourth most trusted institution among the Russian respondents. “Russians Return to Religion, But Not to Church”, Pew Research Center, 10.2.2014; “Institutsional’noe doverie”, Levada Center press release, 13.10.2016.

## ROC NETWORKS AS A PART OF RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

During the Soviet era, the Church was one of the channels for propaganda abroad. The KGB recruited the majority of the senior religious leaders. An example of the role played by the leaders at that time was the KGB's peace campaign in the 1980s – the systematic representation of the Soviet Union as a peaceful actor in world politics, taking a stand against the war-mongering of the capitalist countries. In this campaign, the Church's task was to spread the word among religious leaders and to convince the West that there was no religious persecution in the Soviet Union.<sup>75</sup>

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Patriarch Alexii utilized the networks he had created during his career in the KGB<sup>76</sup> to rebuild the ROC's domestic status and regain the possessions confiscated from the Church by the Soviets.<sup>77</sup> Previous research shows a linkage between the ROC and the KGB's successor, the FSB.<sup>78</sup> An example of the alliance was the re-creation in March 2002 of the Church of Sophia the Divine Wisdom on the Lubyanka Square in the centre of Moscow, the headquarters of the former KGB, now the FSB. During the opening ceremony, Patriarch Alexii blessed the church and called for the need to defend Russia's spiritual security.<sup>79</sup>

For several years, Patriarch Alexii strove for deeper cooperation with the Foreign Ministry. Finally, in 2003, the ROC and the Foreign Ministry signed an accord and subsequently formed a cooperation group through which the top hierarchy of the ROC

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75 Garrard & Garrard 2008, 181–182; 44.

76 Ibid., 51–52.

77 Davis, D. (2002): The Russian Orthodox Church and the future of Russia. *Journal Of Church And State*, 44:4, 657–670, 661, 664.

78 Several sources basing their findings on the KGB's archives, now closed to the public, posit how both Patriarchs Alexii and Kirill were recruited by the KGB. Neither of them has admitted their relations to the Soviet security agency. The archive documents provide information on Alexii's recruitment under the codename "Drozdov". Alexii Ridiger was appointed by the Estonian KGB at the end of the 1950s at the age of 29. He was recruited to work as the KGB's officer within the Church's hierarchy and to promote the KGB's international propaganda campaigns. A similar examination of the archives has revealed Kirill's affiliation to the KGB. During the Soviet era, religious functions and politics were controlled solely through the state organizations as the KGB placed agents within the clerical hierarchies in order to control their functions. According to Garrard & Garrard (2008, 68), this method was "the party's main tool to discredit the church" during Brezhnev's era. The collaboration between the Orthodox Church and the KGB was not one of a kind: the KGB recruited nearly every senior leader of officially recognized religions. See for example: "Soviet Influence Activities. A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda", U.S. Department of State Publication, October 1987, 7; Clover 2013; Knox, Zoe (2004): Postsoviet challenges to the Moscow patriarchate, 1991–2001. *Religion, State and Society*, 32:2, 87–113, 102; Corley, Felix (2000): "Russia: The Patriarch and the KGB", Keston News Service, no. 9, issue 14, 21.9. On the accord between the ROC and the FSB, see for example: Garrard & Garrard 2008, 249; Blitt 2011, 411–412; "International Religious Freedom Report 2003", U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Release.

79 International Religious Freedom Report 2003; see also LaFraniere, Sharon (2002): "Russia's Well-Connected Patriarch", *The Washington Post*, 23.5.

was able to directly connect with top-level civil servants in Russia.<sup>80</sup> In November 2007, Foreign Minister Lavrov presented certain aspects considering the cooperation between the Ministry and the Church at a press conference held after the tenth meeting of the Working Group on MFA–Russian Orthodox Church Interaction. According to Lavrov, “Orthodox values formed the basis of Russian culture and Russian statehood” and “the Church engages in tackling the same tasks as does diplomacy”. Referring to the Act on Canonical Communication between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, Lavrov posited how “[w]e see in the revival of church unity a hugely important factor for consolidating the entire ‘Russian world’”. In addition, the Foreign Minister emphasized how the Church and the Ministry were working “hand in hand”, for example in helping the Russian diaspora abroad.<sup>81</sup>

