

THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE AND THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

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1. Introduction: geopolitics and theopolitics¹

In describing church-state relations, the concept of *symphonia* is used in Orthodox tradition. It refers to the loyal and mutual cooperation between these two distinctive institutions for the sake of the people, who are simultaneously members of the church and subjects or citizens of the state². The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has addressed questions related to this concept in a document called “The Basis of the Social Concept”³, officially approved by the Church in August 2000⁴. The leader of the committee was Patriarch Kirill (Gundiaev), who was the head of the Department for External Church Relations at that time⁵. This document lists sixteen areas of church-state co-operation. The first three are: (a) peace-making on international, interethnic and civic levels and promoting mutual understanding and co-operation among people, nations and states; (b) concern for the preservation of morality in society; (c) spiritual, cultural, moral and patriotic education and formation. This is followed by a list of areas in which the clergy and canonical church structures cannot support the state or cooperate with it. There are three of

¹ The first short version of this paper appeared in Estonian: **Riistan, Ain**. 20.03.2015. Ukraina konfliktit teopoliitikast: Moskva patriarhaadi perspektiiv. – Kirik ja teoloogia, nr 171. <<http://kjt.ee/2015/03/ukraina-konfliktit-teopoliitikast-moskva-patriarhaadi-perspektiiv-2/>> (23.02.2016).

² **Kalaitzidis, Pantelis** 2014. Church and State in the Orthodox World. From the Byzantine “Symphonia” and Nationalized Orthodoxy, to the Need of Witnessing the Word of God in a Pluralistic Society – **Fogliadini, Emanuela** (Ed.). Religioni, libertà, potere: atti del Convegno internazionale filosofico-teologico sulla libertà religiosa. Milano, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore e Università degli studi, 16–18 ottobre 2013. Milano: Vita e Pensiero, p. 40. [**Kalaitzidis** 2014].

³ **The Basis of the Social Concept**. <<https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/>> (23.02.2016).

⁴ **Kirill, Metropolitan** 14.10.2005. The Orthodox Church, State and Europe: A View from Russia. <<http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles5/KirillEurope.php>> (23.02.2016).

⁵ **Richters, Katja** 2013. The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church. Politics, Culture and Greater Russia. London & New York: Routledge, p. 18. [**Richters** 2013].

these areas: (a) political struggle, election agitation, campaigns in support of particular political parties and public and political leaders; (b) waging civil war or aggressive external war; (c) direct participation in intelligence and any other activity that demands secrecy by law even in making one's confession or reporting to the church authorities.⁶

The crisis in Ukraine, initiated by the Kremlin, has put these principles to the test. Officials of the Russian state often claim that the Ukrainian crisis is a geopolitical one, in which the interests of great powers collide. How does the Russian Orthodox Church relate to the crisis from the perspective of church-state symphonia? The current paper describes the politics of the Moscow Patriarchate in its attempts to deal with the conflict between two Orthodox countries, in which the ROC is the biggest religious denomination and national religious identity in one of the countries, Ukraine, is being questioned. While the notion of geopolitics is quite familiar, the concept of *theopolitics* needs some preliminary explanation. This term is sometimes used in the U.S., where it denotes the fusion of Christianity, nationalism and politics, usually from the right-wing conservative side⁷. More generally one can, of course, speak of church politics or political Christianity⁸, but theopolitics places an additional emphasis on the religious aspect of Christian politics and nationalism. The reader shall see the shape of the theopolitics of the Moscow Patriarchate emerging out of the need to maintain symphonia with the geopolitical interests of the Russian State.

2. Rhetoric from Moscow

In August 2014, amidst intense fighting in Ukraine, a document was posted on the website of the Department for Official Church Relations of the ROC. It was a letter from Patriarch Kirill to Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. It was soon taken down, but the genie was out of the bottle already, and the text would not be easily forgotten. Some quotes are appropriate here:

⁶ **The Basis of the Social Concept.** <<https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/iii/>> (23.02.2016).

⁷ See, for example, **Anderson, Braden P.** 2010. Chosen Nation: Biblical Theopolitics and the Problem of American Christian Nationalism. Dissertations (2009–). Paper 64. <http://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/64/> (23.02.2016); **Hanson, Paul D.** 2008. “God is One, So Are We”: A Theo-political Hermeneutic. <<http://reflections.yale.edu/article/between-babel-and-beatitude/god-one-so-are-we-theo-political-hermeneutic#sthash.eAYAi8TL.dpuf>> (23.02.2016).

⁸ The concept of “Political Orthodoxy” is in use already, see **Kalaitzidis** 2014, p. 48.

As far back as last autumn when the present political crisis in Ukraine just began, representatives of the Greek Catholic Church and schismatic communities, who appeared in the Kiev Maidan, openly preached hatred towards the Orthodox Church, calling to seize Orthodox shrines and to eradicate Orthodoxy from the territory of Ukraine. With the beginning of hostilities, the Uniates and schismatics, having been given arms, under the pretext of antiterrorist operation, began an outright aggression against the clergy of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the east of the country. /.../ We cannot ignore the fact that the conflict in Ukraine has an unambiguous religious cause underlying it. The Uniates and schismatics linked up with them to seek to gain the upper hand over canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine, while the Ukrainian Orthodox Church continues with patience and courage to take pastoral care of her suffering faithful in this very difficult situation. Most of the clergy who serve in places that have become arenas for hostilities have remained with their flock, sharing in all the terrors of civil war.⁹

The message was absolutely clear: the Russian Patriarch saw the conflict in Ukraine as a religious one. Furthermore, the term “civil war” was used, signalling that the ROC had already distanced itself from the hostilities¹⁰. The letter listed four occasions of attacks on the priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOCMP). In the context of the escalating conflict, it is actually no surprise that some nationalist-minded Ukrainians might have viewed a clergyman of the UOCMP as an agent of hostile Russia. At the same time the Patriarch makes no mention of numerous

⁹ **Портал credo.ru. Лента новостей.** 15 августа 2014, 13:59. „Google“ и архиепископ УПЦ КП Евстратий (Зоря) сохранили письмо Патриарха Кирилла (Гундяева) главе Константинопольской Патриархии, удаленное с сайта ОБЦС МП. <<http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/index.php?act=news&type=archive&day=15&month=8&year=2014&id=109233>> (23.02.2016). Now it is officially published again on the site of Department for Official Church Relations of ROC: **Kirill, Patriarch.** 14.08.2014, 19:55. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill Calls Primates of Local Orthodox Churches to Raise their Voice in Defence of Orthodox Christians in the East of Ukraine. <<https://mospat.ru/en/2014/08/14/news106782/>> (23.02.2016).

