

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, AN INSTRUMENT IN RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY?

Abstract: This article tries to analyze the cooperation between the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) from the past to the present. As it will be described below, in Russia, the state has almost everytime had domination over the church. Besides, the Russian Orthodox Church, throughout the history, formed the ideological pillars of Russia's foreign policy, such as, Russian messianism. The church began to be used as a soft power of Moscow especially during the Second World War. Since then, the ROC has played a role of soft power in the foreign policy of the state. Since then, the US has been in cooperation with the Constantinople Patriarchate, while the Kremlin has backed the ROC. After the Soviet Union collapsed and especially after Vladimir Putin became the president of Russia, such cooperation between the state and the church intensified ever more. In the far abroad, the ROC helped the state to increase Russia's influence in the Western world, while in the near abroad (in the post-Soviet space), it played a role in reintegration of some of the ex-Soviet countries. However, especially after Russia's annexation of Crimea, ie, after the Russian administration, instead of re-integration policy chose the policy of partition of Ukraine, implementation of a "soft power" role became harder. Consequently, after the outbreak of the full scale invasion of Ukraine, ie, under the conditions of open invasion, the possibility to use the ROC as a soft power tool, decreased remarkably.

Key Words: Orthodoxy, the Russian Orthodox Church, Russian foreign policy, soft power, church – state relations, Russian World, War in Ukraine, Russia – Ukraine War

Problem Statement: In many countries, religion is in a reciprocal relation with politics. Eastern European countries are not exception to this. In addition, Orthodox Christianity has played an important role in shaping the national identity of many nations. Moreover, Russian Orthodoxy played a crucial role in formation of the Russian national identity and the Russian foreign policy throughout the history. Since Russians considered themselves to be the representatives of "true Christianity" and of "true Orthodoxy" and since Russia, due to its convenient geographical location gained power, the Russian rulers began considering themselves as the protectors of all of the Orthodoxes in the world. In addition, especially after 1943, the Soviet rulers began using the ROC as a soft power tool in their struggle for establishing power in Eastern Europe. Especially in the second half of the 1940s', there was a fierce struggle between the Moscow backed ROC and the US backed Constantinople Patriarchate. It might be amazing, but the Soviet Leader Stalin, who fought against religion in the 1930s', began actively using religion in foreign policy in the 40s'. After the collapse of the USSR, the rulers of Russian Federation also began cooperating with the ROC, in order to achieve many foreign policy goals. Those goals include increasing Russian influence in the "near abroad", ie, in former Soviet space, in the Balkans, and in "far abroad", including the Middle East and Africa. The ROC also became an important channel of dialogue in Russia's relations with the conservative circles of Europe. In that period, the conflict between the Moscow and Constantinople Patriarchates erupted again and this time, it became even more fierce than at the time of the Cold War. In 2018, when the Constantinople Patriarch Bartholomew declared that Ukraine was within the canonical territory of their patriarchate, the ROC broke ties with the Constantinople Patriarchate. This led to the greatest schism in the history of Orthodox churches. At that conflict, the ROC was backed by the Russian rulers, while the efforts of the Constantinople Patriarchate had open support from the US politicians. This shows that, the confrontation between the US and Russia in Eastern Europe has also a religious dimension. On the other hand, Russia, in order to increase its influence in some of the ex-Soviet countries, introduced the concept of "Russian world". This concept has been used as a pillar of the new foreign policy of Russia and Russia has been using this concept to justify its domination efforts in those countries. That concept was largely developed by the ROC. Besides, after the outbreak of the hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine in 2014, the ROC was accused of being a tool of that hybrid war. Thus, it can be seen that, religion is a very important component in those countries and that religious direction and the role of the ROC is crucial in order to better analyze the current situation and conflicts in Eastern Europe in general and between Russia and Ukraine in particular. Searching the role of the ROC in Russian foreign policy and analyzing the effect of religion in the war between Russia and Ukraine will help to understand the dynamics of Eastern Europe and of Russia, better.

The Purpose of the Article

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the inter relation between the ROC and the Russian Federation in Russian foreign policy issues and the role of the ROC as a tool in Russian foreign policy. In order to analyze the situation better, the historical background will also be tackled. It will be evaluated, whether the position of the ROC after the full scale war between Russia and Ukraine strengthened or not. Within this framework, the situation during the hybrid war (2014-2022) and the full-scale war will be compared. The policies of the ROC in the far abroad and in the near abroad will also be analyzed.