During Kirill’s Patriarchy, the ROC has bolstered the Kremlin’s agenda abroad, but the support is case-specific. The Patriarch has described the war in Syria as a “holy war”, but his stand on Ukraine is much more reserved.<sup>82</sup> Considering the war in Syria, the main religious argument by the Church and the state is that the state supports the suffering Christians in the region, and the West is oblivious to the suffering.<sup>83</sup> Both the state and the Church speak about the West’s moral decay and the post-Christian era, referring to the fact that the state is protecting the Christians by military means and the Church is sending financial assistance to the Christians in the region.<sup>84</sup> In 2015, Kirill expressed his concerns about how the West does not follow moral Christian values and even suppresses people who do not agree with the new liberal legislation, on issues such as same-sex marriages, for instance.<sup>85</sup> Kirill’s statements concerning the annexation of Crimea and the Kremlin’s subsequent actions in Ukraine were cautious for fear of losing Moscow Patriarchate parishes in the region.<sup>86</sup> In many former Soviet states such as Ukraine, Latvia and Georgia, the Church is also a political actor. The Church uses this role to influence legislative processes concerning LGBT rights and the role of religion in society, for instance.<sup>87</sup>

Even if the Russian Orthodox Church follows the Kremlin’s foreign policy line as a rule, it has also taken an opposite stance. For example, during the Georgian War in 2008,

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80 Garrard & Garrard 2008, 249.

81 Opening Remarks by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the Press Conference After the Tenth Meeting of the Working Group on MFA–Russian Orthodox Church Interaction, Moscow, 20.11.2007.

82 “Russian Patriarch Says War on Terrorism Is ‘Holy War for All’”, pravoslavie.ru 19.10.2016.

83 “Patriarch Kirill: [One] should not remain outside the sufferings of Syrian people”, patriarchia.ru 30.9.2015; “Patriarch Kirill met the President of Billy Graham Evangelistic Association” patriarchia.ru 28.10.2015.

84 Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks... 2017; see also Klimov 2017 and “Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church collected 3 million roubles for Syria”, pravoslavie.ru 26.1.2014.

85 “Patriarch Kirill met the President...”, 2015.

86 Rousselet, Kathy (2015): The Church in the Service of the Fatherland. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 67:1, 49–67.

87 Hug 2016, 33–35.

the ROC made strong appeals for peace together with the Georgian Orthodox Church.<sup>88</sup> The territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which were declared independent, are officially the canonical territory of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and the ROC respects the Canon Law.<sup>89</sup> Hence, the Moscow Patriarchate did not attempt to build their own institutions in the area. According to Alexei Makarkin, during the beginning of the war in particular, the interchurch relations were “the sole channel of communication between Russia and Georgia”.<sup>90</sup> In practice, Russia has been educating priests and sending funding through South Ossetian and Abkhazian churches, which have been declared autonomous.<sup>91</sup> Both parties, the ROC and the Georgian Orthodox Church, stress the close relations of the Churches.<sup>92</sup> As the Georgian Orthodox Church became fully self-governing as early as the 7th century, there is a strong mutual understanding of the canonical territory, unlike in Ukraine.<sup>93</sup>

In Belarus, the Belarusian Orthodox Church is under the heavy influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, but simultaneously pressured by the political elite in Minsk to show loyalty to the regime. According to the ROC, Belarus is part of its canonical territory.<sup>94</sup> Patriarch Kirill stated in 2009 how “Belarus is a native land for all of us, and it is part of Holy Rus, historical Rus”.<sup>95</sup> In recent years, the Belarusian Orthodox Church has taken initiatives towards greater independence from the Moscow Patriarchate, but has not yet been granted significant freedoms. The war in Ukraine has also made the ROC more diplomatic in its Russian World pronouncements, so as not to challenge the Belarusian Orthodox Church’s lead or the country’s political rule.<sup>96</sup>

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88 Kishkovsky, Sophia (2008): “War splits Orthodox churches in Russia and Georgia”, *The New York Times*, 5.9.

89 Grdzeldze, Tamara (2010): The Orthodox Church of Georgia: challenges under democracy and freedom (1990–2009), *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 10:2–3, 160–175, 170.