¹⁰ On February 17, 2015, the Patriarch officially declared the military conflict in Ukraine to be a civil war. See **Novitchkova, Alexandra; Tomak, Mariia.** April 2015. When God Becomes The Weapon. Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Report prepared by the Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights in the framework of the Civic Solidarity Platform, pp. 7–8. <http://iphonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf> (23.02.2016) [**Novitchkova, Tomak** 2015]. Official statement in Russian on the ROC website: **Пресс-служба Патриарха Московского и всея Руси.** 17 февраля 2015 г. 15:19. Святейший Патриарх Кирилл: «Сегодня нет более важного вопроса, чем мир на Украинской земле» <<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3996574.html>> (23.02.2016).

persecutions of people of other faiths by separatists in Crimea and Donbass professing faith in the Moscow Patriarchate¹¹.

That this view was not only a passing thought of the Patriarch can be seen from the remarks made by the successor of Kirill in the post of the chairman of the Department of the External Church Relations Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) in an interview in the National Catholic Register. This interview was published on March 4, 2014, exactly two weeks before Crimea was officially incorporated into the Russian Federation:

*In the present civic confrontation, the Greek Catholics have taken one side, entering into active cooperation with the Orthodox schismatic groups. The head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, together with the head of the so-called Kiev Patriarchate, paced the U.S. State Department offices, calling the American authorities to interfere in the situation and to put Ukraine in order. The Greek Catholics have in fact launched a crusade against Orthodoxy.*¹²

He reiterated his position in the same year in the Vatican on October 16. While giving a greeting address to the Synod of Bishops on the Family, he suddenly changed the topic to Ukraine:

*Regrettably, the conflict in that country, which has already taken the lives of thousands, from the very beginning, has acquired a religious dimension. A significant role in its conception and development has been played by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. From the very first days of the conflict, the Greek Catholics identified with one of the sides of the confrontation. Contrary to the prevailing respect for canonical norms in relations between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, the Greek Catholics have entered into active cooperation with the Orthodox schismatic groups.*¹³

¹¹ See **Freedom of Religion or Belief – Newsletters by Country or Entity. Ukraine** 2014. HRWF International <http://www.hrwf.net/images/forbnews/2014/Ukraine_2014.pdf> (23.02.2016); **Rohrback, Robin** (Ed.). 5 June 2014. Terrorists Kidnapped, Tortured and Threatened Believers in Donbas. Institute for Religious Freedom. <http://www.irf.in.ua/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=419:1&catid=34:ua&Itemid=61> (23.02.2016), and **Novitchkova, Tomak** 2015, pp. 11–20.

¹² **Pentin, Edward**. 04.03.2014. The Pan-Orthodox Council, Ukraine Crisis and Christian Unity. An interview with Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev of Volokolamsk, the chairman of the Russian Orthodox Department of External Church Relations. <<http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/the-pan-orthodox-council-ukraine-crisis-and-christian-unity/>> (23.02.2016).

¹³ **Hilarion, Metropolitan of Volokolamsk**. 16.10.2014. Greeting Address by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk to the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Catholic Bishops on Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization. <<https://mospat.ru/en/2014/10/16/news109624/>> (23.02.2016).

These comments by two Church leaders are eerily similar to official statements by the Kremlin. One such statement will suffice as an example, since the Kremlin rhetoric is well known. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated the following at the 69th session of the UN General Assembly on September 27, 2014:

After they declared victory in the Cold War and the “end of history”, the U.S. and EU have opted for expanding the geopolitical area under their control without taking into account the balance of legitimate interests of all peoples of Europe. /.../The U.S. and EU supported the coup d’etat in Ukraine and reverted to outright justification of any acts by the self-proclaimed Kiev authorities that opted for suppression by force of the part of the Ukrainian people that had rejected the attempts to impose the anti-constitutional way of life to the entire country and wanted to defend its rights to the native language, culture and history. /.../Russia is sincerely interested in the restoration of peace in the neighbouring country and this should be well understood by all who are even slightly acquainted with the history of the deep-rooted and fraternal ties between the two peoples.¹⁴

The symmetry of these statements is quite remarkable. The official Russian position is that the events in Ukraine were initiated by the geopolitical interests of the U.S. and EU. Minister Lavrov spoke of “self-proclaimed Kiev authorities” but the general rhetoric has been much stronger: words like *Banderites*, *extremists*, *nationalists*, *fascists* and *Nazis* were commonly used¹⁵. In other words, it was the nationalists who took over Ukraine’s legitimate government. According to the Patriarchate, on the other hand, it was a “crusade” against Orthodoxy by Greek Catholics (also called Uniates) and “schismatics” who were actively seeking the support of American authorities. So there is a conflict within a conflict: a theopolitical religious conflict inside a geopolitical nationalist conflict, according to the ROC. Both the Russian State and the ROC claim they are only interested in peace. With the special case of Crimea as an exception, Russia is not officially directly involved in the geopolitical conflict and neither is the ROC. Just as (Eastern) Ukrainians who do not agree with the decisions of Kiev suffer in the geopolitical conflict, the ROC suffers in the theopolitical conflict.

¹⁴ **Lavrov, Sergey**. September 27, 2014. STATEMENT by H.E. Mr. Sergey V. LAVROV, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the 69th session of the UN General Assembly. <http://www.un.org/en/ga/69/meetings/gadebate/pdf/RU_en.pdf> (23.02.2016).

¹⁵ See, for example, the documentary that was released on the first anniversary of the incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation: **Kondrashev, Andrey**. 15.03.2015. VIDEO. Crimea. The Way Home. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t42-71RpRgI>> (28.02.2016).

3. Theopolitics: the Moscow Patriarchate, the Uniates and schismatics

There is nothing new in blaming the Catholics as the source of Orthodox troubles; it has been going on more or less continuously for at least a quarter of a century already. It is based on the fact that the ROC considers Russia and most of the former Soviet Union as its canonical territory. The consequence is that the work of other Churches is often seen as “stealing of souls” and undermining Orthodoxy¹⁶. Similarly to the imperial ambition of the Russian state to be a major world power with its spheres of influence in the “near abroad” countries, the ROC aspires to be the leading Church of the Orthodox World. Here the historical rivalries between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarchate and more generally between Orthodoxy and Catholicism (as tradition is very important in Orthodoxy) come together in a complex manner with the political and demographic situation of today complicating the ROC’s aspirations of hegemony.