Analysis of the Studies and Publications:

On the historical background, there are a large number of researches, which have been written by Western and Russian authors. Among them, the book of Nathaniel Davis (*A Long Walk to Church – A Contemporary History of the Russian Orthodoxy*), the book of Thomas Bremer (*Church and Empire – History of Russian Orthodoxy*), the book of Alexander Dvorkin (*Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi*) and the books of Mikhail Shkarovski (*Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov v XX Veke* and *Konstantinopolskaya i Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkvi v Period Velikikh Potryaseniy 1910-1950-e godi*) must be mentioned. The attitude of the ROC toward the foreign policy priorities of the Russian state and its "Russian world" concept can be seen in the best way in the books of the Moscow Patriarch Kirill (*Tserkov Prizivayet k Yedinstvu i Slova, Propovedi, Vstupleniya*). The speeches of the clergy of the ROC and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) shows the current policies of those structures. The relation of the ROC and the UOC-MP toward the politics in Ukraine and the relation between the ROC and the hybrid war

can be seen in the books of Semen Tsvilyuk (Ukrayinska Derzhava – 25 Rokiv Nezaleznosti, Natsionalno-Demokratichne Peretvorenyya Novitnoy Istorii Dobi 1991-2016), Mihailo Doroshko and Valentin Balyuk (Gibridna Viyna Rosii Proti Ukrayini Pislya Revolyutsii Gidnosti) and the books of Larysa Yakubova (“Russkiy Mir” v Ukrayini: Na Krayu Prirvi and Yevraziyskiy Rozlam – Ukrayina v Dobu Gibridnih Vyklykiv).

Introduction

The cooperation between the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church has a long past. At the time of the Kyivan Principality, almost all of the bishops in Kyiv were of Greek origin (this had just two exceptions). On the one hand, the princes tried to keep some distance with those Greek bishops, since they were acting as the ambassadors (or representatives) of the Byzantine Empire and Byzantine emperors used to perceive Kyiv as a vassal state. However, in many cases, those bishops were helping the princes to bring order and to come over the fights for the throne. After the Kyiv Principality collapsed and Kyiv damaged and deserted in the 13th century, the Kyiv metropolite moved from Kyiv first to Vladimir and then, to Moscow. This helped the newly emerging Moscow Principality to gain power and to annex the neighbouring principalities. At that time, the Greek metropolitans helped Moscow to gain power. As long as Moscow was relatively weak, it needed the support of those Greek metropolitans and of the Byzantine Empire. However, as it gained power, it began to perceive the existence of those Greek clergy as a burden. The relations with the Constantinople Patriarchate were terminated during the last period of the Byzantine Empire, when Byzantine emperors sought alliance with Papacy against Turks and when they – for this reason – they accepted subordination of the Constantinople Patriarchate to Rome. The then Moscow Prince Vasily II did not accept this and in 1448, the church in Moscow broke ties with Constantinople. The union of the Constantinople Patriarchate with Rome (similar to the union of the Orthodox church in Ukraine with Rome in 1596), would be condemned by the other centers of the Orthodox world (by the patriarchates of Alexandria, Antiochia and Jerusalem). However, Moscow was the first to blame this, for this reason, Moscow would claim to be the center of “true belief” (it also should be remembered that, the word “Orthodoxy” means “true belief”).

Soon afterwards, Constantinople would be conquered by Turks, thus, the Moscow Principality would be the only independent Orthodox state in the world (with the exception of the remote, isolated Georgia and with the exception of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, which soon would be conquered by the Ottoman Empire). The claim of being the center of the true belief would also lay the foundation of the idea of “uniqueness of Russia”, which we also see today in the official political ideology of Russia. These two factors (being the center of the “true belief” and being the only prominent Orthodox state), combined with the marriage of the Moscow Prince Ivan III’s marriage with the last Byzantine Princess Sofia in 1472, laid the foundations of the understanding of “Russian Messianism” (saving others in the world, or, in other words, justification of intervention by claiming to be savior). Soon afterwards, the Russian Orthodox Church created the “Moscow-Third Rome” doctrine, which claimed that Moscow would be the inheritor of the Byzantine Empire (“there are three Romes. The first one, the ancient Rome fell because of deviation from Christianity, the second Rome was Constantinople, which also was captured by non-Christians because of its deviation and the third Rome would be Moscow and there would not be a fourth Rome”)⁵. This doctrine would strengthen the idea of Russian messianism and Russia, would perceive itself as the protector of the Orthodox population in the Ottoman Empire and in Poland in subsequent centuries.

The Russian Orthodox Church gained the status of patriarchate (In 1588, the Constantinople Patriarch Jeremias II visited Moscow to get financial aid and he was convinced to establish the Moscow Patriarchate in 1589). During the Moscow Principality (especially after 1448) and during the Moscow Tsardom, Russian monarchs had a greater domination on the church than the Byzantine Emperors on the Constantinople Patriarchate. That domination culminated especially during the reign of Peter I, who, in 1721 liquidated the patriarchate and instead established a synod, which would be subordinated to the government. That period would continue until the liquidation of the Tsardom with the February Revolution of 1917. However, despite the fact that the state took absolute control over religion and tried to confine the sphere of religion, it used religion as a tool to interfere with the internal affairs of other countries; Russia, especially during the period between 1774 and 1856, pretended to be the protector of the Orthodox population in the Ottoman Empire. In the domestic politics, Orthodoxy became one of the pillars of the official ideology; In 1837, the then Minister of Education Sergei Uvarov defined three pillars of the Russian official ideology: Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality. This policy continued until the collapse of the tsarist regime with the February Revolution.