90 Makarkin, Aleksei (2011): The Russian Orthodox Church – Competing Choices. *Russian Politics and Law*, 49:1, 8–23.

91 “Russia, Georgia: Private Goals Behind Churches’ Public Agreement”, Stratfor Assessments, 27.7.2011.

92 “Pain and Hope in Ancient Orthodox Ossetia. An interview with Hieromonk Nicodim (Bekenev)”, pravoslavie.ru 26.3.2010; “Patriarch of Georgia: Our church and people never cut ties with Russia”, rt.ru 22.7.2013.

93 Grdzeldze 2010, 160; Hug, Adam (ed.) (2015): *Traditional religion and political power: Examining the role of the church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova*. The Foreign Policy Centre, 8.

94 Vasilevich, Natallia (2013): “Orthodox Church in Belarus: Between the Russian Orthodox Church and Belarusian society”, *Bell BelarusInfo Letter*, Eastern Europe Studies Centre, 38:8, 5; Vasilevich, N. (2014): The Belarusian Orthodox Church in the Shadow of the State. *Russian politics and Law*, 52:5, 7–31, 7.

95 Bykovskij, Pavljuk (2017): “Pravoslavnaya tserkov’: vne politiki, no v politicheskom kontekste”, *naviny.by*, 9.1.

96 Astapenia, Ryhor (2015): “Belarusian Orthodox Church Seeks More Independence from Russia.” *BelarusDigest*, 13.1.; Bykovskij 2017.

## THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE

In the early 1990s, the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine was divided into two branches: the Orthodox Church of the Kievian Patriarchate (UOC KP) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP). The Kievian Patriarchate is not considered a part of the canonical church, whereas the Moscow Patriarchate's affiliate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is recognized by the Orthodox world.<sup>97</sup> Patriarch Kirill has been striving to keep the churches within its sphere of influence.<sup>98</sup> Even before the war, it had been discussed within the UOC MP whether there should be a complete separation from the ROC – which would have reduced the Moscow patriarchate's parishes by half. Since his inauguration, Kirill has been ready to make significant concessions in order to keep the Ukrainian clergy in the ROC's sphere of influence, such as presenting possibilities for new levels of autonomy for the UOC MP.<sup>99</sup>

In many respects, the two Patriarchates of Moscow and Kiev act like rivals, and they take different stands on the war in Ukraine. In November 2013, the Kiev Patriarchate supported the EuroMaidan movement, whereas the Moscow patriarchate was closely attached to Yanukovich and his anti-Western regime. A pro-Moscow and pro-Ukrainian division also existed within the UOC MP long before the annexation of Crimea or EuroMaidan, but it was after those events that the inner schism became more apparent. According to Alexey Makarkin, the division had already become more pronounced ever since the physical condition of Metropolitan Vladimir of the UOC MP had deteriorated after 2007.<sup>100</sup> Within the UOC MP, the younger bishops in particular aim to distance themselves from Moscow and deny the idea of being part of the Russian World.<sup>101</sup> When Russia annexed Crimea in spring 2014, the UOC MP faced a contradictory situation: they could not accept diminishing their “canonical territory”, while at the same time the national sentiment in Ukraine was growing. The annexation of Crimea made the division between the pro-Moscow and pro-Kiev camps more profound. Many UOC MP priests in Donbass assisted the separatists, but many others took a neutral stand.<sup>102</sup> Kiev Patriarch Filaret has stated that the priests of the Moscow Patriarchate encourage the Kremlin's policies. Hence, the parishes of the UOC are transferring their affiliation to the Kiev Patriarchate, precisely in line with what Patriarch Kirill had suspected.<sup>103</sup>

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97 Olszański, T. A. (2014): “The Ukrainian Orthodox Church's stance on the revolution and war”, OSW Commentary, 30.10.

98 Makarkin, A. (2014): “Patriarch Kirill and ‘post-Maidan’ Ukraine”, *Pro et Contra*, May – August.

99 Papkova 2011, 674; 680.

100 Metropolitan Vladimir's illness and subsequent death in July 2014 sparked strong competition to find a successor who also embodied the position towards Moscow. The new head, Metropolitan Onufry, continues Vladimir's legacy by not contradicting Moscow, but strengthening the Church's independence. Makarkin 2014; see also Olszański 2014.

