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KEY POINTS

1. A great majority of Russians declare that they are members of the Orthodox Church. However, an analysis of social behaviours has proven that religion has no major impact on their lives – a great number of Russian citizens are not familiar with the religious dogmas, do not engage themselves in church rituals and have a liberal approach to following Christian moral principles. Attachment to Orthodoxy in the case of most Russians is of a declarative and passive nature, and usually is not linked to taking any specific actions. On the other hand, Orthodoxy and the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate, which is the largest religious community in Russia, play an essential role in the **process of cultural and civil self-identification of the Russian nation.** The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as a socio-political institution with a centuries-old history, which places strong emphasis on the continuity of Russian statehood and enjoys public prestige in Russia, has also been used for political purposes.

2. The ROC's increasing presence in Russia's public life seen over the past few years is to a great extent a result of Russian government policy, which has become more attentive to religion since Vladimir Putin regained the presidency in 2012. To strengthen the political regime in Russia, the Kremlin at that time began to draw extensively upon conservative ideology and promote traditional moral and social values, which the Church is viewed as the guardian of. This has resulted in establishing closer relations between the secular government and the ROC, as well as in a greater engagement of ROC hierarchs and its structures n domestic and foreign policy issues.

3. Relations between the ROC and the government in Russia allude to the Byzantine model of the 'altar and throne alliance'. This co-operation guarantees tangible benefits to both parties: owing to this, the ROC has a privileged position as compared to other churches operating in Russia and has been granted access to various social groups and sources of financing. All this has allowed it to improve its infrastructural and financial potential. In turn, the Kremlin has gained a valuable ideological partner. However, co-operation with a government which demonstrates distrust of any independent public initiatives imposes significant limitations on the ROC activities and does harm to its image to a certain extent. The Church has been unable to reach some of its goals (for example, Orthodox catechisation has not been introduced in schools on a compulsory basis) and to pursue its own policy in various areas, if its goal collides with the Kremlin's policy (for example,

historic policy which clearly condemn the Soviet regime). Furthermore, the ROC's subordination to the Kremlin has been criticised by some of its followers **in Russia,** above all Christian intelligentsia circles who have identified themselves with the ROC so far, and has exposed it to the risk of reputational damage **outside Russia,** especially in Ukraine, which this Church sees as part of the international area where it would like to hold supremacy.

4. Given its close links with the government, which have been successively strengthened since the 1990s, the Orthodox Church's autonomy in Russia tends to be narrower. In effect, the Russian public views the ROC as an element of the system of political power, and not as a neutral religious institution. In the longer term, the increasing integration of ROC hierarchs with political establishment will expose the Church to risks related to the potential destabilisation of the political system in Russia. These risks have recently been augmented by economic problems and increasing tension among the general public resulting from the deterioration of the socio-political situation.

INTRODUCTION

In the Soviet period, the government forced citizens to become atheists and systematically eradicated Orthodox culture from public life. The activity of religious organisations was limited and subordinated to the state's political goals, and their structures were infiltrated by the secret services. The Russian Orthodox Church[1], being the largest religious organisation, experienced brutal repression. During those few decades, a significant part of church infrastructure was destroyed or nationalised, and the number of people who openly declared themselves as Orthodox Christians fell dramatically as a consequence of persecution, including physical liquidation of clergymen and lay members of the Church. As a result, the ROC's position in society became marginalised, which additionally contributed to the liberalisation of moral standards among the public. It was only Perestroika policy, which was initiated by the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, that inaugurated a breakthrough in Soviet government policy and caused a gradual revival of religious life inside the ROC. The Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church was convened again in 1988, new saints were canonised and a festive celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the of the Christianisation of Rus' was organised.

When the USSR collapsed, the post-Soviet public faced an identity crisis as a consequence firstly of the spiritual impoverishment caused by the state's atheist indoctrination and secondly of the ideological crisis resulting from the discrediting of communism. In the new political reality, the Church, being an religious and social institution with long history which managed to survive the Soviet period preserving the remains of its moral prestige intact despite the severe repression, could offer spiritual support to the public and thus rebuild its social position. Over time, the Russian public opinion's interest in the Orthodox religion reached such a scale that this phenomenon has begun to be called 'religious revival'. The ROC's increasing popularity has not been impaired by the fact that the Church had not came to terms with the past of those of its hierarchs who had collaborated with Soviet secret services[2]. The behaviour of a number of Russian politicians, who started building their political careers

[1] The word 'Church' used throughout this text means the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate. The Russian Orthodox Church is also abbreviated in this text as ROC.

[2] For example, Gleb Yakunin, an Orthodox priest, a dissident who wanted cases of the Church's collaboration with the Soviet government to be revealed, has informed about such hierarchs. According to media reports, collected among others by the portal compromat.ru, the incumbent Patriarch Kirill and his predecessor Alexy, were among those who collaborated with the Soviet secret services. For more information, see http://www.compromat.ru/page_32401.htm

in the reality of the Soviet system being engaged in combating Orthodoxy and who ostentatiously show off their loyalty to the Church today, like Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, does not provoke dissonance among the Russian public either[3].

The Russian government, counting on political benefits, has also looked favourably upon religious revival. It backed the ROC and initially afforded it a great degree of freedom of action. Good relations with the Kremlin have made it possible for the ROC to gain a privileged position among other religious groups in Russia, to successfully lobby for legislative changes favourable to itself, and to gain sponsors and succeed in its efforts to reach various social groups[4]. Gradually, the Church as an institution became an active participant of socio-political processes in Russia and an actor in Russian foreign policy. However, the ultimate ground rules for co-operation between 'the altar and the throne'[5] were established after 2009, **under the influence of two factors. Firstly,** the election of the resourceful and charismatic Metropolitan Kirill (secular name Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev) as leader of the ROC, who had previously served as the head of the ROC's department for external contacts, had rich diplomatic experience and showed political ambitions. **Secondly,** the return of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in 2012. Putin, looking for a way to consolidate the public and prevent unrest among the elites, began to draw upon conservative ideology[6]. On the present government's initiative, the Church has become an ideological pillar of the authoritarian system and an instrument for influencing the public.

This paper is an attempt to answer the question as to what role Orthodoxy and the Russian Orthodox Church play in society and politics in Russia today. Its goal is to analyse the current position of the ROC as **an institution engaged in socio-political processes** in Russia. This analysis is focused on the period since the election of the new head of the ROC, Kirill Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus', i.e. 2009, until the present day.

[3] In September 2014, Patriarch Kirill awarded Zyuganov with a prestigious Church award, the Order of Glory and Honour, 3rd degree.

[4] For more information on this subject see publications by N. Mitrokhin, for example, Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov: sovremennoye sostoyaniye i aktualnyie problemy, 2006, NLO.

[5] In the Byzantine Empire, religion was a consolidating factor of the state, and the Church was its pillar. Thus the state government was gaining sacral dimension.

[6] For more information on the Kremlin's conservative project see: Witold Rodkiewicz, Jadwiga Rogoża, Potemkin conservatism. An ideological tool of the Kremlin, *OSW Point of View*, 3 February 2015, http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/point-view/2015-02-03/potemkin-conservatism-ideological-tool-kremlin

I. THE SOCIAL POSITION OF ORTHODOXY AND THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN RUSSIA

The Russian public's approach to Orthodoxy can be characterised as passive, since their declared attachment to religion in most cases does not entail cultivation of religious practices or observing the moral standards promoted by the Church in everyday life. The majority of the Russian public view Orthodoxy as an element of their cultural and national **identity** rather than a strictly religious one. The Orthodox religion thus becomes a nation-building factor – it helps Russian people be distinct from other religious and cultural communities, and be aware of the fact that they are part of a single national or even civilisational community. In turn, the institution of the Russian Orthodox Church is viewed as an element of the Russian state system which has formed over centuries; and this guarantees it widespread respect. Such superficial attachment to Orthodoxy, where religious and moral issues are not really taken into account, nevertheless creates a perfect opportunity for the government to utilise this religion for political purposes to consolidate the political regime. Naturally, the ROC is the primary, valuable institutional partner for the Kremlin in achieving this goal.

1. Orthodoxy as viewed by Russians

The number of people who declare themselves as Orthodox has significantly increased in Russia over the past two decades. In 1989, 75% of the population declared themselves as atheists, and only 17% identified themselves with Orthodoxy. The proportion became quite the reverse 25 years later: a definite majority of the Russian public (68%) declared their attachment to Orthodoxy, and only 19% viewed themselves as atheists. The ROC itself has refrained from revealing the data concerning the number of people engaged in the life of the religious community. It refers to the data from public opinion polls concerning declared attachment to the Orthodox religion, not membership of the Russian Orthodox Church, which allows it to assume the role of the predominant Church in Russia and to make public statements on behalf of the 'Orthodox majority'.