Thus, we see that, in the period before 1917, Russian Orthodox Church helped the monarchs to gain absolute power and establish the system of absolute monarchy, created the concept of “uniqueness of Russia” and helped creation of the concept of Russian messianism, which laid the grounds for expansionist policy. However, it is hard to say that the ROC at that time was a tool for soft power policy: At those times, Russia was expanding by using force and its expansion was followed by expansion of the ROC. In other words, the ROC had very little influence in the territories which had not yet been conquered by Russian forces.

Following the February Revolution, the Russian Orthodox Church council was summoned and the patriarchate was created again. Tikhon was elected as the new patriarch. However, with the October Revolution, the church would be perceived as a hostile organization by the new regime.

The October Revolution of 1917 meant new difficulties for the ROC. Many priests, who supported the White Army and the Antante Forces were punished and in general, the church was seen as a remnant of the previous order. However, Lenin, the leader of the October Revolution, did not exert special pressure on religious institutions, considering

⁵ In fact, Moscow was not the first to claim to be the inheritor of the Byzantine Empire. In the 14th century, Bulgarian and Serbian kingdoms who were fighting with the Byzantine Empire, were declaring themselves as inheritors of the Byzantine Empire; in this way, they were declaring themselves to be the inheritors, before the sick man died. For example, in the 14th century, during the second kingdom, the Bulgarian Kingdom had declared the doctrine “Trnovo-New Rome”. According to this doctrine, since the ancient Rome had left its place to the New Rome (Constantinople), the New Rome also might have left its place to the “Newer Rome”, ie, to Trnovo and Trnovo might become the new center of Orthodoxy (See: Alexander Dvorkin, *Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Russkoj Tserkvi*, Moscow, 2008, p. 720). Similarly, the mightiest king of the mediaval Serbia Stepan Dusan had declared himself as the “Byzantine and Serbian Emperor” (Dvorkin, p. 721). However, those states did not have enough power to become inheritors of the Byzantine Empire. Moreover, they themselves would be conquered by the Ottomans and would disappear from the international arena for a long time. On the other hand, Moscow was gaining power and soon would become powerful enough to claim to be the inheritor of Byzantine Empire.

that religion will disappear by itself in time with the creation of a classless society. In that early period, the Soviet Government supported, or at least, not suppressed national autocephalous churches, such as the Ukrainian Autonomous Orthodox Church (which was established during the last period of the Ukrainian National Republic) and the Georgian Orthodox Church (which was re-established just after the collapse of the Russian Empire), in this way, it tried to reduce the influence of the ROC. This relative tolerance policy towards the church continued until 1929. Nevertheless, when Stalin realized that religion would not disappear by itself, he decided to liquidate religious institutions forcefully. Patriarch Tikhon had died in 1925 and the Soviet Government did not allow election of a new patriarch. Metropolitan Serghei, who was the actual head of the church after Tikhon was forced to cooperate with the Soviet Government and this led to termination of the relation of the diaspora with that church; the diaspora established another church, which was called "Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia". In the 1930s, thousands of priests were either executed, or sent into jail, or sent to exile. Thousands of churches were destroyed, or converted into depots. While in 1917 there were about 50.000 churches throughout the Russian Empire, there were only about 500 active churches in 1940 in the Soviet Union⁶.

However, the relation between the Soviet Government and the ROC changed cardinally during the Second World War. In 1943, Stalin called Metropolitan Serghei and some other members of the higher clergy and ordered them to summon a council and elect a new patriarch. Indeed, such a council would be convened and Serghei would be elected as the new patriarch only within 4 days.

This sharp change in Stalin's policy and his sudden interest to religion had a few reasons. First of all, Stalin saw, how such harsh oppression caused many Soviet peasants to greet German soldiers. Moreover, there was an international aspect: By September 1943, the result of the war was already clear: Germans were losing the war. It was also clear that the Germans would have to retreat from the Eastern Europe and from the Balkan Peninsula. But now, there was another question: Whom the Germans would be replaced with in the Balkans and in Eastern Europe? By the Soviets, or by the Anglo-American alliance? Stalin realized that the majority of the population of the Balkans was of Orthodox faith, so he decided to use the Russian Orthodox Church for taking the Balkans under Soviet influence. Thus, in 1943, the ROC was re-established, but this time, as a right arm of the Soviet state⁷.

With the advance of the Soviet forces in the Balkans, the ROC established inter-church relations with the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox churches. As a consequence, Romanian Orthodox Church helped formation of a pro-socialist government in Romania. Serbian Orthodox Church helped reconciliation in Yugoslavia and it helped restoration of relations after the relations between Yugoslavia and the USSR deteriorated. Soviet Government, via the Russian Orthodox Church, established relations with the Constantinople Patriarchate and convinced them to recognize the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

Since the Vatican had a hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union, Stalin decided to subordinate the Greek-Catholic churches to Moscow. In this way, in 1946, in Lviv, a council of the Greek-Catholic Church was summoned with the force of the Soviet authorities and at that council, the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church announced cancellation of the Union Treaty of 1596 and declared reunification with the ROC. The Greek-Catholics of Romania were forced to unite with the Romanian Orthodox Church, while the Greek-Catholics in Czechoslovakia were forced to unite with the Czechoslovakian Orthodox Church.