The numbers are important here. The ROC is the biggest of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches; as of January 2010 it had approximately 30,142 parishes worldwide, whereas the next largest, the Romanian Orthodox Church, had 13,527 parishes at around the same time. Out of the more than 30,000 parishes belonging to the ROC, 12,444 were in Russia and 11,790 in Ukraine (UOCMP). So almost half of the Moscow Patriarchate’s numbers come from Ukraine. If the Ukrainian churches were to leave the Moscow Patriarchate, the ROC would be comparable with the Romanian Church in size.¹⁷ The fear of secession is a familiar one to the ROC. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and the former Republics of the USSR became independent, it was calculated that if the churches of Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, Moldova, Central Asia and Ukraine left the Moscow Patriarchate, it would lose 60 per cent of its parishes¹⁸. The independent Ukraine became the biggest headache. In the mid-1980s all the Orthodox churches in Ukraine belonged under the unified Moscow Patriarchate. The unity, however, had been forced.

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) has a complicated history. It was created by the Union of Brest in 1596 (hence the name Uniates). Its

¹⁶ See **Richters** 2013, pp. 36–56.

¹⁷ **Richters** 2013, p. 112. The latest number from 2014 is 12,636 with 502 parishes in Crimea already subtracted: **Lunkin, Roman** 2014. Ukrainian Christian Congregations by Church Affiliation (2013–2014). – East-West Church & Ministry Report. Vol. 22, No. 3. <<http://www.eastwestreport.org/pdfs/ew22-3.pdf>> (28.02.2016). [**Lunkin** 2014].

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

followers accept the Pope in Rome as their highest authority, but celebrate the liturgy according to the Byzantine rite. In 1946, the UGCC was dissolved on Stalin's orders and merged into the ROC. Many of its priests were persecuted by Soviet powers. Under Gorbachev's *perestroika* policy, the church was restored in 1988. As of 2014, the UGCC is estimated to have around 4.5 million members and 3,993 parishes.¹⁹ Add to that 1,097 Latin-rite Roman Catholic Churches (RCC)²⁰ in Ukraine and the fact that the RCC in Russia (a church that was still in 1997 considered by Patriarch Aleksei II to be only the church of Poles and the diplomatic corps²¹) decided in 2002 to establish four dioceses in Russia²² and we get an attitude of strong mistrust of Catholics.

Things got even worse for the ROC when the schismatics started to emerge. The success of the UGCC inspired another Orthodox group, and so in 1990 the restored Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) regained state recognition²³. Yet another Orthodox Church was formed out of the UAOC that had firstly seceded from Moscow in 1921 and was shut down and persecuted after World War II. In June 1992, with the support of the president of Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuck, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate (UOKP) was established²⁴. Since the beginning both of these churches have stressed their identity as Ukrainian national churches. Because of this they have found acceptance in Ukrainian society. In 2014 the UAOC had 1,237 parishes (10 parishes subtracted) and the UOKP had 4,653 (without 44 in Crimea)²⁵.

From the very beginning, the Moscow Patriarchate, with the help of the UOCMP, tried to suppress these movements²⁶. It has been one of the reasons

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96, and **Wikipedia. Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church**. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_Greek_Catholic_Church> (28.02.2016). A slightly different number 3910 (9 Crimean parishes already subtracted) is given by **Lunkin** 2014.

²⁰ **Lunkin** 2014. With 13 Crimean parishes subtracted.

²¹ **Richters** 2013, p. 39.

²² This infuriated Metropolitan Kirill and led to a temporary break in relations between the ROC and RCC. **Fagan, Geraldine**. 12 February 2002. Russia-Special Report: Orthodox Indignant at Establishment of Catholic Dioceses. Keston News Service. <<http://www.keston.org.uk/kns/2002/020212RU-01.htm>> (28.02.2016).

²³ **Wikipedia. Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church**. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_Autocephalous_Orthodox_Church> (28.02.2016).

²⁴ **Wikipedia. Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate**. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_Orthodox_Church_of_the_Kyivan_Patriarchate> (28.02.2016).

²⁵ **Lunkin** 2014.

²⁶ A good overview is given by **Richters** 2013, pp. 96–127.

these churches have not been able to get canonical recognition from other Orthodox Churches, as in these matters a consensus is required (compare the situation with Russia vetoing the resolutions of the UN Security Council when the Ukrainian issue is at hand)²⁷. To achieve its goals, the ROC has not hesitated to use political manipulation: during the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the presidential contest between Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich in 2010, the UOCMP openly supported the pro-Russian side²⁸. At the same time, the other churches (especially UGCC and UOKP) have been actively supporting the pro-Western side. When Euromaidan happened, Yanukovich was ousted and Crimea annexed, most of the churches in Ukraine (including the UGCC, UAOC and UOKP) openly supported the Ukrainian government while the UOCMP decided to remain neutral this time²⁹. The reasons for that were obvious: the UOCMP could no longer openly support the pro-Russian position, especially after the annexation of Crimea, since Russia was seen as an aggressor by the majority of Ukrainians, and, at the same time, the UOCMP wanted to maintain ties with Moscow and pro-Russian Ukrainians in the East.

In that light, it is no wonder that, since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, the popularity of the UOCMP has fallen considerably. There is an ongoing process of parishes leaving the UOCMP that has been nicknamed the “parade of cross-overs”³⁰. According to the latest estimates, there are 70 parishes that have left UOCMP for UOKP³¹. This process is now openly supported by Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine which recently initiated a move to

²⁷ See **UN Documents for Ukraine**.

<<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/ukraine/>> (01.03.2016).

²⁸ **Richters** 2013, pp. 115–124.

²⁹ **Lunkin, Roman** 2014. The Ukrainian Revolution and Christian Churches. – East-West Church & Ministry Report. Vol. 22, No. 3. <<http://www.eastwestreport.org/pdfs/ew22-3.pdf>> (01.03.2016); **Elliott, Mark R.** 2014. The Impact of the Ukrainian Crisis on Religious Life in Ukraine and Russia. – East-West Church & Ministry Report. Vol. 22, No. 3. <<http://www.eastwestreport.org/pdfs/ew22-3.pdf>> (01.03.2016), and **Marynovych, Myroslav** 2015. Ukrainian Churches and the Maidan. – **Hug, Adam** (Ed.). Traditional religion and political power: Examining the role of the church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova. Foreign Policy Centre, pp. 23–28. <<http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/1707.pdf>> (26.03.2016).