101 Makarkin 2014.

102 Olszański 2014.

103 Bugriy, Maksym (2015): “The War and the Orthodox Churches in Ukraine”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 12:30, 18.2.

During the war, Russia has been accusing the Ukrainians of suppressing the Russian minority. “Defending” the Russians from this suppression was presented as one of the motivations for the annexation of Crimea. In addition, in his speech delivered on 18 March 2014, on the day of the annexation of Crimea, President Putin described the Russian and Ukrainian nations as one:

“Our concerns are understandable because we are not simply close neighbours but, as I have said many times already, we are one people. Kiev is the mother of Russian cities. Ancient Rus is our common source and we cannot live without each other.”<sup>104</sup>

In a similar way, the suppression of Russians and Russian-speakers in Ukraine, as well as the unity of the Russian World / Holy Rus, has been stressed in the religious context. The Moscow Patriarchate and the Kremlin have been accusing the Kiev Patriarchate of suppressing the MP in Ukraine.<sup>105</sup> There is, however, evidence of the case being actually the opposite. In May 2014, the pro-Russian forces seized Ukrainian Orthodox properties and threatened the priests who were following the Kiev Patriarchate in Slovyansk. Russian insurgents seized Evangelical churches and replaced Protestant objects with Orthodox icons. In July 2014, the head of the Kiev Patriarchate, Patriarch Filaret, stated that “Patriarch Kirill has become part of the Russian government”.<sup>106</sup> He has also posited how the UOC MP in Luhansk and Donetsk supported the insurgents along with Russia’s interests.<sup>107</sup> However, Patriarch Kirill has stated that the war aims to “overpower the canonical Orthodox Church”, thus presenting the Moscow Church as a victim.<sup>108</sup> During 2014, it seemed that Kirill was balancing between the Kremlin and the fear of distancing the UOC MP from the ROC’s sphere of influence. Still, his behaviour makes it apparent that the ROC does not condemn the annexation. In March 2014, Kirill described the brotherhood of Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian peoples as a “reality”, which “must determine our future and it cannot be sacrificed for short-term interests”.<sup>109</sup> The statement is rather reminiscent of Putin’s words above.

The discourse stressing the oppression of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, introduced in 2014, still prevails. In 2016 Sergei Ivanov presented his concerns about the growing xenophobia “in some Western countries”, a trend that would require an “immediate response” at the meeting of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations. The participants discussed how Ukraine aims to limit the activities of the UOC MP. They accused the Ukrainians of seizing their churches and

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104 Address of the President of the Russian Federation, Moscow 18.3.2014.

105 Meeting of the Council for Coordination with Religious Associations, 12.5.2016.

106 Higgins, A. (2014): “Evidence Grows of Russian Orthodox Clergy’s Aiding Ukraine Rebels”, *New York Times*, 6.9.

107 “Patriarch Filaret: Sooner or later Ukraine will have its local orthodox church, independent from Moscow”, Ukraine Crisis Media Center 3.7.2015.

108 Higgins 2014.

109 Makarkin 2014.

venting aggression against the clergy.<sup>110</sup> Hence, the prevailing discourse is used as a justification for both past and possible future actions by the Kremlin, as it builds a rationale for countering the “aggression” aimed at the “canonical Orthodox Church”.

The Russian Orthodox Church and its Ukrainian affiliate are part of a larger set of tools used by the Kremlin for practising its politics and public diplomacy abroad. In addition to the Church, the private sector forms a central part of the Kremlin’s tools. Chatham House analyst Orysia Lutsevych mentions Konstantin Malofeev as one of the most active “Orthodox oligarchs” who contributes to promoting conservative and Orthodox values abroad.<sup>111</sup> Malofeev is the CEO of the Tsargrad religious TV channel, a major donor for the Orthodox Church, and who, reportedly, belongs to Putin’s inner circle. Even in 2013, in an interview for *the Financial Times*, Malofeev said he devoted more time to public service than business. He seems to interpret his work abroad as a moral duty: “like the [western] Christians that helped us to overcome communism 30 years ago, now it is our turn to give back to you and help you with family and Christianity”. Malofeev remains a strong link between the Kremlin, the Orthodox Church and the Russian-backed forces in Ukraine to this day.<sup>112</sup>