Stalin had an ever greater ideal: To transform Moscow into an "Orthodox Vatican". Stalin tried to make the Moscow Patriarchate the ecumenical center of the Orthodox world. His endeavours in this direction lasted from 1943 until 1948 and this period used to be the golden era in the relations between the Soviet State and the ROC⁸.

Meanwhile, with the beginning of the Cold War, the US also decided to use religion in its struggle against the Soviet Union. For this purpose, they wanted to use the Constantinople Patriarchate. Nevertheless, the then patriarch of Constantinople, Maximos V was not convenient for this policy: He had leftist ideas and he had even refused to excommunicate the communists of the Greek Civil War. For this reason, he was forced to abdicate and instead of him, the head of the American Orthodox Church Athenagoras was elected as patriarch. He travelled from the USA to Istanbul by the personal airplane of the then US President Harry Truman and he immediately got Turkish citizenship (according to the Turkish law, the Patriarch of Constantinople must be a Turkish citizen). In his inauguration speech, he said that his mission was to unite the Muslims and Christians of the world against communism. In an interview that he gave in the 1960s, he would say that he was the religious pillar of the Truman Doctrine⁹.

In this way, it can be said that, since the mid-1940s, Kremlin (previously the USSR, now the Russian Federation) has been using the Moscow Patriarchate as a soft power tool to influence the Orthodox population of the Eastern Europe, while the US tries to use the Constantinople Patriarchate for the same purpose.

The New Era

The new era in the church-state relations began with the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the beginning of the 1990s, when it became clear that the Soviet Union was about to collapse, various church movements that aimed at obtaining independence from the ROC (such as the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the Grekocatholics) gained momentum, the ROC decided to take measures to protect its unity. Thus, the synod of the ROC convened in 22 October 1991 where it was decided that "disintegration of the Soviet Union would not mean disintegration of the Russian Orthodox Church", and that "boundaries of a state does not need to coincide with the boundaries of a church"¹⁰.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the ROC was the only institution, which comprehended almost all of the territory of the USSR (the exceptions might be Armenia, where all of the population belonged to the Armenian Apostolic Church and Georgia, where Georgian Orthodox Church had been re established in 1943). For this reason, when the rulers of the Russian Federation came over the initial confusion and decided to dominate the post-Soviet space, they would seek cooperation with the ROC and this time, the cooperation between the state and the church would be much

⁶ Thomas Bremer, *Tserkva ta Imperiya, Nariš İstorii Rossiyskogo Pravoslavya*, Kyiv, Dkuh i Litera, p. 57; Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church- A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy*, Routledge, 2003, p. 12-13.

⁷ Davis, p. 19-20; Mikhail Shkarovsky, *Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov v XX veke*, Moscow, 2010, p. 214, p. 285.

⁸ Davis, p. 23.

⁹ Elçin Macar, *Cumhuriyet Döneminde İstanbul Rum Patrikhanesi*, Ştstanbul, 2003, p. 190.

¹⁰ Alexander Drabniko, *Pravoslaviye v Post totalitarnoy Ukraine*, Kyiv, 2002, p. 54.

stronger and durable. Because, the priorities and approaches of the state and the church were parallel in many cases. For instance, especially from the second half of the 1990s', the Russian state adopted a more conservative and anti-Western approach, which coincided with the conservative and anti-Western approach of the church. Secondly, while the Russian state was seeking to protect its influence in the former Soviet countries, the ROC was also seeking to protect its church structure in those countries and was trying to struggle against the secessionist (ie autocephalist) movements in those countries. So, their interests on this issue was especially parallel. Thirdly, the activities of western missionary organizations in Russia was perceived as a threat both by the state and by the ROC. The state was perceiving them as a fifth column and in the national security doctrines, those missionary activities were mentioned as a threat to national security and it was recommended to strengthen the ROC against such religious movements.

The laws in Russia give a special status to the Russian Orthodox Church. The Law on Religious Freedom and Religious Organizations (issued in 1997) give a special status to the Russian Orthodox Church and it states that, four religions (Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism) are the traditional religions of Russia. In other words, law protects those traditional religions against the "non traditional religions", such as Catholicism, Protestantism, etc¹¹. The attitude of the ROC towards the state has been determined with the document, named "The Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church", which was adopted by the Synode of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000, shortly after Putin was elected president of Russia. That document has laid out the bases of the church-state relations in details. According to the afore mentioned document, it is desirable for the church to have symphony between the church and the state. Nevertheless, it is emphasized that, church must be loyal to the state, whatever regime the state has¹².