³⁰ **Вагнер, Александра**. 17 марта 2015. “Патриарх предал свою Церковь”. УПЦ МП массово покидают верующие. <<http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/26893910.html>> (20.03.2016).

³¹ **Симончук, Алексей**. 10.03.2016. Две УПЦ. Как война повлияла на крупнейшие конфессии в Украине. <http://news.liga.net/articles/politics/9479236-dve_upts_kak_voyna_povliyala_na_kрупнейshie_konfessii_v_ukraine.htm?utm_source=email&utm_medium=rassilka&utm_campaign=newsvsenovosti> (20.03.2016).

change the law with the purpose of making these cross-overs easier³². This move follows the opinion of the general population: according to the latest sociological survey, 59% of Ukrainians consider themselves Orthodox, 32% consider themselves members of UOKP and only 27% indicate themselves to be members of UOCMP³³. In view of this perspective, it is hardly surprising that the ROC has chosen to accuse the Uniates and schismatics. However, this tactic has had only moderate success thus far.

4. Recent developments

In the last two years, the Moscow Patriarchate has been especially active in foreign relations, trying to raise support for its position. Two main areas of interest here are relations with other Orthodox autocephalous churches, especially in view of the up-coming Pan-Orthodox Council to be held in Crete, Greece, in June 2016, and relations with the Roman Catholic Church.

The Pan-Orthodox Council is an event that has been in preparation since 1961 and the Ukrainian question has been in the minds of many as a potential area of conflict, since the idea of creating an autocephalous Ukrainian Church that would replace all the existing ones is very attractive in Ukraine, has some support abroad and is strongly opposed by Moscow³⁴. In January 2016 a preparatory meeting of Church leaders was held in Chambesy, Switzerland, and the ROC came out with a victory: the Ukrainian issue will not be debated at the council³⁵. However, this does not mean that the issue is settled. There is an ongoing debate in the framework of Orthodox canonical law about who has the right to make a decision about Ukraine: Constantinople or Moscow. Both sides have their arguments and it is worth

³² **Портал credo.ru. Лента новостей.** 01 марта 2016, 17:34. В Верховную Раду Украины внесен законопроект, связанный с порядком смены религиозными общинами их канонической юрисдикции. <<http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=118803>> (20.03.2016).

³³ **ЛИГА.net.** 13.01.2016, 16:49. В Украине прихожан УПЦ КП больше, чем УПЦ МП – опрос. <http://news.liga.net/news/society/8359087-v_ukraine_prikhozhan_upts_kp_bolshe_chem_upts_mp_opros.htm> (20.03.2016).

³⁴ **Gavrilyuk, Paul L.** 22 January 2106. The Future of Pan-Orthodox Council: To Be or Not To Be? – First Things. Web Exclusive. <<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/01/the-future-pan-orthodox-council-to-be-or-not-to-be>> (20.03.2016).

³⁵ **Interfax.** 27 January 2016, 16:23. Pan-Orthodox Council not to address Ukraine issue, transition to unified calendar. <<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12696>> (20.03.2016).

noting that when Ukraine's president Poroshenko met with Patriarch Bartholomew in his official visit to Turkey (March 9–10, 2016), the Patriarch said:

*You know that the Church of Constantinople is the Mother Church of the Ukrainian nation. We feel a spiritual bond between the Church of Constantinople and Ukraine.*³⁶

To untrained ears it sounds innocent enough, but the phrases “Mother Church of the Ukrainian nation” and “spiritual bond between the Church of Constantinople and Ukraine” are theologically loaded and even unprecedented. They are a clear signal that Moscow has not yet won³⁷.

The relationship between the Moscow Patriarchate and Roman Catholic Church has been complicated. As the rhetoric outline above indicates, one of the controversial issues has been the very existence of the UGCC, the Uniates, in Ukraine, which is considered by the ROC to be its canonical territory. This February the events took an unexpected turn: Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill unexpectedly met in Cuba at Havana airport on February 12, 2016, while the Patriarch was visiting Cuba and the Pope was passing by on his trip to Mexico. The heads of the RCC and ROC had never met before and, after a two-hour private discussion, they signed a public declaration. Three points of this 30-point declaration are of interest here as they are explicitly about Ukraine:

25. It is our hope that our meeting may also contribute to reconciliation wherever tensions exist between Greek Catholics and Orthodox. It is today clear that the past method of “uniatism”, understood as the union of one community to the other, separating it from its Church, is not the way to re-establish unity. Nonetheless, the ecclesial communities which emerged in these historical circumstances have the right to exist and to undertake all that is necessary to meet the spiritual needs of their faithful, while seeking to live in peace with their neighbours. Orthodox and Greek Catholics are in need of reconciliation and of mutually acceptable forms of co-existence.

³⁶ **President of Ukraine. Official Website. News.** 10 March 2016, 16:28. President: We are grateful to Ecumenical Patriarch for constantly supporting Ukraine. <<http://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/prezident-mi-vdyachni-vselenskomu-patriarhu-za-postijnu-pidt-36837>> (20.03.2016).

³⁷ **Тышкевич, Игорь.** 12.03.16, 13:30. Сценарии появления поместной церкви в Украине: результаты встречи Порошенко и Варфоломея. – Хвиля. <<http://hvylya.net/analytics/politics/stsenarii-poyavleniya-pomestnoy-tserkvi-v-ukraine-rezultaty-vstrechi-poroshenko-i-varfolomeya.html>> (20.03.2016).

26. *We deplore the hostility in Ukraine that has already caused many victims, inflicted innumerable wounds on peaceful inhabitants and thrown society into a deep economic and humanitarian crisis. We invite all the parts involved in the conflict to prudence, to social solidarity and to action aimed at constructing peace. We invite our Churches in Ukraine to work towards social harmony, to refrain from taking part in the confrontation, and to not support any further development of the conflict.*

27. *It is our hope that the schism between the Orthodox faithful in Ukraine may be overcome through existing canonical norms, that all the Orthodox Christians of Ukraine may live in peace and harmony, and that the Catholic communities in the country may contribute to this, in such a way that our Christian brotherhood may become increasingly evident.*³⁸

It is quite obvious that points 25 and 27 strike a compromise: the ROC will no longer press the issue of the Uniates and the RCC has agreed to support Moscow's claim to represent the only legitimate form of canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine, that is, the UOCMP. It is not surprising that the reaction of the UOKP issued three days later was bitter:

The abovementioned paragraphs [i.e. paragraphs 25–27] of the Declaration are seized by a spirit from the worst examples of secular diplomacy, full of equivocal connotations, biased opinions, and groundless assertions. /.../

*For the Kyivan Patriarchate, it is unacceptable to practice the kind of diplomacy where decisions about Ukraine and Ukrainian ecclesiastical and public affairs are adopted without representatives of Ukraine, ignoring their thoughts and positions. The Munich Pact of 1938 and its bitter legacy testify that issues concerning us cannot be resolved without our participation.*³⁹

The mentioning of the Munich Pact signals that, according to the UOKP, the issue here is not only about theopolitics (agreements between two churches) but also of geopolitics: the Vatican as a state affirming the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The vagueness of point 26 of the joint declaration is seen as an agreement with the Russian position: that the conflict in Ukraine has nothing to do with Russian aggression – a position that is maintained by the Kremlin and the ROC (by declaring that there is a civil war in Ukraine,

³⁸ **Joint Declaration of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.** Friday, 12 February 2016. <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco_20160212_dichiarazione-comune-kirill.html> (20.03.2016).

