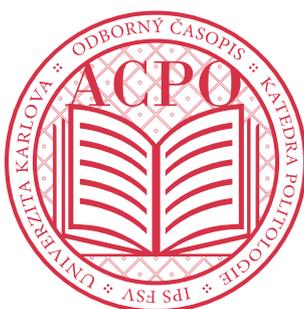


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The Russian Orthodox Church: An Effective Religious Instrument of Russia's "Soft" Power Abroad. The Case Study of Moldova

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Abstract:

By stepping up linkages with post-Soviet states and by creating a various and sophisticated scope of soft power instruments, the Russian federation has striven to maintain its strong influence and simultaneously sought to block Western impact in the Post-soviet region. The principal goal of this study is to explore how the Russian political establishment and the influential Russian Orthodox Church are working together to generate Orthodox Christian linkages in the post-Soviet state of the Republic of Moldova and how they are using Orthodox aspects related to "Orthodox identity" and "Orthodox brotherhood" with a view of obtaining support and admiration of the population of this country. The Russian Orthodox Church as an institution is increasingly becoming an effective tool of the Russian concept of soft power, which is taking on growing dimensions and dangerous forms in the hands of the current Russian political leaders. A success or failure of this kind of Russian soft power is subsequently evaluated in the conclusion.

Key words: *Soft power; Foreign policy; The Russian Federation; The Republic of Moldova; The Russian Orthodox Church; The Moldavian Orthodox Church*

Introduction

Nowadays, the term *soft power* – thus some ability to attract and co-opt, rather than coerce (*hard power*) – has become a significant element in practical politics, in international relations, but also in the academic sphere. This term and concept was established in the early 1990s by Joseph S. Nye, a prominent American professor in international relations at Harvard University. For a long period of time, numerous analysts of international relations have been examining Nye's concept critically and attempting to modify it. This means that his concept still remains popular and relevant at the end of the second decade of the 21st century.

This study focuses on the topic of Russia's soft power in a broad-spectrum perspective. In particular, it deals with religious soft power. In other words, it deals with an important Russian religious organization – the Russian Orthodox Church (the ROC), as a powerful instrument to promote Russia's soft power and Russian influence in the post-Soviet space (specifically Moldova). The study strives to point out why the ROC has become

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simultaneously an important partner and an instrument of Russian political elites in executing policies (in this case Russia's foreign policy). For this reason, it examines the role of the ROC in Russia's foreign policy.

As will be shown later, the term "*Russian soft power*" is a very heterogeneous concept and can be viewed from several different angles. It depends on the specific situation. At the outset, it should be noted that leading Russian political elites have gripped and implemented soft power in Russia's foreign policy. Therefore, the Russian federation's (the RF) experience in this direction can undoubtedly contribute to an overall understanding of how different states (including non-democratic and semi-democratic countries) adapt and implement the concept of soft power in various connotations, including the use of religion in Russia's (foreign) policy. Firstly, it will be defined how Russian soft power will be looked upon in this study. This definition is very important for the whole character of the study. A theoretical framework of linkage and leverage is chosen in this study. This theoretical concept has been developed by Levitsky and Way and tries to look into the kind of linkages which exist between the ROC and its jurisdictionally subordinate church – the Moldovan Orthodox Church (the MOC). In addition, this theoretical approach attempts to understand how these linkages can potentially be used by Russia as a way to achieve more influence in Moldova.

The main research question therefore is: What are the linkages between the ROC and the MOC? Moreover, the ambition of this study is to answer the following additional research questions: What are the main prerequisites for the ROC to become an effective tool of the Kremlin in implementing foreign policy and in promoting soft power abroad? In what ways does the ROC enforce its influence in the Russian neighbourhood, namely in Moldova? What specifically do these activities follow? Due to the fact that this work is devoted to examining the aspect of soft power, specifically by researching an influential religious organization, which is used by the Kremlin as a tool of its foreign policy, this work does not rely purely on the quantitative (statistical) data. The concept of soft power resulting from the power of culture, values, symbols and ideas is difficult to measure and requires in-depth analysis.

For this reason, a qualitative research method has been selected for the study. Specifically, a qualitative method of a single-case study. Michal Kořan writes, that "*detailed analysis of a case that has been chosen as a research object is typical for this type of study. Its aim is to "provide a deep understanding or causal explanation of this case"* (Kořan 2008: 33). Kořan also defines the case as a "*specific object, a closed system that has clear limits and its intrinsic logic of functioning and its particular nature*" (Kořan 2008: 33). In this regard, there is one case in this study: the ROC as an actor for the enforcement of Russia's soft power and Russian influence towards Moldova.

Explicitly, we have used the so-called unique case study. The basic characteristic of this type of case study is that "*there is nothing more than a deep understanding of one single case, without the ambition to offer whatever theoretically relevant and generalizing*" (Kořan 2008: 33). This type of case study has been chosen for a clear reason: there is no ambition to test or create any theory, but to concentrate on the phenomenon of religion – as an aspect of soft power – in Russia's foreign policy. There is an assumption, that the detailed and practical knowledge that this study offers has its own scientific and useful value without a need for theoretical generalization.

This study is composed of an analysis of official documents and articles of the ROC and its jurisdictionally subordinate church (the MOC). The Study consist of a number of relevant scientific studies, articles and books too. This implies that the study uses both

primary and secondary resources. In addition to the already mentioned official ROC documents, this study builds i.e. on the works of Nye (2003, 2004, 2013); Solik and Baar (2019); Levitsky and Way (2005, 2007, 2010) from the theoretical standpoint; by Curanović (2012, 2013), Lomagin (2012), Calus (2016), Solik and Baar (2016), Hug et al. (2015), Suslov (2014), Soroka (2016) or by Morini (2009).

Soft Power in Russian conditions

As mentioned in the introduction, the concept of soft power is associated with Joseph S. Nye. According to him, soft power is the ability to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. A defining feature of soft power is that it is non-coercive (Nye 2004). As Nye writes, *“it differs from hard power, the ability to use the ‘carrots and sticks’² of economic and military might to make others follow your will”* (Nye 2011). It means, that soft power shuns the traditional foreign policy tools of *“carrot and stick”*, seeking instead to achieve influence by building networks, communicating compelling narratives, establishing international rules, and drawing on the resources that make a country naturally attractive to the world (Nye 2004). *“The traditional foreign policy tools”* or hard power means *“the ability of countries to achieve preferred outcomes through the use of force, money or threats and is intuitively associated with the possession of tangible military and economic resources and their conversion into powerful behaviour”* (Winkler 2016: 13).