The proportions of answers given to the question: Do you view yourself as a religious person? If so, which religion are you a follower of?[7]

Answer %	1989	1991	1996	2002	2007	2011	2013
Orthodoxy	17	37	50	56	60	69	68
Islam	<1	<1	<1	4	4	5	7
Catholicism	<1	–	–	<1	<1	<1	1
Protestantism	–	–	<1	<1	1	<1	1
Judaism	–	1	4	<1	<1	<1	<1
Other	1	<1	1	1	1	1	<1
I am not a religious person	75	53	37	32	29	22	19
I am not sure	7	9	8	6	4	4	4

These data indicate that Russians manifest a high level of declared attachment to Orthodoxy. On the other hand, it may be concluded on the basis of public opinion polls that the real level of religiousness among the residents of Russia is very low. As Russians themselves admit, religion does not play an essential role in their lives – 43% of respondents say that it is not important, 19% that it has no meaning at all, and 34% that it is important[8]. Only 8% of the population take part in religious rituals on a regular basis (5% – at least once a week, and 3% two to three times a month)[9]. Over 60% of all Russians admit that they have not read the Bible[10]. Furthermore, only 6% of the respondents who declare attachment to Orthodoxy state that they receive Communion at least once a month[11]. Only 9% of the members of the Orthodoxy are familiar with the Holy Trinity dogma, which is a basic tenet for Christians[12].

7 Levada Centre, December 2013, http://www.levada.ru/24-12-2013/rossiyane-o-religii

8 Levada Centre, April 2013, http://www.levada.ru/18-04-2013/religiya-i-tserkov-v-obshchestvennoi-zhizni-o

9 This concerns representatives of various religions, http://www.levada.ru/24-12-2013/rossiyane-o-religii

10 Levada Centre, December 2012, http://www.levada.ru/17-12-2012/v-rossii-74-pravoslavnykh-i-7-musulman

11 Data for 2013, http://www.levada.ru/24-12-2013/rossiyane-o-religii

12 A survey conducted as part of the Sreda project, June 2014, http://sreda.org/ru/opros/59-dogmat-o-presvyatoy-troitse-znayut-9-pravoslavnyih-rossiyan

Distribution of the answer to the question: Do you attend church services? If so, how often?[13]

Answer %	1991	1998	2007	2011	2013
Several times a week	<1	2	–	2	1
Once a week	1	2	2	2	4
Two to three times a month	1	4	6	3	3
Once a month	3	4	12	5	6
Several times a year	9	18	17	19	17
More or less once a year	9	18	–	11	16
Less than once a year	7	16	17	12	13
Never	67	61	43	45	35
I don't know	3	–	4	3	6

What also indirectly proves that Russians are not really attached to the Orthodox faith is the degree to which they respect **the values promoted by the Orthodox Church,** such as the family, the protection of life and abstinence from intoxicants. The nominal 'revival of faith' in Russia over the past few years has been accompanied by an only slightly more restrictive approach to the moral principles promoted by the Church. One example of this is the very liberal attitude towards **abortion among Russians,** which remains legal and is commonly perceived as a birth control measure in Russia. According to official statistics, the abortion rate in this country in 2012 was 56 abortions per 100 live births[14], and this number covers only officially registered abortions. In the opinion of specialists, the real number of terminated pregnancies may exceed 1 million annually, while the official number of live births in Russia in 2013 was less than 500,000[15].

[13] Levada Centre, December 2013, http://www.levada.ru/24-12-2013/rossiyane-o-religii This survey concerns the Russian population as a whole.

[14] Demoscope Weekly, http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2014/0587/baromo3.php

[15] For example, MP Yelena Mizulina stated that 5–12 million abortions are carried out in Russia annually, http://www.russian.rfi.fr/node/54731. In turn, according to MP Natalia

Russians also have a liberal attitude towards marriage, one proof of which is the high **number of divorces.** Around 50% of marriages in Russia are dissolved, and the divorce ratio is 4.7 per 1,000 people[16], which, according to UN rankings, makes Russia one of the world leaders[17]. Even though the Orthodox Church officially permits divorces in special cases, in general the break-up of families is contrary to the values promoted by the Church.

The Church is also opposed to **alcohol abuse**, which is one of the burning social problems in Russia, being the cause of a great proportion of crimes, accidents and deaths (according to the Ministry for Health, accidents resulting from alcohol consumption are among the most frequent causes of male deaths in Russia[18]). According to official statistics, an average Russian drinks an equivalent of 15.1 litres of pure grain alcohol annually[19] (homebrew, which is popular in Russia, was not taken into account), which is one of the world's highest ratios. Public opinion polls indicate that many Russians view alcohol as a good stress remedy[20].

It is also characteristic of Russian society that the Orthodox tradition and culture are viewed in the public consciousness as elements of the **Russian culture** in the broad meaning of the term. Various superstitions and folk customs originating from old pagan beliefs or modern occultism function in this culture alongside Orthodoxy. According to surveys, around 40% of Russians believe in magic and astrology, and around 20% of them admit that they believe in transmigration of souls[21], which is antithetical to Christianity. Thus the view of the world of most Russians is full of contradictions: the various elements function in it alongside each other, however, not colliding but rather being mutually complementary.

Karpovich, this number is 1.7 million, http://www.km.ru/front-projects/demografiya/abort-po-russki-6-millionov-ubitykh-detei-v-god. The data concerning live births in 2013 originate from Rosstat, http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/demography/#

16 Rosstat, data for 2013, http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/demography/#

17 Classification of United Nations Demographic Yearbook quoted in Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divorce_demography

18 Statement made by Minister Veronika Skvortsova in October 2014, http://www3.vz.ru/news/2014/10/20/711377.html

19 Data from Russia's profile on WHO portal for 2014, people older than were taken into account; http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/profiles/en/

20 http://ria.ru/society/20140716/1016197515.html

21 http://mospravda.ru/life/article/strana_syevernih_ludei/

2. Russians' attitude towards the Russian Orthodox Church

The Russian Orthodox Church and its head, Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus', are highly respected among the Russian public. According to public opinion polls, the ROC is one of Russia's most respected public institutions – 48% Russian citizens trusted the Church fully and 25% partly in 2013. Only 10% of the Russian public expressed distrust to this institution [22].

The patriarch's popularity reached its peak in 2012, when his moves were backed by 69% of Russians, and only 28% disapproved of them[23]. Furthermore, Patriarch Kirill has a high position in the ranking of the most influential politicians who enjoy public confidence in Russia – he is ranked seventh, before the head of the Federation Council, Valentina Matviyenko, and the mayor of Moscow, Sergey Sobyanin[24]. Thus, is shows that the Russian public view the primate of the ROC as a political actor. In public opinion polls, residents of Russia have used primarily positive terms to describe the patriarch – 'wise' (42%), 'decent' (31%), 'good' (24%)[25].

The high level of public confidence in the Church above all results from the fact that it is perceived by citizens as an institution linked to Russian culture and state tradition. The Orthodox Church witnessed the formation of Russian statehood, and is an element which highlights its continuity. For this reason the ROC possesses high symbolic capital in Russia, and this guarantees it respect from the citizens.

Another reason for the high confidence in the ROC is the fact that the key public and political institutions in Russia, such as the police, the judiciary or the political parties, are barely respected by the general public. As compared to weak institutions, the Church enjoys visibly more esteem. There are only two Russian institutions that have a similarly high level of public confidence: the president and the army. Another factor which has contributed to the Church's positive image is its increasing activity in the social sphere, including aid to the poor or affected by diseases, and this meets with a high level of public acceptance in Russia.

[22] http://www.levada.ru/print/07-10-2013/doverie-institutam-vlasti

[23] Public support for the patriarch at that time was 1 percentage point higher than for president Putin, http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=47981

[24] http://www.levada.ru/26-11-2014/noyabrskie-reitingi-odobreniya-i-doveriya

[25] This was a closed-ended question. The suggested answers also included negative evaluations, such as weak, deceptive, untrustworthy, http://www.levada.ru/31-01-2014/otnoshenie-rossiyan-k-patriarkhu-moskovskomu-i-vseya-rusi-kirillu

State-controlled media, the primary source of information for a definite majority of Russians, play an essential role in strengthening the positive perception of the Orthodox Church by the public[26]. The media pay a great deal of attention to the patriarch's activity and the ROC's initiatives, and show them in a good light. For example, they broadcast religious ceremonies, offer coverage to ceremonies accompanying the peregrinations of Orthodox relics across Russia, and they repeat the statements of representatives of the Orthodox clergy concerning issues that are important from the point of view of the public.