³⁹ **Прес-центр Київської Патріархії.** 27 February 2016, 14:22. Reaction to the Havana Declaration. Statement by the Press Centre of the Kyivan Patriarchate. <<http://www.cerkva.info/en/publications/articles/8136-havana-decl-en.html>> (21.03.2016).

the ROC basically follows the official line of the Kremlin because it says nothing about Russian involvement). Many members of the Verkhovna Rada publicly shared similar opinions, saying that Rome has “capitulated to Moscow”⁴⁰. The general population was equally furious: on the night of March 14 somebody sawed off the hand holding a cross of the statue of Pope John Paul II in Drohobych, Lviv oblast⁴¹. President Poroshenko initiated a petition on February 22 to take away the Order of Prince Yaroslav the Wise from Patriarch Kirill (given to him in 2013). The order is awarded for distinguished services to the state and people of the Ukrainian nation. The statement reads: “It is unacceptable that the head of the church of the aggressor-state bears the honours of our country”. To enable the president to take action, the petition has to gather 25,000 signatures in 90 days⁴². Even Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the UGCC, criticized the declaration in an interview on February 14, saying also that point 26 is especially problematic:

Today, it is widely recognized that if soldiers were not sent from Russia onto Ukrainian soil and did not supply heavy weapons, if the Russian Orthodox Church, instead of blessing the idea of “Russkiy mir” (the Russian world), supported Ukraine gaining control over its own borders, there would be neither any annexation of Crimea nor would there be any war at all. /.../

Undoubtedly, this text has caused deep disappointment among many faithful of our Church and among conscientious citizens of Ukraine. Today, many contacted me about this and said that they feel betrayed by the Vatican, disappointed by the half-truth nature of this document, and even see it as indirect support by the Apostolic See for Russian aggression against Ukraine. I can certainly understand those feelings.⁴³

⁴⁰ **Портал credo.ru. Лента новостей.** 16 февраля 2016, 21:59. Украинские парламентарии заявляют о «беспрецедентной капитуляции Рима перед Москвой». <<http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=118504>> (21.03.2016).

⁴¹ **Портал credo.ru. Лента новостей.** 15 марта 2016, 15:49. Неизвестные отпилили руку памятнику Папе Римскому в Украине. <<http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=119124>> (21.03.2016).

⁴² **ЕЛЕКТРОННІ ПЕТИЦІЇ. Офіційне інтернет-представництво Президента України.** 22.02.2016. Позбавити звання кавалера ордена Ярослава Мудрого I ступеня (присвоєного у 2013 році) патріарха російської церкви Кіріла. <<https://petition.president.gov.ua/petition/21210>> (21.03.2016).

⁴³ **Fr. Yatsiv, Ihor.** 14 February 2016, 16:58. «Two Parallel Worlds» – An Interview with His Beatitude Sviatoslav. INFORMATION RESOURCE of Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. <http://news.ugcc.ua/en/interview/two_parallel_worlds_an_interview_with_his_beatitude_sviatoslav_75970.html> (21.03.2016).

The fact that Shevchuk was openly critical of his superior was immediately seized by the ROC, who accused him of insubordination. The Pope answered quickly, stating that he has great respect for Shevchuk, who has the right to have a different opinion, and that he understands how Ukrainians might feel betrayed. He also said that the joint declaration as a document is debatable⁴⁴. Soon after that he sent the Apostolic Nuncio to Ukraine, Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti to the region of Donbass, to report what can be done to help the Ukrainian people⁴⁵.

Meanwhile, Patriarch Kirill has had his own problems. Many conservatives have opposed the very fact that the Patriarch met with the Pope and they called themselves “brothers”. This was seen as a betrayal of Orthodox faith and identity, a heresy of “ecumenism”. The protest movement gathered momentum in March, with emotions running high. On March 6 the conference “The Russian Orthodox Church and the Havana Declaration – a victory or defeat?” gathered more than 400 people from Russia and abroad, most of them highly critical of the Patriarch.⁴⁶ Among other numerous protests on social media, a petition was addressed to high ranking officials of the Russian state, President Vladimir Putin and FSB director Alexander Bortnikov, among others. The letter states that the Havana Declaration is a direct threat to the national security of Russia, as it now gives the RCC, who was directly responsible for Euromaidan in Ukraine, a way to activate its work in Russia hand in hand with Western intelligence services. Once more the main threat is an understanding that the declaration denies Orthodoxy its true nature of being the only true Church and thus it destroys the fabric of the whole Russian Society⁴⁷. Clearly, the rhetoric of blaming the Uniates has its setbacks.

⁴⁴ **Fr. Chirovsky, Andriy.** February 18, 2016. Pope Francis calls Havana Joint Declaration debatable, understands Ukrainians might feel betrayed. – The Catholic World Report. <http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/4591/pope_francis_calls_havana_joint_declaration_debatable_understands_ukrainians_might_feel_betrayed.aspx> (21.03.2014).

⁴⁵ **Портал credo.ru. Лента новостей.** 26 февраля 2016, 19:02. Апостольский нунций в Украине посетил прифронтовую зону Донецкой области. <<http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=118738>> (21.03.2014).

⁴⁶ **Четверикова, Ольга.** 11 марта 2016. Русская Православная Церковь и Гаванская декларация – победа или поражение? – Завтра. <<http://zavtra.ru/content/view/russkaya-pravoslavnaya-tserkov-i-gavanskaya-deklaratsiya---pobeda-ili-porazhenie/>> (21.03.2014).