In the context of soft power Nye writes: *“...sometimes you can get the outcomes you want without tangible threats or payoffs. The indirect way to get what you want has sometimes been called ‘the second face of power’. A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it”* (Nye 2004: 5).

Nye continues that *“the soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)”* (Nye 2004: 11). The success of soft power depends largely on the actor’s reputation within the international community, as well as the flow of information between actors. Thus, soft power is often associated with the rise of globalization and neo-liberal international relations theory.

Even though Nye has shaped this concept in the Western environment with an emphasis on the United States (the U.S.) as the leader in promoting soft power, from around the first decade of 21st onwards, new actors (outside of the Western sphere of influence) have become intensively interested in the concept of soft power. This was mainly due to the rising trend and popularity of soft power. Among these new actors mainly regional powers can be listed, which are concentrated in the economic bloc, known under the BRICS acronym. Brazil, the RF, India, China and South Africa are considered a certain multipolar alternative to the West. These countries have been trying to use different soft power instruments (but in their own specific modification) in order to achieve a geopolitical influence, which will result in a change of the world order in the near future.

Specifically for the RF, the use of soft power in Russia’s foreign policy is more than obvious. This form of power has even become a part of the official foreign policy of the RF

² The phrase *“carrot and stick”* is a metaphor for the use of a combination of reward and punishment to induce a desired behavior.

(in the form of governmental documents)³. Leading Russian academics, politicians and religious (Christian Orthodox) representatives often publicly speak about this concept (for example Konstantin Kosachev, Alexander Lukin, Vladimir Putin or Sergey Lavrov⁴). However, Russia's soft power does not consist merely of written documents or some public statements. There are the specific resources and instruments of soft power that Kremlin uses in order to achieve a geopolitical superiority.

It also involves specific Russian language learning projects, mobility for foreign students at Russian universities, attempts of the RF to implement humanitarian or development aid, or multiple activities of Russian cultural and political organizations (for example Russkiy Mir Foundation, Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation – commonly known as Rossotrudnichestvo, or The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund). It is the cultural pillar of Russian soft power. The RF also uses “*intangible*” elements in the context of soft power, such as historical narratives and identities that Russia associates with surrounding countries. As regards the Russian sphere of influence, this influence is largely based on such “*intangible*” sources of soft power. A typical example in this respect is the myth of the Great Patriotic War and the associated myth of Russian “*anti-fascism*” (Solik, Baar 2019).

As indicated above, Russia's soft power is a very heterogeneous term and it is not clearly defined. In this respect, Solik and Baar offer three possible approaches or views on Russian soft power.⁵ This study respects this division. First, the majority view is a conviction that Russia simply cannot create standard soft power (based on liberal-democratic principles), but that Russia produces only hard (sharp) power. Joseph S. Nye also strongly supports this view. According to Nye, Russia (and also China) “*will need to match words and deeds in their policies, be self-critical, and unleash the full talents of their civil societies*” (Nye 2013) in order to develop its soft power. Nye argues, that soft power comes not only from the state, but also from a functioning civil society, democracy and liberal principles⁶ (Nye 2004). Nye and other researchers (for example Agnia Grigas, Magda Leichtova or Dumitru Minzarari) points out to excessive pressure and strict direction by the Kremlin (Solik, Baar 2019). In other words, they perceive Russian soft power as “*a centrally-orchestrated tool of Russian foreign policy... From this perspective, soft power is only generated by Russian policy endorsed by the regime and financed from the state budget*” (Keating, Kaczmarska 2019). A typical example in this regard may be the cultural pillar of Russian soft power.

³ A typical example is *the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2013*. In this important foreign policy document there is considerable scope for the term *soft power* (in Russian: *myagkaya sila*). In point two, Article 20 of this document is written: “*Soft power; a comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives building on civil society potential, information, cultural and other methods and technologies alternative to traditional diplomacy, is becoming an indispensable component of modern international relations. At the same time, increasing global competition and the growing crisis potential sometimes creates a risk of destructive and unlawful use of soft power and human rights concepts to exert political pressure on sovereign states, interfere in their internal affairs, destabilize their political situation manipulate public opinion, including under the pretext of financing cultural and human rights projects abroad*” (Garant 2013).

⁴ Several influential Russian officials publicly comment (in their articles or at various meetings) on the concept of soft power. See for example Kosachev 2012, Putin 2012, Lukin 2008 or Lavrov 2012, 2018.

⁵ See Solik, Baar (2019).

⁶ Nye has reacted to Russian excessive pressure and strict Russian government control in the context of soft power. According to him, these Russian government actions negates (liberal) attractiveness, openness and aspect of “*laissez faire*” (in general), which Nye prefers in his concept (Nye 2013).

Second, there is a view that argues that the vast majority of researchers have underestimated “illiberal” values of soft power which may become a source of attractiveness. Keating and Kaczmarek argue that *“rather, soft power theory and scholarship has a liberal democratic bias that obscures the possibility of thinking about the conservative and authoritarian nature Russian soft power. In other words, most considerations of soft power make an implicit and, from our point of view, incorrect assumption that soft power may only be derived from a pool of liberal values. Conversely, the authoritarian practices of governments such as Russia as well as normative conservatism must only be corrosive of soft power capabilities”* (Keating, Kaczmarek 2019).

Both authors detach themselves from the perception of Russian soft power as a purely governmental tool of Russian foreign policy and speak about Russian “illiberal” soft power, which is based on authoritative and extremely conservative values. Russian authoritarian and conservative values create real soft power effects. These effects materialize not only in other authoritarian states (in those parts of the world where liberalism and the liberal form of democracy has no historical background), but also among the growing populist and radical conservative constituencies in Western liberal democracies (Solik, Baar 2019). A typical example in this regard may be the domestic political values of Russian soft power which are subsequently reflected in the foreign policy of the RF.