Russian Orthodox Church and "the Russian World"

After the collapse of communism, a vacuum in the world of ideas and ideologies occurred in Russia. However, within a few years, a new idea which proposed integration of the Russian minded people occurred and this idea within a few years became the dominant idea in Russia. That was, the idea of Russian world. According to that idea, Russia had its own civilization and the Russian world would include not only the citizens of Russia and not only the ethnic Russians, but also the people, who spoke Russian and who felt himself closer to Russia. As it could be seen, this doctrine aimed at reintegration of the former Soviet Union, or at least, only some part of it (where Russian culture was stronger) and expansion of Russia. One of the main centers which developed this doctrine was the Russian Orthodox Church. Today's patriarch Kirill, the then metropolitan of Kaliningrad and Smolensk, began defining the concept of Russian World. At the assemblies of the World-wide Russian Peoples Congress in 2004 and 2005, Kirill stressed that in contrary to the unipolar world, there should be a multi polar world and that Moscow should become the center of the world Orthodoxy. He claimed that, since the Russian Orthodox Church had a community of "350 million people", it had the right to be the center of the World Orthodoxy¹³. After he became patriarch in 2009, he began saying that Russia was a country of civilization (it should be remembered that in the last Foreign Policy Doctrine of Russia, Russia is defined as a "country of civilization") and that when he pronounces the word "Russia", he always means a great space of civilization¹⁴. According to Kirill, the countries of Russian world were mainly Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova¹⁵. Furthermore, he was claiming that the existing state borders among those countries were "unnecessary obstacles among the peoples of the Russian world"¹⁶. In that framework, the ROC on the one hand helped the Russian state to fill the ideological vacuum that emerged after the collapse of the USSR, on the other hand, it formed the ideological ground of expansionism and tried to serve as a soft power of Russia in those countries.

In that new era, the activities of the ROC in foreign countries might be classified in two categories: In the far abroad and in the near abroad, i.e in the ex-Soviet countries.

In Far Abroad: The ROC is a member of the sub organs of the United Nations and it's a member of the World Church Council. In such international organs, it pursues policies parallel to the policies of the RF.

An important development occurred in 2007, when the Russian Orthodox Church united with the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. This re-union was achieved as a result of direct efforts of the Russian President Vladimir Putin. This important development had two consequences: On the one hand, it symbolized a reconciliation among the Russians after the difficult Soviet experience. Secondly, the structures of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia would serve as lobbies in the countries where they were.

Another dimension of the ROC in far abroad was the Middle East in General and Syria in particular. In those countries, most of the Orthodox population is of Arabic origin and for many centuries, they have been conflicting with the Greek Orthodox clergy. In Syria, dominance of the Greek clergy over the Arab Orthodox community in the 19th century had ended only after Russia's intervention¹⁷. Since then, they had tense relations. Those relations were developed during the Cold War, when Stalin tried to establish Soviet influence in the Middle East by using the relations between the ROC and the local Orthodox Arab communities. In 2010s, during the war in Syria, the ROC pursued active policy both in strengthening Russia's influence in the region and in voicing the demands of the Syrian Christians before international organizations. The ROC in Syria and in other Middle Eastern countries established close relations both with the Orthodox Patriarchates of Antiochia¹⁸ and Jerusalem and with the eastern churches (non-Calcedonian churches), such as the Assyrians and Nestorians.

Africa is also one of the important spheres of activity of the Russian Orthodox Church. Since the beginning of the Cold War, the ROC has established good relations with the Coptic Church (one of the non-Calcedonian churches) which was a policy in conformity with the Soviet Union's policy to increase influence in Africa. Those relations also continue at present. In addition, the ROC began establishing its own Orthodox church structures in Africa. This policy caused reaction of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, since, it is considered that, according to the canonical borders of the

¹¹ Bremer, p. 144.

¹² Bremer, p. 145-146.

¹³ "Kyivskiy Patriarhat – Pomisna Ukrayinska Pravoslavna Tserkva" – Istoriko-Kanonichna Deklaratsiya, Arhiereyskogo Soboru Ukrayinskoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi Kyivskogo Patriarkhatu, Kyiv, 2007, s. 63-64.

¹⁴ Patriarch Kirill, «Rossiya – eto strana tsivilizatsiya», Moscow, 31 October 2013: <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/65312.html>

¹⁵ Kirill, Tserkov Prizivaet k Yedinstvu, Minsk, 2010, p. 33.

¹⁶ Ibid., s. 34.

¹⁷ Dvorkin, p. 882.

¹⁸ Antiochia is the ancient name of today's Antakya city of Türkiye. However, since the 14th century, that patriarchate has been located in Damascus.

Orthodox world, Africa is within the sphere of the Alexandria Patriarchate. That conflict was triggered by recognition of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Alexandria Patriarchate. The issue of Orthodox Church of Ukraine is one of the most sensitive issues for the Moscow Patriarchate, on which we will give more information below. Moreover, according to Russia, the Alexandria Patriarchate had taken this decision after contacting with the US. So, the conflict between the ROC and the Alexandria Patriarchate on the Orthodox communities of Africa is related with the general conflict between the US and Russia.