It also needs to be emphasised that the building of closer bonds with the Kremlin, as observed since the collapse of communism and which has recently developed on an unprecedented scale at the Kremlin's initiative, also offers short-term PR benefits to the Church. In effect, most Russians identify the ROC as an element of the political system in Russia, and not as a solely religious institution. Owing to this, the high level of public support for the government seen over the past few years[27] linked partly to the euphoric reaction to the annexation of Crimea, in the public consciousness also extends to Church structures and the patriarch himself. Most supporters of the present government automatically identify themselves with the Church and view declaration of belonging to the Orthodox religion as a **declaration of patriotism.**

3. The criticism of the Russian Orthodox Church

Circles which criticise the ROC and its primate **for excessive engagement in political issues and the loss of neutrality** have also crystallised over the past few years in Russia. According to data for 2013, around 50% of respondents in Russia expressed the opinion that the Church should not be engaged in politics but it should rather only deal with questions that are important from the point of view of religion and morality (this proportion increased from 43% in 2009[28]). The critical opinion of the ROC's political activity has been expressed, for example, by representatives of the liberal opposition circles, independent intelligentsia and nationalists representing the ethnic trend. However, their

[26] Television remains the main source of information about the world for 90% of the Russian population. Levada Centre's data, http://www.levada.ru/17-06-2014/rossiiskii-media-landshaft-televidenie-pressa-internet

[27] In December 2014, 85% of Russians backed President Putin's moves, http://www.levada.ru/24-12-2014/dekabrskie-reitingi-odobreniya-i-doveriya

[28] These are the latest available data on this subject. Survey conducted by WCIOM, October 2013, http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=114598

disapproval of the ROC's political engagement is motivated by different factors, and some of the ROC critics are people who identify themselves with Orthodoxy as their religion.

Some critics of the ROC became disillusioned by the patriarch's reaction to the mass anti-governmental protests in late 2011/early 2012 in which these groups took part (he appealed to the protesters to end demonstrations). The patriarch's appeal was understood as proof that the Church had chosen to be completely subordinate to the government and had closed itself to dialogue with the most politically active part of the Russian public. What is more Russians who have more liberal views negatively evaluated Patriarch Kirill's reaction to the performance by members of Pussy Riot group in the Orthodox cathedral in Moscow in February 2012[29]. The patriarch insisted on a strict penalty for the women for insulting the religious sensibilities of Orthodox Christians. The Russian government used this incident to introduce a law imposing penal liability for insulting religious feelings, which has been used as an instrument of political pressure on anti-Kremlin circles. However, it needs to be emphasised that the patriarch's reaction corresponded to the sentiments shared by a majority of the Russian public, who were very critical of Pussy Riot's action.

Some social groups became critical of Patriarch Kirill as a consequence of media reports on his involvement **in moral scandals,** for example, concerning his reported assets, a luxury flat in the centre of Moscow and an expensive watch[30] which Moscow Patriarchate's press service ineptly attempted to remove from a photograph published in the Internet. These scandals undermined the ROC's reputation, since they laid bare the dissonance between the Christian teachings promoted by the Church and the clergy's behaviour. They also revealed the **lack of PR strategy and the organisational weakness of the Church administration** which was unable to ward off intensifying criticism – mainly from Internet users, and thus younger and more active members of the Russian public.

Some Russians criticise the ROC **for its intolerance, obscurantism and hostility towards progress**. One reason for this is the various actions taken by the clergy – for example, their protest against 'Neptune Day', celebrated by young

[29] The women sang the song 'Mother of God, Chase Putin Away!' criticising the president in the cathedral.

[30] The apartment scandal was publicised among others by Rosbalt agency: http://www.rosbalt.ru/moscow/2012/03/22/960327.html; the information about the 'disappearing' watch is available here: http://www.newsru.com/religy/04apr2012/uhr.html

people in Voronezh oblast, due to its 'non-compliance with Christian values'[31] or the incident when a group of lay church members led by a priest interrupted an anniversary concert organised by Silver Rain radio in Moscow because the music was too loud[32]. In December, Protopriest Vsevolod Chaplin, chairman of the synodal department for co-operation with the public of Moscow Patriarchate, appealed to Russians to stop using Apple's electronic gadgets arguing that these were tools of manipulation[33]. Reports on exorcisms performed by clergymen in public[34] or their contacts with nationalists with Fascist inclinations that have been circulated online have also provoked unfavourable reactions among some segments of Russian society.

Thus over the past two years **public opinion has become polarised** in Russia as regards the ROC's activity and its co-operation with the Kremlin – a definite majority of the public who have a positive attitude towards the Church's activity have become consolidated in response to the criticism, while the minority who are critical about the Church have been branded as enemies of the Church and the Kremlin, and as such have been pushed to the margin of socio-political life.

[31] This happened in 2013, for more see: http://diak-kuraev.livejournal.com/495241.html

[32] People came from the nearby church claiming that the overly loud music did not allow them to pray.

[33] http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=monitor&id=22083

[34] For example, the developments in Transnistria were broadly publicised in Russia, http://focus.ua/world/331220/

II. THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION

The Russian Orthodox Church is currently the largest religious community in Russia and in the entire post-Soviet area. Its jurisdiction covers 30,675 parishes (and a similar number of churches and clergymen) and over 800 monasteries[35]. This makes it the world's most numerous autocephalous Orthodox Church, the estimated number of its members being estimated at 150 million[36]. Most members of this Church are residents of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, which are viewed by the ROC as its indisputable 'canonical territory'[37], as well as in other countries which were set up in the post-Soviet area. Less numerous Orthodox communities which are within the ROC's jurisdiction are also present in other countries, for example, France, the United Kingdom, Austria and Canada.

Being a religious organisation with the largest nominal number of members in Russia, the ROC plays **an essential role in the socio-political processes** in the country.

1. The authorities of the Russian Orthodox Church – characteristics and views

The incumbent Patriarch has made himself known on the one hand as a supporter of a conservative approach to the development of society and the state, and a promoter of building closer bonds between the religion and secular authorities, and on the other as a skilful diplomat and manager. **The position of the conservative wing in the ROC,** which to a great extent represents the views of the patriarch himself, **has become stronger** under his influence. The structure of the Church authorities has been centralised and personalised over the past few years, which also reflects the processes taking place within Russia's political establishment.

[35] Data for 2012, for more information see: http://www.russia.ru/news/society/2012/9/20/967.html

[36] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominations_by_number_of_members

[37] The ROC's canonical territory, as understood by the Church, is its natural zone of influence. It covers the countries inhabited by followers of the Orthodox religion: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and other post-Soviet countries where members of the Orthodox Church live. The Church expects that other Christian religions, especially the Roman Catholic Church, should be banned within this territory. This term, in the present meaning, appeared in the public discourse in late 1980s/early 1990s in the context of operation of Greek Catholics in Ukraine, and patriarch Kirill is believed to be the person who popularised it.

Patriarch Kirill

Kirill (secular name Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev) was born on 20 November 1946 in Leningrad. His father was a clergyman. He studied at Leningrad Theological Academy. He received holy orders as a priest in 1969 and adopted the name of Kirill. In 1971-1974, he served as a representative of Moscow Patriarchate at the World Council of Churches in Geneva. In 1974-1984, he was the rector of Leningrad Theological Academy.

In 1989, he was entrusted with the function of chairman of the department for external contacts of Moscow Patriarchate, where he for years managed the ecumenical and foreign contacts of the ROC. He also became (as the Department head) a permanent member of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. From 1988, following the reorganisation of the eparchy, he became archbishop of Kaliningrad and Smolensk, and in 1991 he was promoted to the rank of a metropolitan. He also was a member of the Council for Co-operation with Religious Organisations attached to the President of the Russian Federation. Since 1994, Kirill has hosted the religious programme called 'The Shepherd's Word' on state-controlled TV Programme 1.

In the 1990s, he received a great deal of publicity after the newspaper *Moskovsky Komsomolets* disclosed that the department for external contacts of the Moscow Patriarchate, led by him in 1994–1997, took part in organising the transportation of alcohol (mainly wine) and tobacco to Russia under the guise of humanitarian aid, benefiting from customs duty exemptions in the process. Kirill's reputation was also tarnished by the reports that he had supervised duty-free transports of goods from Russia to Belarus in 1997–2000, and later was involved in organising imports of luxury Mercedes cars to Russia.

Kirill himself supervised the work on the document titled 'Basics of Social Doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church' adopted in 2000 outlining the ROC's stance on a number of social phenomena and Church relations with the secular government in the state. This is the first programme document in the Church's history to discuss such issues, and it, in essence, presents a very conservative and anti-liberal stance. Nevertheless, it was partly modelled on the social teachings of the Catholic Church. As a consequence, Kirill, who had had regular contacts with the Catholic clergy during his visits abroad, began to be suspected of crypto-Catholicism in Russia.