Third, there is an opinion which presents that the sophisticated Russian soft power combines hard and soft power aspects. Andrew Chisholm describes this kind of Russian power as *“Russian smart power”*. He writes: *“Nye defines smart power as an intelligent combination of coercive hard power with attractive soft power. However, Nye’s theory fails to explain the mechanics of Russian power and the resultant rise of Russian influence because it does not account for Russian deception and obfuscation. The apparently disconnected and ambiguous nature of the individual elements of Russian hard and soft power complicates the development of an effective strategy”* (Chisholm 2018). Chisholm argues that Russian smart power uses deception to disrupt the awareness of its target, create opportunities to apply coercion, and legitimize its attractive soft power.

In addition, he emphasizes (in the context of recent events in Ukraine, Syria and Turkey) the importance of the interplay between coercion and attraction, which reveals the existence of a unique brand of Russian power (Solik, Baar 2019). The RF has adapted the smart power concept of simultaneous strategic coercion and attraction to fit the Russian strategic culture and worldview, and in so doing, has devised an innovative model to address Russian strategic challenges. The manipulation of Russian symbols as a soft power component of the smart power strategy reveals a deliberate attempt to use Russian culture in order to create an attractive effect (Chisholm 2018). A typical example in this regard may be the Russian soft power based on *“intangible”* sources – the myth of the Great Patriotic War and the associated myth of Russian *“anti-fascism”*. It means Russian *“anti-fascist”* soft power (Solik, Baar 2019).

It should be noted that this study is based on the first mentioned approach of looking at Russian soft power. Despite the fact that the foreign activities of the ROC can be considered as *“soft”* activities, the ROC has become *“an instrument of Russian Federation foreign policy that often becomes a mechanism of manipulation of the society and people as well as a means of strengthening influence on other countries. Political regimes, which in essence are far from values, make an easy use of religion, having a double advantage: trustfulness of believers and one’s own immorality”* (Pkhaldze 2012: 4). In other words, Russian

religious soft power is understood in this study as a type of power that is coordinated “*from above*”, that is, from the state. It lacks adequate openness and aspect of “*laissez faire*” (in the spirit of Nye’s concept of soft power). Moreover, the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in the context of soft power are overwhelmingly coercive and accompanied by psychological manipulation. Therefore, it is not possible to consider other than the „*hard*“ or “*sharp*” power approach in this case.

The concept of linkage and leverage

As mentioned in the introduction, the theoretical framework of linkage and leverage is selected for this study. This concept is rarely applied to Russia’s foreign policy. The theory of linkage and leverage is strongly associated with the prominent representatives of Democratization theory, Steven Levitsky and Lukan A. Way, who started developing the concepts in 2005 within their grand concept of competitive authoritarianism. They were the scholars who have conceptualized linkage and leverage as two basic factors of Western influence on the post-Communist “*regimes*”.⁷

Levitsky and Way define leverage as government’s vulnerability to external (Western) democratizing pressure. According to the scholars, mechanisms of leverage comprise diplomatic pressure, political conditionality, sanctions and military intervention, and of course, the threat of them. Initially the researchers argued that Western leverage is affected by both bargaining power of targeted authoritarian states, which is the latter’s ability to avoid punishing actions of the Western community, and potential economic, security, and the other impact the Western countries have on them (Levitsky, Way 2007). Later they reconsidered the causes that contribute to effectiveness of Western leverage and removed the possibility of the targeted state to “*bargain*” with the West, by replacing the bargaining with the tendency of Western powers to use their pressure. All in all, they concluded that the highest leverage is achieved when Western pressure is “*both likely and consequential*” (Levitsky, Way 2010: 43).

Levitsky and Way identified also three factors that determine leverage. The first of them is the size of the economic and military force of the target country. It is clear, that small and weak states are more vulnerable to external pressure than larger countries with substantial military and economic strength (such as China or Russia). The second factor is the existence of competing issues on Western foreign policy agenda. Levitsky and Way argue: leverage may be constrained...in countries where Western governments have some important economic or security interests at stake, such as in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, The United Arab Emirates and Turkey (Levitsky, Way 2005).

Thirdly, the degree of Western leverage can be affected by the existence of military, economic and political support that alternative (usually regional) power provides to incumbent governments facing Western pressure. The scholars call them “*black knights*”, and Russia which supports the loyal political regimes in the post-Soviet space and thereby undermines the Western “*democratizing*” impulse, is identified as one of these “*black knights*” (Levitsky, Way 2010). In short, leverage is quite a non-democratic tool that democratic

⁷ See Levitsky, Steven and Way, Lukan A.: *International Linkage and Democratization* (2005); *Competitive authoritarianism. Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (2010). Way, Lukan A. and Levitsky, Steven: *Linkage, Leverage, and the Post-Communist Divide* (2007).

Western countries do not disdain to use toward “unfriendly” non-democratic states when they do not comply with Western democratic norms.

Levitsky and Way define the second dimension of the post-Cold war environment, Western linkage, as “*the density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people, and information) between particular countries and the U.S., the European Union (the EU), and Western-dominated multilateral institutions*” (Levitsky, Way 2010: 43).

Linkage is a complex dimension of foreign policy that manifests itself in different spheres of inter-state relations. Levitsky and Way argue, that linkages can be categorized in six different groups: economic (trade, investment), intergovernmental (diplomatic and military connections, participation in alliances, treaties and international organizations), social (flows of people - migration networks, diaspora communities), communication (flows of information – internet and television networks), civil society (ties to NGOs, religious and party organizations, etc.), and geographic proximity (Way, Levitsky 2007). In the course of their conceptualization, they recognized that geographic proximity cannot be perceived as a dimension of linkage but a source of it or rather a facilitator and an intensifier of the linkage network. For this reason Levitsky and Way substituted it with “*technocratic linkage*” associated with the presence of the elite educated in the West and /or having close ties with Western universities, NGOs and institutes (Levitsky, Way 2010).

It is necessary to add, that this theory has been gradually extended by new academics to new aspects. For this study, Tolstrup’s approach is very important. Jakob Tolstrup has argued that the model of linkage and leverage is just as applicable to autocracy promotion as it is to democracy promotion. Tolstrup added a new concept in his model, wherein he developed the idea that the different linkages and ties between countries are dependent on the influence of gatekeeper elites. These elites have a certain amount of control over the linkages, and can therefore decide if they want to accept or reject foreign influence. The groups that can be defined as “*gatekeeper elites*” are diaspora communities, political groups, civil society groups, and business elites (Tolstrup 2013).