During Putin’s third presidential term, conservative, spiritual-moral values have become an increasingly important way for the Russian high-level political circles to exercise power, but also for some influential figures in the business community. The Church’s inner schisms are not a high priority for the Kremlin, as long as the relationship with the ROC is guaranteed. However, the divisions within the Church are a high priority for the ROC because this divide decreases the prospects of unifying the Orthodox Churches in Ukraine in the future. The ROC’s current objective is to keep the Ukrainian affiliate in its grip and not to lose additional followers. The Kremlin, however, attained its aims in Ukraine and worked together with the ROC to reach its goals.

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110 Meeting of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations, 12.5.2016.

111 Lutsevych, Orysia (2016): “The Long Arm of Russian ‘Soft’ Power”, Atlantic Council, 4.5.

112 Weaver, Courtney: “Konstantin Malofeev, Marshall Capital Partners”, *Financial Times*, 8.9.2013; see also Clover 2016, 324–327.



## CONCLUSIONS

Since 2012 in particular, the political leaders in Russia have made the traditional Russian spiritual-moral values an integral part of the national identity, intensifying the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the domestic and foreign policy-making of the country. Both the state leadership and the religious leaders have applied the concept of the Russian World in emphasizing the distinctive, traditional Russian values. In the Church discourse, the concept is often understood as the Holy Rus, the spiritual connection between all Russians. However, the Church leadership has recently applied the concept in more “geopolitical” terms, describing a “Russian land” that does not limit itself to the current state borders of the Russian Federation. Hence, both the state discourse and the Church discourse incorporate a strong foreign policy element into the meanings of the Russian World.

In domestic politics, the ROC has supported legislative changes that limit the rights of sexual and gender minorities in the public space, condemn offending people’s religious feelings, and decrease possibilities to punish cases of domestic violence. The mechanism of influence is activated through formal institutional links and by supporting religious activists, who also promote these goals. Both state and Church present the liberal sentiments in society as a threat to national security.

Both state and Church use the concept of the Russian World in a foreign policy context as a way to promote their interests. Despite Foreign Minister Lavrov’s statement that the ROC and the state work “hand in hand”, those interests are not always fully congruent. In Ukraine, for example, Patriarch Kirill has been careful not to express strong sentiments regarding the war, as he has been fearful of losing the Moscow Patriarchate’s support in the region. Simultaneously, the war has deepened the existing divisions both between the two Orthodox patriarchates in Ukraine and within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. The ROC weighs its resources and possible losses when taking a stand in foreign policy matters, and at least in the case of Ukraine, these seem secondary factors for the Kremlin as long as the close relationship with the ROC remains.

The Orthodox Church in Russia cannot be observed independently from the state, but its political stances cannot be reduced to those of a puppet either. The political ideology of the Kremlin is intertwined with the religious ideology of the ROC, and the two actors support each other’s aims in providing new meanings for specific Russian “spirituality” that is, in turn, used as an argument for countering the “Western influence”. This narrative has been a foreign policy tool in the regions considered to belong to Russia’s sphere of influence, but it also serves as an instrument in domestic politics. The representation of Russian spirituality in opposition to Western values can be interpreted as a securitization move.

The strong emphasis on spiritual values forms a significant part of the support basis for the current rule, which, for its part, has guaranteed the Church’s position as a central actor in domestic and foreign policy. It seems that, for now, the politicization process of spirituality has benefitted both, but this does not mean that the two-way settlement will last forever. In consolidating the spiritual values as being reminiscent of a state ideology, the Russian Orthodox Church and the state leadership have reinforced the conservative value basis of society at the expense of the liberal one, and thus made it increasingly



difficult to change the course of the “conservative turn” in the future. In foreign policy, a possible change would require a profound reforming of current practice, in which important channels of influence work through the Church and the private sector, connecting the world’s conservative wing together. Any efforts to redirect politics in Russia will be long infected by the “spiritual” legacy of Putin’s era.

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