Kirill's greatest achievement at the time when he was in charge of the ROC's diplomacy was bringing about the unification of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 2007, on terms set by the external contacts department. This move, in addition to symbolic and PR advantages, offered significant financial benefits to the ROC, since its incomes from wealthy foreign parishes increased. Kirill also made successful efforts for the ROC to take control over individual temples administered by Orthodox communities independent of the Moscow Patriarchate, which are important for Moscow considering their historic value and significance in religious life. Owing to his endeavours, the Moscow Patriarchate has been able to establish its supremacy over several important Orthodox centres in France, the United Kingdom, and Israel. Being a skilful negotiator, Kirill has earned the reputation of a talented diplomat.

Even while his predecessor, Alexy II, was still alive, Kirill was gradually taking over some of the ROC head's obligations. After Patriarch Alexy's death in 2008 he became the regent of the patriarchal throne, and then in January 2009 the Local Council elected him the sixteenth patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'. The election of the new patriarch in 2009 was preceded by an extensive media campaign conducted by the state government, aimed at promoting Metropolitan Kirill as the most suitable candidate supported by the Kremlin. During the vote, Kirill's candidacy was backed by most church hierarchs and representatives of the laity. The official enthronement ceremony, which took place on 1 February 2009 at Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow, was described by the main Russian public TV channels as an epochal event in the life of the ROC and the country as a whole. The character and the splendour of this ceremony signified that a new stage of the ROC's symbiosis with the state had begun[38].

There are allegations indicating that Kirill owes his astonishing career as a representative of the Church at the World Council of Churches and then as the head of the external contacts department to his connections with Soviet (KGB) and then Russian (FSB) secret services. According to recurrent media reports, he acted as a secret associate using the operational code name 'Mikhailov'[39].

[38] The full text of the new patriarch's speech during the enthronement ceremony can be found at http://www.aif.ru/society/8991

[39] For more information see: http://www.compromat.ru/page_23895.htm

The present patriarch's views can be characterised as **nationalist-imperialist and pro-Kremlin**. Firstly, he is the main supporter and promoter of the **'Russian world'** concept (*русский мир*), under which, according to the Church's interpretation, all Orthodox Christians belong to one Church and to one Orthodox nation. Geographically, the 'Russian world' extends over territories inhabited by eastern Slavs, which once belonged to the historical 'Holy Rus', i.e. in addition to Russia the territories of Ukraine, Belarus and – in the broader sense – the Russian-speaking and Orthodox diasporas in other countries across the world. The ROC believes that its mission is to lead to a unification of all Orthodox Christians under the spiritual leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is represented by what they believe to be the only canonical church in this area. The patriarch's pastoral visits to the countries which are believed to be part of the 'Russian world', the missionary activity and the strengthening of informal personal influence in this area are among the many measures taken to promote the 'Russian world' idea. One example of such actions were Patriarch Kirill's frequent pastoral visits to Ukraine, at the time of which he appealed for the schism in Ukrainian Orthodoxy[40] to be overcome and for the building of closer contacts with the Moscow Patriarchate, which, in his opinion, is the legitimate 'mother church' for Orthodox Christians in Ukraine.

The patriarch also voices Moscow's aspirations to hold historical and religious primacy in the entire Orthodox Church, which may be understood as a reference to the 'third Rome' concept. According to this concept, after the fall of Byzantium, Moscow became the legitimate successor of the entire Christian tradition and claims the right to view itself as the most important of all autocephalous Orthodox Churches. The argument which representatives of the ROC often raise is that it is at present the world's largest Orthodox Church[41]. The Moscow Patriarchate's geopolitical aspirations have on many occasions provoked tension between the ROC and the Constantinople (Ecumenical) Patriarchate holding the symbolic primacy over Orthodoxy worldwide, which is questioned by the ROC on a regular basis.

[40] For more information on the religious situation in Ukraine see: Tadeusz A. Olszański, The Ukrainian Orthodox Church's stance on the revolution and war, *OSW Commentary*, 30 October 2014, http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2014-10-30/ukrainian-orthodox-churchs-stance-revolution-and-war

[41] For example, Metropolitan Hilarion's statement in which he claims that the ROC is the world's largest Orthodox Church the number of whose members is higher than the total number of the members of all other Orthodox Churches altogether, http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=20896

In the early stage of Kirill's primacy of the ROC he was perceived as a more progressive and open-minded person than his predecessor Alexy, but it soon turned out that he represented **a conservative approach to social and moral issues and openly supported the Kremlin.** The fact that Kirill was determined to build closer contacts with the Kremlin became evident, for example, at the time of the civil protests in Moscow in late 2011/early 2012, when Kirill discouraged members of the Orthodox Church from taking part in the protests, arguing that "Orthodox Christians don't go to demonstrations"[42].

Furthermore, the patriarch is known for his nationalist and anti-Western views. One manifestation of these is his opinion that a 'religious war' is being fought in Ukraine that is targeted against the canonical Russian Orthodoxy[43]. In the opinion other members of Church hierarchy, this war is being fought by 'schismatics' and 'Uniates' supported by the West. Another view presented by the patriarch is that the real reason for the economic sanctions imposed by the West on Russia in 2014 was the desire to humiliate Russian citizens and undermine their sense of national solidarity[44]. Such statements and were in line with the Kremlin's narrative.

The patriarch **would not accept any criticism and demands full loyalty** from his associates. Proofs of this include the way he disregards any signs of criticism from the public (for example, in response to the moral scandals) and by obstructing any manifestations of pluralism inside the ROC. For instance, he dismissed the popular Orthodox publicist Andrey Kuraev from his position as a tutor at Moscow Theological Academy. Probably the reason for the dismissal were accusations that Kuraev waspublishing 'scandalous and provocative' statements concerning issues linked to the ROC on his blog and thus acting against the Church's interests[45]. Kuraev, who used to have the patriarch's full confidence, according to commentators, was finally forbidden from making any public statements, which can be interpreted as an attempt to introduce **internal censorship inside the Church.**

[42] Patriarch Kirill's speech of 1 February 2012, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1992020.html

[43] This opinion was presented, for example, in Patriarch Kirill's letter of 18 August 2014, https://mospat.ru/ru/2014/08/14/news106782/

[44] An opinion voiced on 4 November 2014, http://nr2.com.ua/News/world_and_russia/Patriarh-Kirill-Zapad-vvel-sankcii-chtoby-ponizit-nacionalnoe-samosoznanie-rossiyan-83927.html

[45] Information of 3 January 2014, http://www.pravmir.ru/diakona-andreya-kuraeva-otchislili-i-professorov-mda-kommentarii-1/

2. Structural and staff reform – towards centralisation

The patriarch performs above all a representational function in the ROC, and his decisions need to be approved by the Holy Synod, which is a collegial body. However, since Kirill assumed this function, the impression has been created in the public awareness that the ROC primate's prerogatives are much more extensive than those set down under Church regulations, and that he plays a key role in the ROC, similar to that of the pope in the Roman Catholic Church. An extensive **structural and staff reform** began to be implemented in the ROC upon Kirill's initiative, as a result of which the patriarch's position was strengthened. As emphasised by commentators, the process of consolidation of power in the Orthodox Church is not over yet and is evolving more and more towards authoritarianism. Thus it increasingly resembles the process of centralisation of political power as observed for several years in Russia.

As part of this reform, during the Holy Synod in 2009, Kirill established **new organisational units** within the structure of the ROC. It is worth noting above all the fact that a synodal department for co-operation with the public was created which was supposed to symbolise the Church's 'openness' to dialogue with society. The responsibilities of this structure include co-operation with state authorities as well as with political and social organisations: political parties, trade unions and NGOs within the ROC's 'canonical territory'. The department is managed by Protopriest Vsevolod Chaplin, Kirill's former deputy in the external contacts department. However, Chaplin, whose views can be characterised as nationalist-imperialist and pro-Kremlin, has on many occasions provoked controversies with his statements and criticism from some sections of the public. For example, he has insisted on introducing a special Orthodox dress code in Russia (for example, forbidding women from wearing short skirts), thus estranging some members of the Orthodox Church and representatives of other religions. In turn, in spring 2014, he publicly supported the idea of sending Russian troops to Ukraine with the aim to perform a kind of 'civilisational mission' there[46], which outraged Orthodox Christians in Ukraine.

Another major change was the creation of the Moscow Patriarchate's financial and economic board[47], which began to supervise in a centralised manner the growing assets and finances of the Church. Bishop Tikhon (Zaitsev), who

[46] Statement of 1 March 2014, http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2014/03/01/n_5985053.shtml

[47] The department's website is: http://www.fedmp.ru/

was Patriarch Kirill's close associate when he managed the external contacts department, was put in charge of this unit.