The Russian Orthodox Church as spiritual linkage in the post-Soviet space

Using the linkage and leverage concept of Levitsky and Way, it is possible to identify numerous (secular) linkages that tie the RF with its neighbourhood. Typical example in this respect are economic linkages as leverage over post-Soviet countries; the social and intergovernmental linkage, formed by the presence of Russian minorities (compatriots) in the Post-Soviet region; technocratic linkages, information linkages and civil society linkages. These linkages have become important parts of Russia’s foreign policy tool kit after the “*Orange*” Revolution in Ukraine. However, there is no space and ambition for detailed analyses of these (secular) linkages in this study.

As mentioned above, this study examines the role of the ROC in Russia’s foreign policy and in enforcing Russian influence in Moldova. At this point, it is appropriate to clarify the reason, why an attention should be paid to the ROC and its jurisdictionally subordinate Church – the MOC. Although instrumentalization of religion for political purposes abroad is not a specific case of the RF, this case requires a special attention from several primary reasons. The ROC – as the largest religious organization as well as an institution in the RF – has had a major impact on the formation of Russian national identity and its influence in

the Russian society has been rapidly increasing. Precisely for this reason it is possible to say that a “*desecularizing*” trend has been taking place in the RF since the 90s of the 20th century, in contrast to the trend of secularization, which is characteristic for Western Europe (and in the Western world in general), and which is accompanied by the crisis of Western identity and a retreat of religiosity.⁸

The current head of the ROC is Kirill (secular name Vladimir Gundyayev) who became Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus’ and Primate of the ROC on 1 February 2009. The ROC has become a privileged partner of the Kremlin (especially after 2000, when Vladimir Putin was elected President of the RF) in two main dimensions. In the national politics, the ROC supports Russia’s nationalist line as well as the traditionalist, conservative and spiritual values within the Russian society. However, the strength of the ROC lies not only in partaking in national policy making, but on the global scene too. The transnational potential of this church is enormous. The largest autocephalous⁹ Orthodox Church in the world has survived the Soviet collapse without a loss of territorial integrity and its influence more or less persisted throughout the post-Soviet region and even abroad, where it deepens its power by construction and refurbishing of its parishes. The number of believers inclining to this church is estimated at 150 million and pastoral activity is carried out in 60 countries (Dzidziguri 2016).

In these countries, the ROC relies on an extensive and persistent network of parishes of the ROC. According to the official data of the ROC, in 2016 there are 34,764 parishes of the ROC in the world. It is therefore possible to visit the parish of the ROC for example in Haiti, Uganda, Indonesia, Morocco, or in Cuba (Ruskaya pravoslavny tserkov: Ofitsialny sayt Moskovskogo patriarkhata 2016). From this reason, the Kremlin sophisticatedly uses this transnational nature of the ROC. Unfortunately, this Church has become an obedient instrument that in the hands of the current political leaders of the RF is taking on growing dimensions and dangerous forms. Various activities of the ROC often become a mechanism of manipulation of the society and people as well as a means of strengthening influence upon other countries. The transnational nature of ROC is underpinned by three main factors.

The historical experience of the ROC as a linkage in foreign policy of the Russian state

The first such factor is related to the historical experience of the ROC as a linkage in foreign policy of the Russian state. In the Russian state there is a continuous and long-term tradition of the use of religious elites (from the ROC) to promote Russian image and interests abroad. This tradition – which has survived to the present day – dates back to the early 18th century, as a result of reforms by Peter the Great.¹⁰ The clergy was *de facto* transformed into

⁸ In contrast, the situation in the RF, or generally in Eastern Europe is vastly different. Although the number of people who are religiously active in the RF is still relatively low, a quarter century after the collapse of the USSR, Russians claim allegiance to the Orthodox religion. According to a recent survey relating to the level of religiosity in Central and Eastern Europe from relevant and respected *Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project* in 2017, in the RF and in Eastern Europe in generally has sharply risen in share of adults who describe themselves as Orthodox Christians. Specifically in the RF, number of people who identify themselves as Orthodox Christians has increased from 37 % (1991) to 71 % (2015) (Pew Research Center 2017).

⁹ Autocephality is a complete church independence. In other words, autocephality is the right of autonomy for a church; specifically, the right to resolve all internal problems on its own authority and to appoint its own bishops, including the head of the church, without any obligatory expression of dependence on another church. Used especially in Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Independent Catholic churches.

¹⁰ Peter the Great ruled the Tsardom of Russia and later the Russian Empire from 1682 until his death in 1725,

civil servants educated at public universities and paid salaries by the state.¹¹ In exchange for this “*care*” orthodox clergy were required to serve the emperor’s regime (Curanović 2013). Church then swore allegiance and loyalty to the Emperor of All Russia and specific objectives were set that were to be met through religious organizations or missions on behalf of the Russian Empire. Since then the ROC has been demonstrating a broad-spectrum of activities abroad.

A typical example of such “*religious mission*” of the ROC was assistance in the cultural assimilation of the conquered territory. In other words, the ROC became an important vehicle for the Russification policies of the Russian imperial regime in newly acquired territories. The significance of the ROC in this field is plainly visible by the absorption of the Metropolitan of Kiev and all Rus’ – an influential metropolis, which was under the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople – in 1686 and the elimination of the Uniate Church (Union with Rome)¹² (Solik, Fiřakovský, Baar 2017). During the triple division of Poland (1772, 1793, 1795), Galicia became part of the Habsburg Empire, while most of what is now Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania fell under the Russian Empire. Within the territory controlled by the Russian Empire the Uniate Church was gradually suppressed. In the words of historian Vlad Naumescu: “*there, the Russian Church and State began to destroy the Union and forced Uniate dioceses to ‘return’ to Orthodoxy*” (Naumescu 2007: 47).