⁴⁷ **Обращение православных граждан России к госвласти и иерархам РПЦ МП с требованием навести порядок.** 6 март 2016. Институт высокого коммунитаризма. <http://communitarian.ru/publikacii/tserkovnaya_analitika/obraschenie_pravoslavnyh_grazhdan_rossii_k_vysshim_organam_gosvlasti_i_cerkovnym_ierarham_s_trebovaniem_navesti_zakonny_poryadok_09032016/> (21.03.2016).

5. The “Russian World” and the Moscow Patriarchate

While Ukrainian nationalism is comparable to nationalism in other countries in Eastern Europe in the sense that it is primarily secular and based mainly on patriotism, culture and language and especially stresses the difference of Ukrainians from Russians, who claim that Ukrainians are “Little Russians”⁴⁸, Russian nationalism is a somewhat different story, as exemplified in the concept of the “Russian World”.

The concept was originally worked out in the 1990s as an identity-based marketing brand to promote Russia’s soft power, then backed by Vladimir Putin who used it for the first time already in 2001 in his speech before the first World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad⁴⁹. In the 2000s the brand was backed up by several state-sponsored projects, most notably by the Russkiy Mir Foundation (2007) with its main goals to support learning of the Russian language, to popularize Russian culture and heritage, to reconnect Russian diaspora and to support people abroad who are interested in Russian language and culture⁵⁰. The basic idea behind this concept is that of a civilizational space that is shared by Russians and Russian speaking people in Russia and all over the world. As such, it is a somewhat vague concept that can be used in different ways to promote different interests of Russia.⁵¹ However, the fact that religion is an integral part of it and that interests do go beyond the mere promoting of Russian language and culture is seen in another example of President Putin using the term “Russian World” in a speech, that is in his address to State Duma on the occasion of the incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation on March 18, 2014:

Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus./.../

⁴⁸ For a detailed current overview see **Olszański, Tadeusz A.** 28.08.2015. Ukraine’s wartime nationalism. – OSW Commentary Number 179. <http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_179_0.pdf> (21.03.2016).

⁴⁹ **Laruelle, Marlene.** May 2015. The “Russian World“. Russia’s Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination. Washington, D.C.: Center on Global Interests, pp. 3–6. <http://globalinterests.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/FINAL-CGI_Russian-World_Marlene-Laruelle.pdf> (21.03.2016) [**Laruelle** 2015].

⁵⁰ **The Russkiy Mir Foundation: Creation and Mission Statment.** <<http://russkiymir.ru/en/fund/index.php>> (21.03.2016).

⁵¹ **Laruelle** 2015, pp. 1–3.

In people's hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia. This firm conviction is based on truth and justice and was passed from generation to generation, over time, under any circumstances, despite all the dramatic changes our country went through during the entire 20th century. /.../

I believe that the Europeans, first and foremost, the Germans, will also understand me. Let me remind you that in the course of political consultations on the unification of East and West Germany, at the expert, though very high level, some nations that were then and are now Germany's allies did not support the idea of unification. Our nation, however, unequivocally supported the sincere, unstoppable desire of the Germans for national unity. I am confident that you have not forgotten this, and I expect that the citizens of Germany will also support the aspiration of the Russians [in Russian original „русского мира“, i.e. of the Russian world], of historical Russia, to restore unity.⁵²

More important than the formal mention of the Russian world (changed into “the Russians” in the official translation) are the ideas expressed in that speech. The first excerpt of the speech lays out the foundations of the civilizational space of the Russian world. The second and third excerpt stress the emotional component that unites the people of the Russian World (or Russians) saying effectively that these emotions can be a legitimate basis of foreign policy.

These ideas were later echoed in the Declaration of Russian Identity that was adopted by the 18th Global Russian National Assembly on November 11, 2014. That document outlined four main points of Russian identity: (1) the concept of *Russian* is multi-ethnic and international, i.e. a person considering oneself a Russian may have a different ethnic background and he or she may live outside of Russia; (2) the idea is stressed that the acceptance of Russian identity by representatives of other nationalities was never the result of forceful assimilation of certain ethnic groups (russification), but the result of free personal choice of certain individuals; (3) the leading role of Orthodoxy cannot be denied by non-believers who still want to consider themselves Russians; (4) emotional solidarity with the history of Russia is required and pride for the Victory in 1945 is especially important. In conclusion:

[A] Russian is someone who considers themselves Russian; who has no other ethnic preferences; who speaks and thinks in the Russian language; who acknowledges Orthodox Christianity as the basis of the national spiritual culture; who feels solidarity with the fate of the Russian people.⁵³

⁵² **Putin, Vladimir.** March 18, 2014. Address by President of the Russian Federation. <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>> (21.03.2016).

⁵³ **EuroMaidan Press.** 2014/11/14. Declaration of Russian Identity passed. <<http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/11/14/declaration-of-russian-identity-passed/>> (26.03.2016).

This evident blending of Russian national identity with Orthodoxy is not accidental; it is the result of the consistent efforts of the Moscow Patriarchate, most notably of Patriarch Kirill personally. Just one example is sufficient here to illustrate his activities. On January 7, 2015, the Patriarch confessed in an interview with Dmitry Kiselyov on TV channel Russia-1 that it was he who suggested that the melody of the anthem of the Soviet Union (originally selected by Stalin) was to be restored as the national anthem of Russia (which did happen in 2000 with different lyrics):

I recall a discussion in relation to our national anthem, about its music. I was invited to the channel Russia, it was, as they say nowadays, a talk show, I still was at that time the metropolitan attending such events, I said the following: "We have a coat of arms – the two-headed eagle, it is from the same medieval Russia, the symbol of Byzantine. We have a tricolour – it is the Russian Empire. We must have the Soviet period – let's keep the music. We should also have a new Russia – let's take modern lyrics." /.../ So I offered simple words: faith – ancient Russia; great power – the Russian Empire; justice – the revolution; solidarity – the Soviet era; and dignity – the new Russia.⁵⁴

The Patriarch spoke as an identity builder who tried to create a positive image of Russian history, one that includes Orthodoxy as its basis and at the same time reconciles people with their difficult and complex history in a way to be proud of it. The most problematic elements from the Orthodox point of view were his positive assertions about the Soviet revolution and Soviet time. It is well known that "Bolshevik justice" meant severe repressions for the Church⁵⁵. The same applies to the Soviet era, of which he said the following:

Soviet period? Yes, of course, there were the camps and collectivization with the corresponding blood, there was the industrialization with the help of GULAG, but wasn't there also an enthusiasm, wasn't there solidarity? Wasn't there the virgin lands campaign? Weren't there Komsomol youth brigades? Weren't there many other things that are today being lamented by, say, older and older middle age people? Solidarity.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ **Портал credo.ru. Лента новостей.** 08 января 2015. Патриарх Кирилл (Гундяев) признал, что это он предложил сохранить у нынешнего гимна РФ мелодию гимна СССР, которую в 1944 году выбрал лично Сталин. <<http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=111322>> (26.03.2016). [**Портал credo.ru. Лента новостей.** 08 января 2015].