Relations with Vatican:

The relations between the ROC and Vatican were in a bad situation during the Soviet time. First of all, Pope Pius XII had a moderate policy towards the Nazi Germany during the WWII. Secondly, during the rule of Pope John Paul II, Vatican waged a struggle against the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR, during the second half of the 1990s' and the first decade of the millennium, Vatican's proselytism (expansion of Catholicism) policy caused concern both among the Russian ruling elite and among the ROC clergy. Pope Jean Paul II's visit to Ukraine in 2000 and moving of the center of the Ukrainian Grekocatholic Church from Lviv to Kyiv in 2005 were perceived by them as proselytism and as a part of Russia's containment policy. However, after Kirill became patriarch of the ROC and especially after Francis became pope in 2013, relations between the ROC and Vatican improved remarkably. In that new period, the ROC, instead of rejecting the West as a whole, made a distinction of conservative circles of the West, with whom cooperation could be made and the liberal circles in the West, against whom, according to the ROC, struggle should be given. This new policy gave its results, especially after the beginning of the hybrid war of Russia against Ukraine in 2014, when the West began imposing sanctions on Russia. Under those circumstances, the ROC helped Russia to get rid of the isolation as much as possible. Culmination of the rapprochement in the relations between the ROC and Vatican was the meeting of them in Havana in 2016. At that summit, they agreed on mutual cooperation in the struggle against non-traditional movements, making joint efforts to defend the rights of the Christians in the Middle East. This summit had another aspect: Pope, at that summit contacted with the Moscow Patriarch as an equal counterpart and some decisions on the problems of Christians were taken in absence of the Constantinople Patriarch. Thus, the head of the ROC acted as the actual head of the Orthodox world, bypassing the Constantinople Patriarch.

As a result of this dialogue, Vatican adopted a more moderate policy towards Russia in the Russian-Ukrainian War. Currently, Vatican deals with intermediary mission in the war, by contacting with the representatives of the ROC. This also could be seen as a consequence of the ROC's relations with Vatican.

In the Near Abroad:

During the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ROC, in order to cope with the new conditions where national states emerged, gave autonomy to its church structures, which remained in those newly independent states. Thus, autonomous churches in Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, Moldova and Belarus (exarchate) emerged.

The main target of the policy of ROC in ex-Soviet countries is reintegration of those countries with Moscow.

The ROC pursued its policy both through its local structures and in connection with the religious authorities of other religions. For example, in Southern Caucasia, the ROC is in contact with the Head of the Muslims of Azerbaijan and the head (catholicos) of the Armenian Apostolic Church and those three leaders from time to time come together, to solve the conflict in the region, under the auspices of Russia.

On the Orthodox communities in the ex-Soviet countries, the main conflicts have occurred with the Constantinople Patriarchate and the Romanian Patriarchate. Those conflicts were also related with the international influence struggles between the US and Russia and Romania and Russia.

The Baltic Countries: In the Baltic countries, the main conflict occurred with the Constantinople Patriarchate and with the local governments, who wanted to reduce the influence of the ROC. The first serious conflict occurred in Estonia. After Estonia gained its independence in 1918, the bishop in Estonia decided to subordinate the church to the Constantinople Patriarchate, however, after the Baltic republics were annexed by the Soviet Union, the Orthodox population in these countries were again included into the ROC. The clergy which had been subordinated to the Constantinople Patriarchate went to exile. After the independence of Estonia, the question arose again between Moscow and Constantinople and finally, Constantinople declared that "upon the desire of the Orthodox population in Estonia and the demand of the Estonian government", it decided to include Estonia again into its own sphere (In 1978, the then Constantinople Patriarch Dmitrios upon the demand of the Moscow Patriarch Pimen, had cancelled the tomos of the Estonian Orthodox Church). This led to a great crisis. However, the parties met in 1997 in Switzerland and it was decided that there would be two separate Orthodox church structures in Estonia, one of them which would be subordinated to Constantinople, the other one to Moscow. This conflict was not completely independent from the aspirations of Estonia to isolate itself from Russia and to be integrated into NATO and the EU.

After Russia's invasion to Ukraine began in 2022, the Latvian Parliament, with the initiative of the Latvian President, accepted a decision, according to which the Latvian Orthodox Church had to change its status and terminate all of its relations with the Russian Orthodox Church¹⁹. In this case, we see that Russia's aggressive policy towards Ukraine put the ROC into a hard position.

Georgia:

Georgia became a country, where the policies of the ROC and the Russian government differed.

As mentioned above, the Georgian Orthodox Church had been restored in 1943, ie, much before the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the early 1990s', while Georgia was struggling to get its independence, Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia declared their independence and with the help of Russia, they managed to expel Georgian troops from those territories. After the Five Days War between Russia and Georgia in 2008, Russia "recognized" those territories as independent states. In Abkhazia, an "Abkhazian Orthodox Church" was established. However, despite Russia's support of the separatists, the ROC did not recognize this church and it continued to recognize those breakaway regions within the canonical territory of the Georgian Orthodox Church. This might have a few reasons: First of all, the ROC itself insists on existence of canonical territories and that the changes in state borders does not necessarily bring changes in church

¹⁹ Kommersant, 08 September 2022; <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5549493>

borders. Especially being based on this principle, the ROC claims that Ukraine is still within its canonical territory. Secondly, Georgian Orthodox Church traditionally has had good relations with the ROC and consequently, in spite of the insistence of the Ukrainian authorities, the Georgian Orthodox Church did not recognize the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). Thirdly, warm relations between those two churches may increase the possibility of influencing the whole Georgian society, which may result in distancing Georgia from the West. In this case, we can say that, although the policies of Russia towards Georgia differs from the policy of the ROC towards the Georgian Orthodox Church, in the long period, the relations between Russian and Georgian churches will help Moscow to form closer relations with Georgia.