The violent and unfair steps of the Russian Empire and Russian Orthodox clergy were resented for example by Basialian monks (a monastic order of the Greek Catholic Church), who stood against them openly. In order to neutralize “*harmful*” western influences, the then Emperor of all Russia Nicholas I. in cooperation with the ROC banned the Uniate Church throughout the Russian Empire in 1839. Thus this Church was finally absorbed into the ROC (Solik, Fiřakovský, Baar 2017). In the late 19th century, Eastern Catholicism almost entirely disappeared from the Russian Empire.¹³ Emperor’s decisions in accordance with the Orthodox religious activities made strengthening of Russian influence in the region easier. Similar pressure tactics were used even in the introduction of Russian Orthodoxy in Georgia. Several years after the annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire (1801), in 1811, the autocephalous status of more than a thousand-year old Georgian Orthodox Church was canceled by the decision of the Russian authorities and Georgian believers were subsumed under the ROC.

Basically, history kept repeating itself, accompanied by a wave of repression, persecution and other violent deeds of secular power in cooperation with the Russian Orthodox clergy against (not only) religious ideas that were in opposition to the official ideology of

jointly ruling before 1696 with his elder half-brother, Ivan V.

¹¹ The Orthodox religion was first used in this country in the context of foreign (imperial) policy during the period of Peter the Great. Some scholar such as Alicja Curanović write about “*the roots of religious (orthodox) diplomacy*” (Curanović 2013), thus the instrumentalization of religious aspects for the foreign policy goals of the Russian state.

¹² The Uniate Church arose in 1596 split off from Orthodoxy in the Polish-Lithuanian State on the basis of the Brest-Litovsk Union and was subjected to Rome. Uniate Church recognizes the authority of the Pope and dogmatic doctrine shares with the Roman Catholic Church. But the liturgy is served and celebrated not according to the Latin rite (ceremony), but according to the Byzantine rite. In essence, the Brest-Litovsk Union has meant a move from under the Constantinople church administration under Rome due to a fear of Moscow, which Constantinople could not resist anymore (Solik, Fiřakovský, Baar 2017).

¹³ For comparison, the Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite survived in Galicia, which got under the Austrian rule in 1772. In Austria the Uniate Church was given the official name of “*Greek Catholic Church*” and it began receiving state support, which had a positive impact mainly on its secular clergy.

the Russian Empire. In the religious sphere, such measures included pogroms against the Old Believers¹⁴ in the 17th century, the mentioned violent suppression of the Georgian Orthodox Catholics, the Uniate Church or the persecution of Catholics in the Russian Empire following the partitions of Poland. Later – at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries – massive persecution of the Jews and downright hateful anti-Semitism was added to these measures.¹⁵

The activity of ROC on the expanding territory of the Russian Empire helped to create a positive image of this empire (for example as a protector of Orthodox nations). Likewise, these activities served to its wider impact beyond the borders of the empire itself. Clergy not only carried out diplomatic activities, but it also served as a messenger of the rulers in Moscow and carried out educational activities. Missionary centers turned into places that strengthened the Russian presence in the region (Curanović 2013). Within the Russian Empire there was so called “*organic colonialism*”¹⁶ towards Siberia and the Far East, which was understood by the Russian Empire as a “*civilizing mission approved by God*” (Morini 2009: 73). Basically the ROC worked among other things as “*national cement*” between the multiethnic “*periphery*” and the imperial center of the empire – Moscow. Emperor’s officials insisted that “*their colonial subjects in Central Asia and elsewhere consider Russian presence in these areas to be their affinity with paradise*” (Morini 2009: 73). Likewise, Alexander II (Emperor of All Russia in the years 1855-1881) stressed “*the sacred mission of the Holy Rus to liberate their Orthodox counterparts in the Balkans*”¹⁷ (Morini 2009: 73). It follows that the religious (Orthodox) aspect has represented an effective tool used by Russian rulers to achieve pragmatically defined interests. This missionary-messianic worldview helped to shape the image of a Russian Christian charity power in foreign policy through which the Russian Empire justified its expansionist colonization aggressions.

In addition, in the context of the historical experience the ROC as a linkage between foreign policy and the Russian state, it is necessary to add, that the ROC manages most of its activities abroad through its *Department for External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate* (Russian: Otdel vneshnikh tserkovnykh svyazey Moskovskogo patriarkhata – OVTSS). This is a major synodal institution of the ROC, founded by the Holy Synod¹⁸ of the ROC

¹⁴ In the official terminology “*Schismatics*” (Russian: Raskolniks), are primarily Orthodox Christians in the Russian Empire, who did not adopt the reform of the then Patriarch of the ROC Nikon in 1654. These reform correcting and harmonizing ancient religious texts and establishing essentials Orthodox rite (Vydra et al. 2017).

¹⁵ To express cohesiveness with the Russian Empire, the ROC was struck by hatred towards Jews and joined forces with some ultra nationalist organizations. In the western and southern parts of the Russian Empire populated by Jews Orthodox priests carrying flags and singing religious songs often lead the constant pogroms organized by ultra nationalist sections (Klier, Lambroza 1992).

¹⁶ This term was used by historian Mikhail Khodorkovsky in his publication *Russia’s Steppe Frontier: The making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800*, which states that “*Russia’s internal colonization of the steppe can be described as organic or natural colonization, i.e. colonization, mostly determined defense needs to secure and stabilize the southern frontier of the empire, which were not secured to the 19th century*” (Khodarkovsky 2004: 229).

¹⁷ It was the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878). Russia attacked the Ottoman Empire. Russia’s aim was to liberate the Balkan Slavic peoples (Serbs, Bulgarians, Macedonians) from Ottoman domination, that is to expand their power influence to the Balkans and other Orthodox nations (Romanians, Greeks).

¹⁸ The word *synod* comes from the Greek meaning *assembly or meeting*, and it is synonymous with the Latin word *concilium* meaning “*council*”. Originally, synods were meetings of bishops, and the word is still used in that sense in Catholicism, Oriental Orthodoxy and Eastern Orthodoxy. In modern usage, the word often refers to the governing body of a particular church, whether its members are meeting or not. It is also sometimes used to refer to a church that is governed by a synod. The word *synod* also refers to the standing council of

in 1946, when the development of the Church's external activities made it urgent to establish a special church body for sustaining this essential aspect of church life (Otdel vneshnikh tserkovnykh svyazev: Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov 2018a).