The Moscow Patriarchate's secretariat for foreign Church units, which reports directly to the patriarch, has also been created. It has been tasked with canonical supervision and administrative and financial control of the ROC's units and organisations located abroad. The secretariat is managed by Archbishop Mark (Golovkov).

Another **major staffing decision** was putting Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk in charge of the ROC's external contacts department and the Church's relations with the state government. At the same time, Hilarion became the head of the Saint Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Post-Graduate and Doctoral Studies, which was established in 2009 and where future elites of the ROC receive education[48]. Hilarion, as an academic teacher with an extensive education (for example, he composes classical music), has been able to build a circle of influential intellectuals sympathising with the Church around himself.

Another novelty is the fact that the largest Church bodies began to employ **secular professionals**; for example, Vladimir Legoyda, editor of the Orthodox magazine *Foma,* was nominated head of the newly established synodal information department. Before his nomination, Legoyda was the head of a department of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), which has a reputation for being the main source of staff for Soviet and Russian diplomacy.

In parallel to this, the new patriarch, by means of adequate staffing policy and reorganisation, has neutralised his opponents, pushing them to the margin of Church hierarchy. During the first two years of his primacy, Kirill removed his competitors from the Synod, as a result of which the patriarch's impact on decisions of this body has strengthened. In 2009, Metropolitan Kliment (Kapalin) of Kaluga and Borovsk, who was Kirill's main rival for the patriarchal throne, left the Synod. Metropolitan Hilarion, Kirill's close associate, was among the new members of the Synod.

In addition to this, it is worth noting **organisational changes in the ROC initiated in 2011.** Two trends can be observed. On the one hand, they lead to

[48] 120 novices studied at this institute in 2011.

reinforcing the vertical structure of power in the ROC, based on a three-level organisational structure: patriarchy – metropolis – eparchy (diocese). The originators of the changes wanted the patriarchate's direct control, including financial, to be tightened over the eparchies which report to it, and local bishops, some of whom had broad autonomy and earned great fortunes without paying church taxes, to become subordinate to the patriarchate. On the other hand, the **reform has led to fragmentation of the ROC's structure.** Some larger eparchies have been divided into smaller ones in order to facilitate centralised control and to increase the number of eparchies located in Russia in the entire structure of the ROC. The ROC's authorities thus wanted to change the proportions between the number of eparchies located in and outside Russia, which carries a symbolic meaning. Before the ROC's reform was launched, it was comprised of a total of 187 eparchies (most of which were located in Ukraine); now it has 279 eparchies, including 159 in Russia[49].

[49] Data http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/organizations/

III. THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH VS. THE GOVERNMENT

The Russian Orthodox Church, being an organisation with extensive infrastructure providing access to various social groups and having highly valuable symbolic capital, is a valuable partner for the government in Russia. This partnership offers the government benefits **at home** and **in foreign policy** – the Church is important as an institution which integrates Russian-speaking diasporas and as a soft power instrument that can be employed to promote Russia's political interests abroad. The ROC's close co-operation with the government has been based on the principle of 'loyalty in exchange for support', and has offered tangible benefits to the Church in many areas. The Church's ever stronger integration with the Russian political system indicates that, according to the Church's calculations, these benefits outweigh the risks and problems that ensue from the ROC's overly strong subordination to the Kremlin.

1. Orthodoxy and the Russian Orthodox Church in the government's policy

As regards internal policy, Orthodoxy and the Church play **an important role in promoting and implementing the conservative project** developed by the Kremlin. The Russian government's decisive turn towards Orthodoxy and the Church has been evident since Vladimir Putin became the Russian president for the third time, i.e. since 2012. After seeing the rapid increase in the popularity of Orthodoxy among the Russian public since the 1990's, the government concluded that religion could become a unifying factor for a heterogeneous society experiencing a state identity crisis. Vladimir Putin mentioned the state-building role of religion in his manifesto article 'Russia: the national issue'[50] in January 2012. He stated then that the values promoted by all four 'traditional' religions present in Russia (i.e. Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism), such as mercy, truth, justice and family ideals, are the 'principal moral and spiritual values' that consolidate the Russian nation.

In turn, during his meeting with participants of the All-Russian Youth Forum by Lake Seliger in 2012, Putin directly mentioned the special role of Orthodoxy in state-building: "As regards Orthodoxy, it has played a special role in our country's history. I would like everyone to hear this. Why? Because before Prince

[50] The whole article see: Владимир Путин, Национальный вопрос, *Независимая газета*, 23 January 2012, http://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html

Vladimir baptised Rus' and then united it, we had no single Russian state, and the Russian nation as such did not exist"[51].

Representatives of the Russian government claim that attachment to Christian values is the foundation of the 'unique Russian civilisation' and a factor which distinguishes Russian society from the secularised and demoralised Western societies who, in their opinion, have turned their backs on the Christian values which had founded them. Putin proposed this thesis during his annual address at the Federal Assembly in 2014, stating: "Today, moral standards in many countries have been turned upside down, national traditions and differences between nations and cultures are fading. (...) This 'top-down' destruction of traditional values not only has negative effects on societies but also is totally undemocratic, because this is implemented on the grounds of abstract ideas which are taken out of context against the will of most of the people who do not accept the coming changes and the proposed revision. And we know that there are more and more people across the world who support our stance as regards protection of traditional values, which have been the spiritual and moral foundation of civilisation, of each nation over millennia: the values of a traditional family, true human life, including also religious life, not only material (...). Obviously, this is a conservative approach"[52]. This way, the defence of Christian values, which until recently was the domain of the Church in Russia[53], has become part of the Kremlin's agenda. Employing such conservative slogans, the Kremlin has been attempting to consolidate the Russian public and to win the favours of foreign partners.

In the domestic context, the government also draws upon Orthodoxy and the ROC as part of its **identity policy aimed at strengthening social bonds and patriotic conduct among the Russian public.** The Kremlin emphasises that the Church is an element which guarantees the continuity of Russian culture and statehood – the Orthodox Holy Rus' is viewed as a protoplast of the Russian state. It is important that the Kremlin, while implementing its internal policy goals, does not mind the Russian public's superficial attitude towards religion. This is so because it does not draw on profound religious sentiment but rather

[51] A transcript of the meeting which took place on 31 July 2012, see: http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/16106

[52] The presidential address of 12 December 2013, http://kremlin.ru/news/19825

[53] In January 2011, the synodal department for co-operation with the public in a special document titled 'The list of Russian values' listed the values it defends; for more information see: http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=39255

on conservatism in thein the colloquial sense. Stimulating the development of deep religiosity among the public as part of any of the religions present in Russia might contribute to provoking religious radicalism, and thus security problems the government would have to deal with.

Close relations with the Church also offers **PR benefits** to the Kremlin. Good contacts with the ROC, a respected and long-lived social institution, make representatives of the political establishment seem more trustworthy to the Russian public. Good relations with the ROC ensure prestige to the Kremlin and an additional 'sacral' legitimacy of its power, being a reference to the Byzantine tradition. This is why the state-controlled media offer extensive coverage to meetings of the Kremlin's representatives with Church hierarchs, and government members seek the patriarch's support for their own initiatives (for example, ahead of elections) and offer him congratulations on various occasions in public (for example, on his Birthday).

Another area of the ROC's operation that is beneficial from the Kremlin's point of view is **social activity.** Thus, the government transfers to Church entities part of its functions in the social area which it is unable to deal with by itself, for example, assimilation centres and language courses for immigrants. This way, with the Church's help, the Kremlin softens some social issues, and the ROC is rewarded financially for carrying out the tasks of the state as part of ministerial programmes and grants. On the other hand, such co-operation offers the ROC access to sensitive social groups where it is able to conduct its pastoral activity.

The ROC bodies also offer the Kremlin **an efficient channel of communication with the public and an instrument for influencing public opinion.** For example, the patriarch backed the legislative changes introduced by the Kremlin imposing penal liability for insulting religious feelings (in effect since 1 July 2013) and for propagating untraditional sexual behaviours among minors (in effect since 2 July 2013), which liberal circles have described as another stage of restricting freedom of speech and conscience in Russia. However, Kirill made efforts to lessen public dissatisfaction, arguing that passing the laws was the right thing to do and in the interest of the Church and the public. Another example of the Church's attempts to neutralise negative social sentiments were the patriarch's statements concerning the impact of Western sanctions on Russian consumers and the consequences of the Russian currency's devaluation. In his speeches towards the end of 2014, the primate of the ROC made effort to calm down the public and encourage them to make sacrifices. His line of argument that the West, in its attempt to destroy

the national pride and sovereignty of Russians, was responsible for Russia's economic problems, dovetailed with the statements made by representatives of the Kremlin[54].