Moldova:

Moldova is a former Soviet country, where there has been a conflict between pro-European political forces and the pro-Russian political forces. On the other hand, the main church conflict in Moldova is between the Moldova Metropolitanate of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Bessarabia Metropolitanate of the Romanian Orthodox Church. In addition to the breakaway region of Transnistria, in Moldova proper, the vast majority of the population belongs to the ROC. However, the Moldovans are from the same origin with the Romanians and the country used to belong to the Romanian Orthodox Church until 1812, when the Russian army captured Bessarabia (most of today's Moldova). After that, the territories of today's Moldova was included into the canonical territory of the ROC. After Moldova gained independence, the Romanian Orthodox Church wished to re-enter into this country, but due to the influence of the ROC on Moldovan governments, the Bessarabian Metropolitanate of the Romanian Orthodox Church could be registered in Moldova only in 2002 and only as a result of the decision of the European Court of Human Rights, which forced Moldova to register that church. That church is mainly supported by "unionists", who wish re-unification of Moldova with Romania.

In Moldova, some bishops of the ROC have supported pro-Russian politics, however, Patriarch Kirill, until recently, tried to establish good relations with almost all Moldovan politics, excluding the Unionists. For instance, Patriarch Kirill was welcomed in 2011, when he visited Moldova in 2011, during the rule of the pro-European coalition of "Alliance for Democratic Integration". In his speech, he had reiterated that he was not an envoy of the Russian Federation. In this case, we see that, the ROC tries to distance itself from the daily politics and tries to have influence on all parts of the Moldovan society. The speech of Kirill during that visit, where he said that he was not an ambassador of the Russian Federation and his emphasize that Moldova was a "free European country" shows this approach²⁰.

Ukraine: The Most Sensitive Place:

Among all those regions, Ukraine is the most sensitive place for the ROC. This has many reasons: First of all, Russians perceive themselves as the inheritors of the Kievan Rus. Secondly, because of geopolitical location of Ukraine, Russia wished to keep Ukraine under its influence. Third, since the Kyiv-Perchersk Monastery was an important pilgrimage center for the Russian Orthodoxes, and since the ancestors of the Eastern Slavs were baptized in Kyiv, Ukraine has a great religious significance both for Russia and for the ROC. Fourth, a large part of the community of the ROC lives in Ukraine. So, both the interests of the Russian state and the interests of the ROC urges them to pay special attention to Ukraine.

During the Soviet period, all of the Orthodox population in Ukraine was a part of the ROC. However, when the Soviet Union gave the first signs of collapse, national-oriented clergy began establishing their own church structures. First of all, the Ukrainian Autonomous Orthodox Church was established and in 1995, a second church structure, the Kyiv Patriarchate was founded. Under such circumstances, in order not to cope with the new conditions, the ROC, in October 1990, ie, one year before the collapse of the Soviet Union, gave autonomy to its structure in Ukraine. Thus, the Orthodox population in Ukraine, until the end of 2018, was divided among the Ukrainian Autonomous Orthodox Church (UAOC), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate (UOOCKP) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP). Nevertheless, the first two had not been recognized by other Orthodox churches. Some Ukrainian presidents were trying to unite the first two churches and get recognition of the Constantinople Patriarch. However, the Constantinople Patriarch not wishing to come into conflict with the ROC, had not given active support to them until 2018.

The church issues in Ukraine was also closely related with politics. While the UOC-MP was claiming brotherhood between the Russian and Ukrainians, the other two (UAOC and UOC-KP) were advocating membership in the EU and NATO. The ROC had shown active interest to Ukrainian politics, especially during the presidential elections of 2004 (which would have resulted in the Orange Revolution). Before that elections, when the Viktor Yanukovych, the Russian oriented candidate had visited Moscow and there he was blessed by the then Moscow Patriarch Alexei II. During the election campaign, large part of the clergy of the UOC-MP agitated for Yanukovych, while, the UOC-KP and the UAOC had rendered active support to the pro-Western candidate Yuschenko. (However, it would be wrong to say that all of the clergy of the UOC-MP had agitated for Yanukovych; for instance, Volodymyr, the Kyiv Metropolitan of the UOC-MP had a more distanced position towards Yanukovych.

The split within the UOC-MP became more apparent in 2013, when, Metropolitan Volodymyr, together with the clergy of other religious communities, signed a petition which suggested that Ukraine was a European country and it should be a integrated into the EU. This action had called great reaction within the UOC-MP. That friction would be more apparent during the incidents of the Euromaidan Revolution, when some of the clergy condemned the revolution, but some others joined the protestors.