Current head of the Department is Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk. One of the most important tasks of the institution is to *"maintain and enhance ecclesiastical relations with Orthodox churches, 'non-Orthodox' churches, non-Christian religious communities, as well as with governmental, parliamentary, inter-governmental, religious and public institutions abroad, including public international organizations"* (Otdel vneshnikh tserkovnykh svyazev: Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov 2018a). In practice, the Department for External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate acts as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the ROC, which hosts ambassadors, conducts missions all around the world, but also cooperates with for example the United Nations, the EU, or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The concept of the canonical territory of the ROC

The second important factor, which demonstrates the transnational nature of the ROC is the concept of the canonical territory of the ROC. Although the concept of a canonical territory is not an unusual phenomenon, especially for Orthodox Churches, in the context of the ROC this concept suddenly emerged at a time, when it was clear, that the collapse of the Soviet Union (the USSR) was irreversible – in the early 1990s. Already in 1990, the then Patriarch of the ROC Alexy II (1990-2008) made clear that his main goal was twofold: a revival of the ROC and keeping strong ROC unity (Lomagin 2012). Especially the fulfilment of the second goal seemed to be challenging.

In this period, there were two significant threats for the ROC arising from the approaching collapse of the USSR. Firstly, as a result of Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika in the USSR in the second half of the 1980s, a wave of religious liberation occurred in this collapsing communist super power. This meant, that not only the ROC's position, but also the other banned (officially illegal) religions and religious groups (including Western Christian denominations) began to increase again after the soviet longstanding strict communist atheistic regime.¹⁹ However, this initial religious pluralism (first of all stronger activities of the Roman Catholic Church), posed a threat to the ROC, fearing a loss its dominant position in the USSR and after the collapse of this state in the post-Soviet space (Gaskova 2004).

Secondly, religious and political liberation in the USSR and the subsequent dissolution of the USSR resulted in the creation of fifteen new and independent states. In many of these countries, national and emancipatory tendencies (both political and religious) were apparent even before the collapse of the USSR. There was an evident risk for the ROC, because the local orthodox churches in the post-Soviet area, which were under the jurisdiction of the ROC at the time of the USSR,²⁰ would have striven for some church independence

high-ranking bishops governing some of the autocephalous Eastern Orthodox churches (Beal et al. 2000).

¹⁹ For example, various religious churches and organizations in the USSR could officially register and renew, or to establish their new parishes. In addition, a large number of religious missionaries – especially from Western Christian denominations – have begun to evolve their intensive spiritual activity in that territory.

²⁰ During the USSR the ROC was jurisdictionally superior to the Eastern Orthodox Churches that were located in the territory of the USSR. From the late 1940s until the late 1980s the majority of operating Orthodox churches in the USSR (almost two-thirds) were located within the Ukrainian exarchate of the ROC, renamed the Ukrainian Orthodox church in 1990 (Solik, Fiřakovský, Baar 2017). The subordinate Ukrainian exarchate

– a greater degree of church autonomy or even autocephality, thus a complete church independence in new post-Soviet conditions.

In response to these threats, the ROC adopted a statement, which declared a clear position: “*Several countries – one patriarchate*” (Lomagin 2012: 503). This crucial statement and its derived concept of the canonical territory of the ROC argued, that the ROC’s boundaries may not coincide with the boundaries of individual (secular) states and, that the disintegration of the USSR is not a reason to destroy the unity of the ROC. It was officially approved by *The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church*²¹ on October 22, 1991 (thus two months before the official breakdown of the USSR). This act of the ROC essentially created a church or spiritual analogue of the Russian secular concept of Russian “*Near abroad*”.²² However, this “*Church near abroad*” emerged a year before the secular version and remained the same after the collapse of the USSR – the ROC refused to accept the new territorial status quo and did not accept the borders of the newly formed successor states in the post-Soviet space (Lomagin 2012).

Jaroslava Buciora, a cleric of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada in this context argues: “*It would not be a mistake to assume that this theory was formed right after the collapse of the USSR and the disintegration of the border of the USSR. As a result of political changes in Eastern Europe and the emergence of an ideologically political vacuum in the post-Soviet Eastern Block, the created theory of the canonical territory of the ROC would become a mechanism by which the imperialistic ideology of imperial Russia would be maintained and rebuild*” (Buciora not dated).

The canonical territory of the ROC is made up of several Orthodox churches with different church statutes according to the degree of their autonomy (the Autonomous Churches, the Self-governing Churches, the Metropolitan Areas, the Exarchates, the Dioceses/the Eparchies²³). These Orthodox churches are under the ROC’s exclusive church jurisdiction. This statement is given in an official document of the ROC – *The Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church* (in Russian: *Ustav Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi*). The Article 1 (General provisions), subparagraph 3 of this document states that “*The jurisdiction of the ROC shall include persons of Orthodox confession living on the canonical territory of the ROC in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Estonia, Japan and also Orthodox Christians living in other countries*” (Otdel vneshnikh tserkovnykh svyazey: Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov 2018b).

In 2005 the current head of the ROC Kirill (at that time Kirill was Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad and the head of the Department for external church relations of the ROC) articulated in a much abbreviated form the ROC’s position on the theory of

included dioceses in the territory of today’s Ukraine and Belarus. Dioceses of the ROC was also created in Estonia, Latvia, Moldova, or in Soviet Central Asia too.

²¹ *The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church* (in Russian: *Svyashchenny sinod Russkoy pravoslavnoy tserkvi*) serves by Church statute as the supreme administrative governing body of the ROC in the periods between Bishops’ Councils.

²² In the political language of Russia and some other post-Soviet states, the “*Near abroad*” (in Russian: *Blizhnyeye zarubezhye*) refers to the newly independent republics (other than Russia itself) which emerged after the dissolution of the USSR.

²³ At the lowest level of this hierarchy is exactly an eparchy, what is a territorial diocese governed by a bishop of one of the Eastern churches, who holds the title of eparch. Each eparchy is divided into parishes in the same manner as a diocese of Western Christendom.

the canonical territory of the ROC. In his interview Kirill defines the concept of the canonical territory of the ROC on three major principles/peculiarities: territorial, ethnic/national, and pastoral (Buciora not dated). It should be noted, that Kirill's arguments, or more precisely ROC's arguments contain a controversial ecclesiological and historical ambiguity in the case of the canonical territory of the ROC. However, a presentation of this ambiguity is not a goal of this work.