Co-operation with the Church is strongly valued by the government in **foreign policy,** especially with regard to those CIS countries where Orthodoxy is the predominant religion. This co-operation is based on the shared interests of the two parties which want to strengthen their influence in this area. Mutual interests naturally create conditions for tightening co-operation between the two partners.

Firstly, the Church plays an active role in the process of **consolidation of Russian-speaking diasporas outside Russia:** above all in such post-Soviet countries as Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, and also in other former Soviet republics and other countries where members of the Orthodox Church live. To strengthen its influence in the area inhabited by Orthodox Christians, the Kremlin has adapted for its own purposes the 'Russian world' concept promoted by the Church, which is aimed at justifying Moscow's desire to dominate in this area, not only in religious but also in political terms. The Russian government's imperial aspirations also go in line with the 'Holy Rus' idea, according to which the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian nations have common roots.

Church structures and social organisations linked to the Church, for example parish Sunday schools and Russian language schools that are run as part of parishes, are engaged in practical activities aimed at consolidation of the diasporas. Evidence of co-operation between the state and the Church in this area includes actions implemented by Church organisations jointly with the Russian governmental agency Rossotrudnichestvo[55] – for example, foreign conferences and exhibitions. This agency was established in 2008 to support Russians living outside the country. However, its real goal is to expand Russia's influence in the CIS area and to build a friendly atmosphere for the implementation of Russia's political and economic interests abroad. Patriarch Kirill has on numerous occasions emphasised the importance and the effectiveness of co-operation with

54 For more information on the patriarch's speech of 4 November 2014 see: http://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2014/11/06/svyatejshij_patriarh_kirill_sankcii_napravleny_na_to_chtoby_lyudi_perestali_dumat_ob_obwenacionalnom/

55 The full name of this structure, which was established in May 2008, is the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Co-operation.

Rossotrudnichestvo, for instance, during his meeting with the agency's head, Konstantin Kosachev, in April 2014[56].

In the international arena, the Kremlin also benefits from **the Church's cultural activity** aimed at promoting the positive image of Orthodoxy and Russian culture among residents of Western countries who know little about real Russian politics – for example, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Canada, etc. This activity includes issuing publications concerning religious and cultural subjects in foreign languages, holding cultural events, such as expositions of Russian Orthodox culture and film festivals. In this context, the ROC is becoming a **soft power** instrument for the Kremlin, helping it to form a positive attitude towards Russian policy among the international community in a subtle way.

Another area of the ROC's operation in the international arena which is important from the Kremlin's point of view are the efforts made with the intention of establishing **closer relations between Russian Orthodoxy and representatives of other Christian denominations,** which the ROC is endeavouring to do in the conviction that it is necessary to protect shared values and to combat ever stronger secularisation. The ROC does this as part of various commissions operating within the most senior structures of the Moscow Patriarchate. Metropolitan Hilarion, the head of the external contacts department, is especially active in this area.

One partner which is especially important for the ROC in the international arena for PR and ideological reasons is the Vatican. One example of the successful establishment of relations was the common conference organised jointly in Rome with the Pontifical Council for the Family, concerning the protection of the traditional family and entitled 'Orthodox Christians and Catholics stand together in defence of the family'[57], which was widely commented on in Russia.

Furthermore, various social organisations linked to the ROC which are involved in international activity, reach influential representatives of foreign **political and business circles** who share conservative values and are opposed to

[56] This meeting took place on 25 April 2014, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3637879.html

[57] The conference was organised by the Moscow Patriarchate's external contacts department and the Pontifical Council for the Family. It took place in November 2013. For more information see: https://mospat.ru/en/2013/11/13/news94251/
The full text of the address is here: http://episkopat.pl/dokumenty/pozostale/4396.1,Wspolne_Przeslanie_do_Narodow_Polski_i_Rosji.html

European integration. They consolidate these circles what plays an important function from the Kremlin's point of view. **In this way, the Church helps to create a platform for international debate and co-operation as an alternative to mainstream diplomacy.** PR support and mediation offered by structures linked to the ROC and Patriarch Kirill add credibility to the intentions of Russia as an ally in the struggle for defending the Christian values, traditional sexuality and life in the international arena, thus creating favourable conditions for Russia in forging political alliances.

The organisations which are active in this area include the missionary and cultural Saint Andrew's Foundation (*Фонд Андрея Первозванного*[58]) and the international network organisation World Public Forum 'Dialogue of Civilisations' (*Мировой общественный форум Диалог цивилизаций*[59]) registered in Geneva, whose promoter is Vladimir Yakunin, an oligarch who has close links with Vladimir Putin. Other individuals engaged in this kind of activity are oligarch Konstantin Malofeev and Aleksandr Dugin, the supporter of the idea of Eurasianism, who has extensive connections among European conservatives who are favourably disposed to the Kremlin[60]. The most tangible effects of the operation of these structures included the statement by the Czech president Miloš Zeman, who appealed during the Dialogue of Civilisations forum in December 2014, for lifting the sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia as a result of the Ukrainian conflict, thus attempting to undermine the solidarity of EU member states as regards this issue[61]. The circle of the ROC's 'friends' also includes representatives of radical right circles in Europe, above all the National Front in France.

Furthermore, the conflict in Ukraine has given rise to many questions about **the connection between ROC and Russian secret services** which might operate in neighbouring countries. As reported by the former separatist leader Igor Girkin

[58] The organisation's profile on Moscow Patriarchate's website: http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/441404.html

[59] The organisation's website http://dofc-foundation.org/ru/about

[60] In 2014, hackers revealed the so-called 'friends of Russia' list made by Dugin's assistant. Representatives of political and business elites and the media from a number of European countries, including Hungary's president, Viktor Orban and the leader of the Hungarian right-wing party Jobbik, Gabor Vona, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico and the former Romanian president, Ion Iliescu, were on this list.

[61] For more information see: President Zeman calls for lifting of Russia sanctions at event organized by Putin associate, 19 September 2014, http://radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/president-zeman-calls-for-lifting-of-russia-sanctions-at-event-organized-by-putin-associate

(Strelkov), he came to Crimea towards the end of January 2014 before the Russian annexation of the peninsula as an official member of the ROC's delegation, who were on a pilgrimage with Orthodox relics from Mount Athos, the so-called Gifts of the Wise Men[62]. Another participant of this pilgrimage was Konstantin Malofeev, the founder of the Orthodox Charity Foundation of Saint Basil the Great (*Благотворительный фонд Святителя Василия Великого*), which was one of the initiators of this pilgrimage and at the same time one of the sponsors of the Russian Russkiy Mir Foundation, tasked with promoting the Russian language outside Russia and which is especially active in the post-Soviet area. Malofeev has admitted in public that he organises and finances aid for pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine.

2. The Russian Orthodox Church as a beneficiary of relations with the Kremlin

The Church's strong social and institutional position is to a great extent a result of co-operation with the government in the areas mentioned above. Thus it is possible to propose the thesis that the increasing popularity of Orthodoxy among the public and the Church's institutional 'revival' would not have been possible without the favourable approach and financial, organisational and media support from the Kremlin. Therefore, it is in the ROC's interest to maintain this close co-operation which has brought it tangible benefits so far.

Firstly, good contacts with the state government guarantees the ROC **a privileged position** among all other religious groups in Russia itself. At present, the ROC is **clearly favoured** by the Russian government as a religious organisation representing the 'Orthodox majority' in society. Manifestations of this include broad access to the public media, education system, state institutions and sources of funds from the public budget. However, according to the provisions of the constitution of the Russian Federation, Russia is a secular country which guarantees freedom of conscience and religion to its citizens[63]. In turn, as many as four confessions are recognised as 'traditional' in Russia. These are, along with Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. However, the widespread presence of the Orthodox Church in the Russian public space creates the impression that Orthodoxy has the status of state religion in Russia. This belief is expressed by some Russians: according to public opinion polls, 46% of citizens

[62] Interview with Strelkov of 11 November 2014: http://svpressa.ru/war21/article/103643/

[63] See: Chapter 2. Article 28 of the constitution of the Russian Federation, http://www.constitution.ru/10003000/10003000-4.htm

are of the opinion that there is a state religion in Russia, and 44% are convinced that this religion is Orthodoxy[64].