The hardest period came for the ROC in 2014, when Russia captured and annexed Crimea and when pro-Russian separatist groups, with Russia's support, captured some parts of the Donbas region. The problem was that, the ROC had its two greatest communities in those two countries, it had always advocated unity of Russian and Ukrainian peoples, but now, one of those countries was occupying the other country. Moreover, the situation would have been especially hard for the UOC-MP, who would have been perceived as a fifth column under such circumstances. It is

²⁰ Roman Lukin, "Tserkovno-Političeskaya Situatsiya v Moldavii v Svete Pozitsii RPTS", <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/tserkovno-politicheskaya-situatsiya-v-moldavii-v-svete-pozitsii-rpts/viewer>

worthy of note that, Moscow Patriarch Kirill, who used to attend all of the prominent state ceremonies, was absent at the ceremony of annexation of Crimea on March 18 2014. In this way, he refrained to have the image of a person who supported this annexation. Moreover, the ROC, even after the annexation, did not change the church structure; Crimea continued to be under jurisdiction of the UOC-MP. Likewise, the occupied parts of the Donbas region continued to be under the jurisdiction of the UOC-MP. Thus, the UOC-MP at that period, became the only Ukrainian structure, who had representation in occupied territories²¹. It was the only institution, which had its center in Kyiv and some branches in occupied regions. At that period, on the one hand, some of the clergy of the UOC-MP gave support to the separatists, while the top clergy of the UOC-MP tried to present itself as a true Ukrainian structure. For instance, when Petro Poroshenko was elected as president, Head of the UOC-MP Onufriy said that Poroshenko was the legitimate head of the state and that they would pray for him²². However, when Poroshenko, during a speech at the parliament asked everybody to stand up for the Ukrainian soldiers that were martyred in Donbas, Metropolitan Onufry refused to stand up, saying that he wants peace in Ukraine.

The dilemma of the ROC and of the UOC-MP became ever greater after the full scale Russian invasion to Ukraine began. Unlike the period of hybrid war when Russian administration denied the existence of Russian soldiers in Donbas, in February 2022, a direct war began between the two countries. When it became clear that Russia would not be able to achieve its goals in a short time in its so called "special operation", the circumstances for the ROC and the UOC-MP became ever harder. Patriarch Kirill, at the beginning of Russia's invasion, preferred to make more cautious statements. However, in April 2022, he began making announcements which justified the war²³. This, as could be expected, put the UOC-MP to an ever harder position. At the local council in 27 May 2022, the UOC-MP condemned Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Kirill and announced that it would terminate all of its relations with the Moscow Patriarchate. Yet, the situation with the UOC is yet unclear, since Ukrainian authorities believe that its termination of relations with the ROC is not real. At the same time, the structures of the UOC in the occupied territories such as Crimea, passed to the direct jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. Thus, the situation changed cardinaly compared with the period of hybrid war.

After the outbreak of the full scale war, many communities of the UOC passed to the OCU of the Constantinople Patriarchate. Nevertheless, those transfers were mainly in the western and central regions of Ukraine; In southern and eastern regions, the situation did not change remarkably. In the first half of the year 2023, many of the western provinces of Ukraine banned the activities of the UOC-MP in their territories. The situation develops contrary to the interests of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Consequently, it can be said that, direct military intervention policy of Russia has put the ROC into a very hard position. The situation for this soft power instrument will be hard under the conditions of "hard power" policies.

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РОСІЙСЬКА ПРАВОСЛАВНА ЦЕРКВА – ІНСТРУМЕНТ ЗОВНІШНЬОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ РОСІЙСЬКОЇ ФЕДЕРАЦІЇ?

Анотація: Ця стаття спробує аналізувати співробітництво між Російською державою та Російською Православною Церквою з минулого до сьогодення. Як буде представлено в статті, в Росії держава завжди мала домінацію над церквою. Крім цього, Російська Православна Церква, за історію, складала ідеологічні стовпи Російської зовнішньої політики, такі як російське месіанство. Ця церква почала користуватися як м'яка сила, особливо під час Другої Світової Війни. З того часу, США були у співробітництво з Константинопольським Патріархатом тоді як Кремль підтримував Російську Православну Церкву. Після того як Радянський Союз розпався й особливо після того як Володимир Путін став президентом Росії, таке співробітництво стало ще інтенсивнішим. За кордоном РПЦ допомагає державі збільшити вплив у західному світі, у пострадянських країнах РПЦ сприяє політиці реінтеграції деяких колишніх радянських країн. Однак, особливо після анексії Криму Росією, тобто після того як російське керівництво замість політики реінтеграції обрало політику розчленування України, виконання ролі «м'якої сили» ускладнилось. В результаті, після початку повномасштабного вторгнення до України, можливість використання РПЦ як м'якої сили було зведено нанівець.

Ключові слова: Православ'я, Російська православна церква, м'яка сила, церковно-державні відносини, «руський мир», російсько-українська війна

²¹ Katerina Shotkina, Khroniki Tomosu – Shlyakh Ukrayintsiv do Avtokefalii, Kharkiv, 2019, p. 189.

²² Mykola Denisenko, Pravoslavna Tserkva v Ukraini – Stolittya Rozzdilen, Kyiv, Dukh i Litera, 2019, p. 241.

²³ <https://www.rbc.ua/ukr/stylar/rosiya-botsi-svitla-qlava-rpts-kirilo-vidznachivnya-1681117902.html>