The fact remains, that through this concept, the ROC has gained both the advantage and the domination over the territories of the former USSR in religious and secular aspects. In the first field, the ROC has been striving successfully against the West-Christian denominations (especially the Roman Catholic Church) and against their pastoral and missionary activities in this area and has effectively been fighting against any church-separatist ambitions and attempts of Orthodox churches under the jurisdiction of the ROC. In the second field, the ROC has gained a very important influence in the Post-soviet area in the secular dimension too. Patriarch Kirill and other prominent leaders of the ROC officially and regularly visit the secular leaders of the states located in the canonical territory of the ROC, where they are received with significant honour and respect. The ROC is thus an important part (linkage) of Russian foreign policy.

The concept of the Russian World

The ROC's transnational nature is underpinned by another factor, called the concept of the Russian World. The term *Russian World* (in Russian: *Russkiy mir*) has played a crucial part in Russian politics for several years. The Russian World was originally (during the 90's the 20th century) constituted as a certain framework and instruments, through which the Russian Diaspora can be consolidated abroad in the new conditions after the collapse of the USSR. This concept thus primarily presented, how the Russian people living outside of Russia can be organized on the basis of certain cultural and national identities. It was assumed, that the Russian Diaspora has actual potential to create the Russian World, which can give opportunities for development and support it outside Russia. Russian intellectuals like Petr Schedrovitsky, Yefim Ostrovsky, Valery Tishkov, Natalia Narochitskaya, or Gleb Pavlovsky initially perceived the Russian World primarily as a project of new (Russian) civilization in the modern world, among such analogical projects as Chinese, Japanese projects, projects of incorporated Europe, or Islam world etc. (Solik, Baar 2016).

Since the presidency of Vladimir Putin (2000) these ideas of the Russian World have been officially accepted as a part of Russia's reformulated foreign policy. Russia's political and ideological leaders have been quietly working to boost its attractiveness in the neighbourhood, and in particular they have learned the power of incentives. Russia's strategy is to counter EU soft power in the neighbourhood by presenting itself as an alternative model (Polegkyi 2011). Since 2000, pro-Kremlin policy makers systematically connected the concept to their efforts to legitimize the domestic policy (main task of ensuring the stability within the Russian society and strengthening the sense of presumed imperial power and superiority) and foreign policy (the Russian leadership seeks for a solid ground for its imperialist aspirations in the post-Soviet space, i.e. to restore the status of superpower (Payne 2015). They applied it to a range of dimensions: ideological, political, identity-based, and mainly geopolitical. With the establishment of the *Russkiy Mir Foundation*²⁴ (in Russian:

²⁴ This foundation was created by a decree of Russian president Putin in 2007, as a government-sponsored or-

Fond Russkiy Mir) in 2007, the term was securely entrenched in Russia's public discourse (Solik, Baar 2016).

Geopolitical and imperialist ambitions of the Russian World are evident in several aspects. The most important of these is the gradual enlargement of the Russian World to new "recipients" by pro-Kremlin Russian politicians and intellectuals who intensively deal with this concept. In addition to the Russian diaspora, which is concentrated outside the RF, other actors were gradually added to this concept: the people of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine (the emphasis on the "Slavic Orthodox Brotherhood", resulting from the ancient period of Kievan Rus'); other Slavic and Orthodox nations living especially in the territory of the former USSR; and even people, who spiritually identify themselves with Russia and dream about the "All-Slavic Union" under the leadership of Russia.²⁵

Simultaneously, the Russian World is a very important concept in the context of the ROC as a linkage in the post-Soviet space. In recent years, the ROC has been intensively engaged in discussions (alongside secular intellectuals) about the Russian World. This considerable interest in this concept is visible, especially since 2009, when Kirill became the Patriarch of the ROC. It is Kirill who quite often publicly calls for the construction of the Russian World, connecting the Russian-speaking and Orthodox Christian faith professing population (Solik, Baar 2016).

The ROC sees the idea of the Russian World as rooted in the canonical concept, according to which all believers are part of one Church and one "Orthodox nation". This concept is linked to the Church's sense of mission (Chawryło [Jarzyńska] 2014). At the third Assembly of the above mentioned Russkiy Mir Foundation in 2009, Patriarch Kirill presented his concept of the Russian World. This World is composed of a "core" (or "backbone") – namely, the "Holy Rus" (in Russian: *Svyataya Rus*) – and a diaspora, which are united by three factors: the Orthodox Christian faith, the Russian language, and a shared historical memory. According to Kirill, the "core" of the Russian World consists of the three Slavic nations of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. It should be noted, that the concept of the "Holy Rus", or "the great Eastern-Slavic civilisation" as a spiritual and historical entity is not a new term, but has deep historical roots (Chawryło [Jarzyńska] 2014).

For the first time, this concept appeared in Rus' in the 16th century.²⁶ Later in the interpretation of the Slavophiles, the "Holy Rus" was a metaphor for the "heavenly Russia," connected with the presence of holy objects in the country – monasteries, churches, relics. It means, this concept originally included rather sacral aspects and had no clear connection with

organisation aimed at promoting the Russian language worldwide, and "forming the Russian World as a global project" (Russkiy Mir Foundation 2018), co-operating with the ROC in promoting values that challenge the Western cultural tradition. The Foundation was shaped according to similar culture promotion agencies, such as the *British Council* and the *Goethe Institute*.

²⁵ This definition is related to the new determination of the term *Russian compatriot*. Although a law defining this concept has been in force in Russia since 1999, the discussion is still ongoing. Amendments to the law were submitted for consideration to the State Duma (the lower house of the Federal Assembly of Russia – Russian parliament) in February 2010 with the aim of more precisely defining the term compatriot, stressing an individual's self-identification and his/her practical connection with Russia. Such a connection could be, for example, membership in a Russian non-governmental organization (NGO) operating abroad. Critics of the amendments inside Russia have already labelled them as creating a group of "professional compatriots" (Kudors 2010).