Given the 'unequal competition', representatives of other confessions complain that they are discriminated against by the state government, and accuse the ROC of taking a non-ecumenical stance and of contributing to building a negative image of the 'competitive' religions among the Russian public. The ROC **is distrustful towards Islam,** the second largest religious community in Russia. According to various estimates, Muslims account for between 7% and 20% of Russian residents, and the popularity of this religion is rapidly growing[65]. The Church defends its predominant position in society, and the state aids it in this, for example by passing administrative decisions concerning allotment of plots for the construction of temples. As a consequence, while representatives of the Russian Council of Muftis have for years made unsuccessful attempts to receive consent to build another mosque in Moscow[66], new Orthodox temples are built there on a mass scale. The struggle to maintain the dominant position also has an ideological aspect – for example, a 'Declaration of Russian identity' has been prepared under the patronage of the Orthodox Church. According to this declaration, the Orthodox religion is the basis of every Russian's national identity[67], which has sparked controversies among the followers of other religions. Yet on the other hand, depending on the political situation inside Russia, representatives of the Church would sometimes treat followers of Islam, which has traditionally been present in Russia, as tactical allies. One proof of this is Vsevolod Chaplin's statement concerning a polygamous marriage in Chechnya, which was given a great deal of publicity in the media[68]; such marriages are

64 WCIOM survey: http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=114598

65 According to public opinion polls, around 7% of Russia's residents declare they are followers of Islam; in 2009, there were 4% of them. Experts' estimates are much higher, reaching even up to 20% of the public. It is difficult to determine the precise data. The Muslim community in Russia comprises not only the people living in Russia whose traditional religion is Islam but also migrant e workers from Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus. Thus Russia is a country with the largest Muslim community in Europe. However, this community is poorly organised and fragmented, considering the various denominations of Islam present there.

66 Officially, four mosques operate in Moscow, while the estimated size of the Muslim community in this city is 2 million people.

67 This declaration was adopted on 1 November 2014 at the time of the meeting of the 18th Global Russian National Council; for more information see: http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/508347.html

68 This concerned the wedding of a senior Chechen state official with a minor girl in May 2015, which was publicised by *Novaya Gazeta*, for more information see: http://echo.msk.ru/blog/kavkaz_politic/1550284-echo/

admissible under Islam. The hierarch spoke in defence of this custom, concluding that Chechnya had fallen victim to opponents of the traditional family who want the nation's traditions and identity to be eradicated so that it could be easier to control this nation for political purposes. This was in line with the opinions previously expressed by representatives of the ROC and the Kremlin that Russia itself is under attack from the amoral and secularised West.

The ROC is ill-disposed towards the **Catholic Church and has been making attempts to restrain its** missionary activity in Russia. Catholics have been accused of proselytism[69], i.e. winning over followers in the areas recognised by the ROC as its 'canonical territory'[70]. This is one of the reasons why the Russian Church has not granted consent for any pope to visit Russia as yet, even though the Vatican has come up with such proposals. The government in the Kremlin accepts this stance of the ROC, since it itself is suspicious about representatives of the religions popular in the West, such as Catholicism or Protestantism, suspecting them of acting in the interest of foreign countries.

Legislative changes introduced under the influence of lobbying from the ROC and politicians linked to it have contributed to **strengthening the ROC's infrastructure and possessions.** The ROC has become the key beneficiary of the act adopted in 2010 enabling religious organisations to regain the assets lost after 1917, which gave it the right to objects of religious cult – temples, monastery and utility buildings owned by the Church before the revolution, when the Orthodox Church was not formally separated from the state. Representatives of the state administration have commented that the act will allow the Church to reclaim as many as 12,000 historic premises. If this happened, the ROC would become one of the largest property owners in Russia. The Land Code of the Russian Federation was amended in March 2015. These amendments are beneficial to the Church since they offer the ROC more extensive rights to use state-owned land free of charge. As stated in a comment on the Moscow Patriarchate's website,

[69] The Catholic Church in Russia itself is not a serious competitor for the ROC. The estimated size of the Catholic community in this country is several hundred thousand followers and around 230 parishes.

[70] One proof of this was the ROC's very sharp reaction to the Catholic Church's changing the status of apostolic administrations in Russia to that of dioceses (which took place in 2002). In 2007, Kirill while referring to this fact stated: "We will never agree, and we will not stop our protest against the presence of the regular dioceses of the Catholic Church in Russia. We believe that this is a challenge to our commonly shared principle of territorial jurisdiction of Churches." For more information see: http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=21715

representatives of the synodal department for co-operation with the public took part in the work on the bill[71].

The government actively supports the Church in the **development of Church infrastructure** by allocating land and financing the construction of new temples. One example of this is the implementation of the programme envisaging the construction of new temples in Moscow, known as 'Project 200'[72], which is being carried out in co-operation with the municipal government. In 2014, regardless of protests from some residents of Moscow, the number of planned investments was increased to 380[73]. The construction of Church infrastructure is also backed by sponsors from business circles – some Russian companies have special funds allocated for reconstruction of temples, which sometimes is due to close personal contacts between the Orthodox clergy and business representatives. As a result, the ROC's possessions have grown significantly over the past few years. However, it is difficult to assess the total value of the Church's assets, since consolidated data are not made available to the public. Furthermore, the ROC's assets also include incomes generated by business organisations linked to it (for example, Sofrino candle and jewellery factories, the manufacturer of 'Holy Spring' mineral water and the banks Sofrino and Peresvet linked to Church organisations).

The Church's co-operation with the Kremlin also brings results in the area of education. After years of efforts, in 2012, the Russian government introduced obligatory **religion lessons to primary schools.** However, from the point of view of the Church, the main lobbyist behind this decision, the success has turned out to be partial. Orthodoxy (and more precisely, 'Basics of the Orthodox culture') became one of the five subjects to choose from as part of the compulsory course 'Basics of the spiritual and moral culture of the peoples of Russia', which has been launched in several regions of Russia since 2006 as a pilot programme. When the programme covered all regions, it turned out that the public is interested in Orthodoxy to a smaller extent than expected – only 30% of Russian students chose the subject. The students could also choose secular ethics.

Nevertheless, positive relations with the state administration have made it possible for the Church to actively participate in the Russian education

[71] Commentary of 24 December 2014; http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3889996.html

[72] This plan envisages the construction of 200 Orthodox temples in Moscow on plots of land provided by the city government. Project website: http://www.200hramov.ru/

[73] For more information see: http://itar-tass.com/obschestvo/1388536

system on all levels – nurseries, kindergartens and schools operate in some Orthodox parishes. Over the past few years, the Church has also been able to expand its **educational offer for young people** without any obstructions, boosting the educational potential of Orthodox higher education facilities and theological seminaries. At present, the ROC runs one university, five theological academies and fifty seminaries[74]. Since the 1990s, the ROC has also been actively developing co-operation with various kinds of Orthodox youth organisations operating in and outside Russia, which is stimulated by the government, for example through offering state grants for NGOs to these organisations.

Since Kirill's rise to the patriarchal throne, the Church has been expanding its **access to various social groups, organisations and institutions,** and its hierarchs have become present in the public space expressing their opinions in the public debate on important social issues, for example speaking out against abortion. The patriarch raised this topic in his first official speech in front of deputies at the State Duma (lower house of Russian parliament) in January 2015, appealing at the same time that the state should discontinue financing abortion in the frame of medical insurance. At present, the ROC runs around 60 centres for supporting motherhood and preventing abortion, and intends to open new ones[75]. Another example of the ROC's activity in the social area are its actions aimed at assimilation of immigrants. The first assimilation centre for expatriate workers was opened in 2012 in Moscow[76]. However, this idea has been widely criticised due to the fact that most migrant workers coming to Russia are Muslims.

An important fact is that over the past few years, thanks to closer co-operation with the Kremlin, the Church has increased its presence in state institutions – **in the army and secret services;** and its presence in various kinds of **public utility institutions,** hospitals, airports, offices, has become commonplace. In 2009, following instructions from the president of Russia, the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation created a directorate for religious soldiers and made the function of Orthodox military chaplain more widespread. The construction of an Orthodox temple at the FSB Academy in Moscow, which was finalised in 2014 (as part of 'Programme 200'), served as a symbol of closer

74 Data quoted by the patriarch in 2011; http://ria.ru/society/20111114/488790378.html

75 For more information see: http://rusk.ru/fsvod.php?date=2014-08-12

76 For more information see: http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/2267669.html

co-operation between the ROC and the secret services[77]. Temples and chapels can now be found in some hospitals, airports and penitentiary institutions.

Russian-language **traditional and electronic media** have become an important instrument of popularising Orthodoxy and building the ROC's positive image in the eyes of the public. Since the 1990s, the Church has been successively increasing its presence in the media sphere, stemming partly from its good contacts with the Kremlin, which holds a tight grip on the media in Russia (one proof of this is the fact that opposition media have been ousted from the public arena and have faced repressions in Russia). Since Kirill's rise to the patriarchal throne, the ROC's presence has remained at a constant high level. The 'Shepherd's Word' show hosted by the patriarch, which is broadcast by the Kremlin-controlled Programme 1 TV station, and the publicist programme 'The Church and the world', hosted by Metropolitan Hilarion, have played an important role in reaching the broader public. Several Russian-language TV channels devoted to Orthodoxy, for example the television stations Spas[78], Soyuz[79] and Radonezh[80] are available on digital platforms and on the Internet. Over the past few years, the Church has also been intensively developing its activity in the Internet – via the official portals, for example, Patriarchia.ru and news platforms, for example, Pravoslavie i Mir (pravmir.ru) and Portal-credo.ru, as well as Orthodox social networks, such as Elitsy[81] and Ekklezia[82].