⁵⁵ **Elliott, Mark R.** 2014. Persecution of Christians in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet and Post-Soviet Union. – East-West Church & Ministry Report. Vol. 22, No. 3. <<http://www.eastwestreport.org/43-english/e-20-2/343-persecution-of-christians-in-tsarist-russia-and-the-soviet-and-post-soviet-union>> (01.03.2016).

⁵⁶ **Портал credo.ru. Лента новостей.** 08 января 2015.

The Patriarch's promotion of the Russian World is characterised by compromises: in order to promote Orthodoxy as a constituent part of Russian identity to the large segment of Russian population nostalgic of Soviet times⁵⁷, these times have to be glorified even by the Church that suffered at the hands of Soviet authorities. Nevertheless, in general, it has been a successful move.

6. The battles in Donbass and the Moscow Patriarchate

That the Moscow Patriarchate has succeeded in making itself invaluable to Russian identity rather too well is evident from one of the first drafts of the constitution of the Donetsk People's Republic (14.05.2014):

Preamble. We, the Supreme Council of the Donetsk People's Republic, feeling like an integral part of the Russian World as Russian civilization, the community of Russian and other peoples; thinking about the indivisibility of fate of the whole Russian World and still willing to remain its partakers; remaining dedicated to ideals and values of the Russian World and honouring the memory of our ancestors who shed blood for these ideals and values and passed to us the love and respect of our common Fatherland; confessing the Orthodox Faith (Christian Orthodox Catholic faith of Eastern Confession) of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and recognizing it as the cornerstone of the Russian World; also recognizing the historical responsibility and expressing the will of multi-ethnic people of the Donetsk People's Republic that was expressed in the decisions of the referendum of May, 11th 2014, /.../ proclaim the national sovereignty of the Donetsk People's Republic on all its territory and establishment of a sovereign independent state, based on the restoration of a unified cultural and civilizational space of the Russian World, on the basis of its traditional religious, social, cultural and moral values, with the prospect of becoming a part of Greater Russia as halo territories of the Russian World; and accept this constitution of the Donetsk People's Republic.

Article 9.2. In Donetsk People's Republic the leading and dominant belief is the Orthodox faith (Christian Orthodox Catholic faith of Eastern Confession) professed by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

Article 9.3. The historic experience and role of the Orthodoxy of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is recognized and respected, including as the systemic pillar of the Russian World.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See, for example, **White, Stephen** 2010. Soviet nostalgia and Russian politics. – Journal of Eurasian Studies 1, pp. 1–9.

⁵⁸ **Конституция Донецкой Народной Республики. Unofficial Draft.** Принята Верховным Советом Донецкой Народной Республики 14 мая 2014 года. Russian original is available at <<http://garizo.blogspot.com/2014/05/donetsk-he-constitution-of-peoples.html>> (26.03.2016).

When this document became public, it had to be a kind of embarrassment as this draft was quickly replaced with the version that had the Preamble removed and article 9 changed:

Article 9.2. Religious associations are separated from the state and are equal before the law.

Article 9.3. No religion and ideology is allowed to be made a state one and compulsory.⁵⁹

As was outlined above, the ROC sees the conflict in Ukraine as a religious one, but with one important specification: according to the ROC, the religious war is fought by the Uniates and schismatics against the churches of the UOCMP, while the wider conflict is just a civil war in which the ROC and the UOCMP remain neutral. Nevertheless, it is clear that the separatists' loyalty to the idea of the Russian World gives the conflict a distinct religious character in a much wider sense than the ROC is willing to admit.

The persecution of people of other faiths than the UOCMP Orthodoxy by the separatists is well documented⁶⁰. Besides that, the separatists have uploaded several videos on social media, documenting their religious fervour. The most telling one is of artillery fire targeting the Donetsk airport that was held by the Ukrainians. The shots were initiated with a command: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – Fire!"⁶¹ When the miraculous icon of the Mother of God of Tikhvin was brought to Donetsk in 2014, the uploaded video had the following commentary: "Once upon a time this holy (icon) inspired the Russian soldiers in the field of the Battle of Borodino and in Sevastopol in the time of the Crimean War. Now she is called to help the Russians in the Novorossiia."⁶² The icon was later taken to the frontline, too⁶³. One has to remember that the home of the icon

⁵⁹ **Конституция Донецкой Народной Республики**. 14.05.2014г. Официальный сайт Донецкой Народной Республики©. <<http://dnr-online.ru/konstituciya-dnr/>> (26.03.2016).

⁶⁰ See footnote 10 above.

⁶¹ **Во имя Отца и Сына и Святого Духа ОГОНЬ!!!** December 29, 2014. VIDEO. <<https://www.facebook.com/putercaput/videos/754549181303178/>> (28.09.2016).

⁶² **В Донецк доставили Тихвинскую ополченную икону Божьей Матери**. 29 September 2014. VIDEO. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RuVUEK39qCc>> (28.03.2016).

⁶³ **Крестный ход с иконой Тихвинской Божией Матери**. 17. December 2014. VIDEO. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SqWZdm9gMg>> (28.03.2016).

is the Tikhvin Monastery in Russia and that this icon is very famous⁶⁴. It is impossible for this icon to appear in the hands of Donetsk separatists without high-level Church authorities allowing it. There are many documented cases of the UOCMP and the ROC priests' involvement in separatist army units, one of the UOCMP priests even oversaw a punitive unit in the basement of his church where a torture chamber was set up⁶⁵.

At least two groups with distinct Orthodox identity are fighting in Donbass: the Russian Orthodox Army and the Cossacks. "The Russian Orthodox Army of Donetsk Peoples' Republic" was initially formed as a paramilitary group in 2014 and it is now a part of Oplot Brigade. It has been involved in battles in Mariupol and Amvrosiivka Raion in June 2014, and in Karlivka in July 2014.⁶⁶ Journalist Patrick Lancaster, working in Donbass on the side of the separatists, filmed them in battles near Donetsk in December 2014⁶⁷. The religious motivation of this group was initially especially high as can be seen in the film made on that occasion⁶⁸.