The ROC's activity as a publisher is also rapidly developing. A rich collection of Orthodox literature is available primarily in Church kiosks but also in normal bookshops. The book *Everyday Saints and Other Stories* by Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov), telling about the life and the dilemmas of a clergyman, was a bestseller in Russia in 2011[83]. Media speculation that the author is President Putin's confessor and a possible successor to the present patriarch adds popularity to this publication.

77 The construction of the temple symbolically ended on 20 December, the secret service worker's day in Russia. For more information see: http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/1476805/

78 www.spastv.ru

79 www.tv-soyuz.ru

80 This is a TV channel, a radio and a news platform; radonezh.ru/tv

81 https://elitsy.ru/

82 http://ekklezia.ru/

83 This book became a bestseller in Russia (over one million copies were sold) and won a few prestigious publishing awards.

3. The Russian Orthodox Church as a hostage to relations with the Kremlin

The co-operation of the 'altar and the throne' in Russia, in addition to numerous benefits, is also a source of some limitations to the Church, and is making it a hostage to relations with the Kremlin. This is not a co-operation between equal partners – **the Church is the subordinate partner.** It is the Kremlin that determines the areas and the limits of co-operation. The Kremlin, which is increasingly distrustful of any independent initiatives and social organisations, especially those which have a good chance of winning broad public support, wants to tighten its grip on the ROC and has been thwarting its hierarchs' attempts to emancipate themselves. From the government's point of view, only a subordinated and predictable Church can be a safe ally. Furthermore, the Church's abilities to influence the state's decisions are limited, and the successfulness of its lobbying is correlated with the Kremlin's interests.

The Church is not always able to bring about all the legislative changes beneficial to it – as was the case with the compulsory Orthodox religion lessons for all students. As pointed out above, Orthodoxy has become only one of the five modules to be chosen from as part of a compulsory subject. Another proof that the Church has a limited influence on the administration is the fact that a court dismissed the charges against the director who staged a play based on Wagner's *Tannhauser* in Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theatre that had been criticised by the clergy. The local metropolitan accused the director of insulting religious feelings, which is a punishable offence in Russia. This conflict resounded widely across Russia and provoked city residents' protests against 'Orthodox radicalism'[84].

The Kremlin has proven that it is able to control the ROC's actions and discipline its hierarchs in case they made attempts to undermine the government's reputation or to become overly emancipated. According to media speculations, the fact that the property scandals[85] in which the patriarch was involved were made public was the Kremlin's attempt to discipline the ROC's primate. At that time his public support ratings were very high. The government probably did not like the fact that Kirill had begun to make attempts to strengthen his public image (for example, in his first reaction to anti-Putin protests in

[84] 2,500 people took part in the protest in Novosibirsk on 5 April 2015. For more information see: http://grani.ru/Politics/Russia/m.239810.html

[85] See footnote 30.

late 2011/early 2012, he spoke with sympathy about the protesters and appealed to the government to listen carefully to their demands) and demonstrated overly high political ambitions.

The special character of relations with the Kremlin means that the Church hierarchs must withdraw from activity in certain areas which are important from the point of view of development of society and the state, for example, co-operation with representatives of the anti-Kremlin opposition or actions aimed at popularising democratic freedoms in Russia, which might provoke the government's dissatisfaction. One proof of this is the dismissal of Deacon Kuraev, who openly criticised the Church for its engagement in politics and accused the Russian government of authoritarianism[86]. Furthermore, as it appears now, the Church has given up its attempts to conduct its own policies that would be in conflict with the interests of the state. For example, Patriarch Kirill did not criticise the government for the annexation of Crimea and waging the war on Ukraine although these decisions have put the ROC in a very difficult situation, given the large number of its followers in Ukraine[87]. Over the past few years, the Church has also given up a separate historical policy that would bring into account those responsible for Stalinist crimes and highlight the harm the communist government inflicted on the Church[88]. This policy would have collided with the new state ideology being launched by the Kremlin, one element of which is promoting a vision of the country's history without any contradictions or unambiguously negative evaluations of the era of communist rule[89].

The long-term negative consequences of the Church's close contacts with the Kremlin include reputational losses the Church has already begun to sustain.

[86] See footnote 45.

[87] For more information on the ROC's response to the Ukrainian conflict see: Katarzyna Chawryło (Jarzyńska), Patriarch Kirill's game over Ukraine, *OSW Commentary*, 14 August 2014; http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2014-08-14/patriarch-kirills-game-over-ukraine

[88] In 2011, when signs of a trend to condemn totalitarianism appeared in the Kremlin's historical policy, the Church unambiguously backed in public discussions the idea to commemorate the victims of the totalitarian regime. The ROC's representative, Vsevolod Chaplin, commented then: "It is necessary to make a political and legal evaluation of the crimes committed by the Bolshevik regime. The crimes committed not only by Stalin but also by Lenin, Dzerzhinsky and Trotsky." He also said that the glorification of executioners, i.e. naming streets after them, needed to be stopped. For more information see: http://www.newsru.com/arch/religy/18apr2011/politik.html

[89] For more information see: Witold Rodkiewicz, Jadwiga Rogoża: Potemkin conservatism..., *op. cit.*

As the Church is becoming more active in politics, the number of citizens who do not want the Church to be engaged in political issues has risen. What also discourages part of the Russian public is the activity of radical social organisations of an Orthodox and nationalist profile which identify themselves with the Orthodox Church and fanatically support President Putin. These controversial organisations include the Association of Orthodox Experts[90], which propagates imperialist and anti-Ukrainian views, and the movement God's Will, whose leader, Dmitry Enteo, became known for organising a conference concerning the 'godly' nature of President Putin[91].

In turn, the ROC's reputation on the international arena has suffered from its stance on the conflict in Ukraine. Patriarch Kirill has never condemned in public the Kremlin's aggressive policy, as a consequence of which some members of the Orthodox Church outside Russia are turning their backs on the Moscow Patriarchate, treating it as an 'aggressor'[92].

[90] An organisation which wants, for example, Russian troops to officially enter Ukraine and Ukraine's total subordination to Russia.

[91] For more information see: http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=109315

[92] For more information on the patriarch's attitude to the conflict in Ukraine see: Katarzyna Chawryło (Jarzyńska), Patriarch Kirill's game over Ukraine, *op. cit.*

IV. THE CHALLENGES THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IS FACING

One serious challenge the Russian Orthodox Church may face in the future is the fact that even though it has been undergoing an institutional and financial revival over the past few years, it has been unable to attract followers to the churches on a massive scale. Furthermore, given the demographic crisis Russia is experiencing, the risk is that the Church will lose some active members as the elder generations will die out. Moreover, as a consequence of migration processes, the proportion of Orthodox Christians in Russian society will diminish – the majority of immigrants coming to Russia are Muslims. As a result, the currently observed discrepancy between the presumed and the real number of active followers may lead to a **weakening of the Church's negotiating position** in relations with the Russian government and a decline in its previous privileges. The number of Orthodoxy followers may also fall due to the Church's engagement in politics, which discourages some active members from participating in the Church's life at present. As proven by the developments witnessed over the past few years, the ROC's approach, which is not amenable to criticism and dialogue, prevents it from improving its image among the social groups who criticise it most of all.

Over the past few years, the Russian Orthodox Church has **blended into the Russian government system and become engaged in politics** to an increasing extent, going beyond the traditional areas of activity reserved for religious organisations, such as catechisation and charity. Given the Russian political reality, where the government more and more tends towards authoritarianism, and the space for independent social initiatives is gradually shrinking, co-operation and subordination is the most convenient way for the Church to achieve its own goals. For the time being, as it seems, for the Russian Orthodox Church the benefits of this co-operation are much higher than the losses, and this is an argument for strengthening mutual relations. However, as the Ukrainian conflict has revealed, a further reconciliation of close relations with the Kremlin with the interests of the Church itself will depend on the ROC's readiness to surrender what has remained of its autonomy.

Although the Russian Orthodox Church benefits substantially from its co-operation with the Kremlin, it also assumes some risk, since it becomes vulnerable to the disturbances the government system created by Putin may face in the future. Accumulating problems, resulting partly from the country's

disadvantageous economic situation, which may lead to the deterioration of the living standards of citizens and growing dissatisfaction among part of the business and political elite, may also affect the stability and well-being of the Church and its hierarchs.

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