The Cossacks, an ethno-cultural group, have special ties with both the ROC and the President of the Russian Federation. The group claims to defend Orthodoxy and Russian World values, and its rhetoric has strong undertones of xenophobia and violence. They came into Ukraine already in April 2014⁶⁹ and they have been active ever since. The Cossacks have a history of taking part in conflicts that have taken place since the disintegration of the Soviet Union: in Transnistria in 1992, in Abkhazia in 1993, and in the two Russian-Chechen wars (1995–1995 and 1999–2009)⁷⁰. They also found their own

⁶⁴ **Википедия. Тихвинская икона Божией Матери.**

<https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Тихвинская_икона_Божией_Матери> (28.03.2016).

⁶⁵ **Novitchkova, Tomak** 2015, pp. 10–11.

⁶⁶ **Проект "Стоптерор"**. Русская Православная Армия так называемой Донецкой Народной Республики. Ноябрь 17, 2015. <<https://stopterror.in.ua/info/2015/11/russkaya-pravoslavnaia-armiya-tak-nazyvaemoj-donetskoj-narodnoj-respubliki/>> (28.03.2016).

⁶⁷ **Lancaster, Patrick**. 9 December, 2014. VIDEO. Military actions in Donbass #1: Russian Orthodox Army Training, in battle, and firing D-30 artillery. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHXPzWo4e08>> (28.03.2016).

⁶⁸ **Новороссия: Рождение Православной Армии**. July 4, 2014. VIDEO.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9D_UIBKZxU> (28.03.2016).

⁶⁹ **Novitchkova, Tomak** 2015, p. 8. There is a special **Synodal Committee for the Cooperation with Cossacks**. <<http://www.skvk.org/>> (28.03.2016); and also a **Council for Cossacks Affairs**. The Office of the President of the Russian Federation. <<http://www.skvk.org/o-sovete>> (28.03.2016).

⁷⁰ **Rotar, Igor**. August 13, 2014. The Cossack Factor in Ukrainian War. – Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 11, Issue 149. <http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42747&no_cache=1#.VvmPtOJ97cs> (28.03.2016).

justification: in June 2014 the Supreme Ataman Vodolatsky proclaimed the Ukrainian oblasts of Luhansk and Donetsk to be the territory of the Cossack's historical Don Republic, which was illegally annexed in 1922 by the Council of People's Commissars and joined to Ukraine⁷¹. The attitude expressed in this statement is shared by many other Cossacks, being a source of tension between them and other pro-Russia separatists. Ataman Nikolai Kozitsyn, who visited Russia after the capture of Debaltseve in February 2015, gave an interview to Gazeta.Ru describing how he and 750 Cossacks helped to win the battle. He noted that 90% of the Cossacks were locals and that helped as the locals knew the landscape. In answer to the question about tensions between him and the leaders of Luhansk People's Republic, he stated that he does not aspire to be a statesman in Luhansk, and that he has his own mission:

*Higher above me are only God and president Putin. Only they can be, I repeat, but I thank God for giving Russia such a president. Putin is saying today: they're our people living in Donbass, we will not leave them alone. I and my Cossacks will help the president in that.*⁷²

In order to understand the situation, it is essential to know that while many Cossacks come from Russia, there are tens of thousands of individuals claiming to be ethnic Cossacks across the region, and many were indeed loyal to the Russian president already before the conflict. So Kozitsyn is also reported to say:

*The Luhansk People's Republic is just a territory with no judicial state. I talk to the guys in [Donetsk and Luhansk], but they know that we are Cossacks in Cossack lands /.../ I've always said that we belong to Russia and should return these lands to Russia.*⁷³

⁷¹ УНИАН. 19.06.2014. 15:22. Глава российского казачества: количество направленных из РФ в Украину боевиков никто не считает. <<http://www.unian.net/politics/930649-glava-rossiyskogo-kazachestva-kolichestvo-napravlennyih-iz-rf-v-ukrainu-boevikov-nikto-ne-schitaet.html>> (28.03.2016).

⁷² Ветров, Игорь. 06.03.2015, 21:33. Надо мной только Господь Бог и Путин. – Газета.Ру <http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/03/06_a_6446745.shtml> (29.03.2016).

⁷³ Barraby, Thomas. 02/19/15 at 9:15 AM. Who Are The Cossack Fighters Who Spearheaded Rebels' Capture Of Debaltseve In Eastern Ukraine? – International Business Times. <<http://www.ibtimes.com/who-are-cossack-fighters-who-spearheaded-rebels-capture-debaltseve-eastern-ukraine-1821514>> (29.03.2016).

7. Conclusion

The theopolitics of the Moscow Patriarchate in the case of Ukraine involve at least three different but related factors. The first is plain Church politics – in the sense that the ROC has its ecclesial interests in Ukraine and is trying to maintain its influence there – especially as the existence of the UOCMP and its relatedness to the ROC is of crucial importance for the ROC's ambition to be the leading Orthodox Church in the World. It would be a severe blow to the ROC if all the different Ukrainian Orthodox Churches were to unite and form a single Ukrainian national Orthodox Church separated from Moscow (whatever its new official name). The possibilities, in principle, are there. Thus, it is quite understandable that the Moscow Patriarchate has created a parallel scenario within the Ukrainian conflict of being attacked by other Churches in Ukraine. Secondly, while the UOCMP is formally neutral in the conflict, the overall way the ROC pursues its agenda is so similar to the way the Kremlin acts that it is almost impossible to separate the geopolitics of the Russian state from the theopolitics of the Patriarchate at times. This is where the concept of theopolitics fits in: this fusion of the activities of the Kremlin and of the Patriarchate comes not only from their close cooperation but also from the cultural milieu which the ROC has been involved in creating – namely the third factor, Orthodox nationalism regarding the Russian world. It is precisely this factor of religious nationalism that has been the greatest success and the greatest problem in the case of Ukraine. Before the Maidan it was a success story: a pro-Russian government existed in Kiev, or at least a strong pro-Russian sentiment in the country, even in times when the government was not so friendly towards the Kremlin. There was the prominent idea that Ukrainians and Russians are basically the same Orthodox nation belonging to the Russian world. Of course, there were opposing Ukrainian nationalism and opposing national Orthodox Churches, but they were a problem to contain instead of actively fight. It is precisely here that the success of the ROC's policies is not so certain. Resistance to the idea of the Russian World has definitely grown much stronger over the last two years in Ukraine, even to the point that it can be said: Ukraine is no longer a part of the Russian world. But what is left for the Russian Orthodox Church if Ukraine is gone?

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