²⁶ It appeared in the missives of Prince Kurbsky to Tsar Ivan the Terrible in the 1570s, where it acquired clear oppositional and antistate features: "Kurbsky counterposes the tsar to 'Holy Rus' because his deeds bring shame on the holy Russian land" (Suslov 2014: 45).

the Russian Empire as a geopolitical formation. In recent years, however in the interpretation of the leading representatives of the ROC (especially from Patriarch Kirill of Moscow), the *“Holy Russia”* has acquired a considerable geopolitical and statist dimension (Suslov 2014).

This interpretation is based on the works of the Russian Church historian Anton Kartashev (1875-1960), for whom the *“Holy Rus”* is the *“qualitative self-definition of Rus – Russia”*. Thus, the *“Holy Rus”* is not a name for the *“heavenly Russia,”* a synonym for a social ideal, or a project for the transformation of the future, but – in the words of Deacon Georgii Malkov – the *“spiritual basis of national self-determination, a name for the unchanging cultural and spiritual core of the Russian nation, for the foundation of its identity”* (Malkov cited in Suslov 2014: 45).

The vagueness and gradual expansion of this spiritual concept the *“Holy Rus”* and the Russian World is similar to the above mentioned secular concept of the Russian World. In addition to the original *“core”* of the Russian World (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus), other countries have been gradually added to this list: Moldova and/or the self-proclaimed Transnistria, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. According to the ROC, this inclusion is *“based on historical arguments – that is, the affiliation or ‘adhesion’ of one or another territory to the people of ‘historical Rus’”* (Suslov 2014: 46).

In his interview in 2014, Kirill declared that the Russian World is not the world of Russia or the Russian Empire, but it *“comes from the Kievan Christianization”* (Kirill 2014). According to Kirill, the Russian World is *“a special civilization, which comprises of people who now call themselves different names: Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. This world may also include people who do not belong to the Slavic world at all, but who have taken the cultural and spiritual component of this world as their own”* (Kirill 2014).

With these words, the head of the ROC basically imitated the secular vision of the Russian World concerning self-identification. The gradual expansion of this concept (both in secular and Church version) have followed a clear goal: to reach as many people as possible. Consequently, the *“core”* of the Russian World today resides in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus (at other occasions, Kirill added Moldova or Kazakhstan), but *“can refer to anyone who shares the Orthodox faith, a reliance on the Russian language, a common historical memory, and a common view of social development”* (Petro 2015). It is also necessary to emphasize, that the Russian World is extremely important for the ROC, because through this concept, the *“ROC actively presents itself as the sole integrative force in the space of the former USSR and this force has no intention of simply aligning itself with the political schemes of others (religious) actors”* (Laine, Saarelainen 2017: 8).

As mentioned above, the Church’s concept of the Russian World has risen sharply in the Russian discourse since 2009, when Kirill became Patriarch of the ROC. Moreover, when Vladimir Putin resumed the presidency in 2012, he adapted the Church’s concept of the Russian World as the foundation of the new Russian strict conservative state ideology, and turned the ROC into an instrument of Russia’s political influence on the neighbouring countries, especially Ukraine. However, Putin has broadened the interpretation of this idea to adjust it to his political aspirations, and also added new elements to it. Apart from the appeal for a unity of the *“Orthodox nation”*, he has incorporated slogans concerning the uniqueness of Russian civilisation, the common historical, cultural and linguistic legacy of the residents of this area, as well as anti-Western slogans in the idea of the Russian World (Chawryło [Jarzyńska] 2014).

It means, that this concept has become even more distinctive, mobilizing and expansive, with the assistance of the ROC. The ROC has become a key partner of Russian state authorities in their plans for politicizing the Russian World. Consequently, this concept has been complemented by a considerable politicization and a cult of Orthodoxy, and has been placed in similar borders like other Russian geopolitical and expansionist projects, which are intensely defined against the West, or more precisely the Western universality. It is a huge difference compared to other similar projects in the West (for example Commonwealth or Francophonie) (Solik, Baar 2016).

In the context of the current Russian World as a unique (anti-Western) civilization, the Russian state (the Kremlin) and the ROC have developed a common vision, which unites their opposition to Western values and ideas. In this vision, we can identify three major themes that are mentioned on a regular basis by church and state leaders: LGBT rights, religious minorities rights and the influence of Western institutions (Soroka 2016). A large number of statements of Russian politicians and church representatives reveal the real significance of this widespread and anti-Western concept. One of the most appropriate of them is the statement by the head of the ROC Kirill at the 10th World Russian People's meeting on May 2006. Kirill declared that *"a unique Russian civilization, consisting of Russia and the Russian World, should oppose Western civilization in its assertion of the universality of the Western tradition"* (Kirill cited in Solik, Baar 2016: 35). Vsevolod Chaplin, a controversial radical and influential Russian hierarch of the ROC argued, that *"the Russian state should develop its military potential in order to be able to repel any invasion and defend its civilizational separateness, especially from the U.S. and NATO"* (Chaplin cited in Curanović 2012: 136).

In addition, Patriarch Kirill has often spoken out against homosexuality (as a symbol of Western decadence). In 2017, during his visit to Kyrgyzstan, he publicly compared homosexual laws and homosexual marriages with Nazism. The Patriarch said *"so-called homosexual marriages are a threat to families"* (Kirill cited in RIA Novosti 2017) and added that *"when laws are detached from morality they cease being laws people can accept. This was similar to the laws in Nazi Germany"* (Kirill cited in RIA Novosti 2017). President Putin and other influential Russian politicians have also defended anti-gay laws as a *"bastion of global conservatism"* (Ragozin 2013) and frequently stressed the importance of defending Russia and its conservative and traditional values against the Western view of gay rights, which Putin called a *"genderless and fruitless so-called tolerance"* (Putin cited in Ragozin 2013).

It is quite obvious, that both institutions: the Russian state and ROC have strongly stood against the West and point to its *"decline"*. Thus, today is the Russian World a variable signifier, aimed at addressing different target groups, using Russian language, Russian culture, shared memory, history, economic ties, spiritual factor, or conservative values in order to achieve the desired result – improving the image and attractiveness of Russia, but also presenting a clear stand against the West.

Moldova – important part of the Russian World

Moldova is perceived as a part of the *"Near abroad"* of the RF, which does not change the fact that Russian diplomacy must acknowledge the strong position of two important partners of this region – the EU and NATO. Moscow is still too weak, economically and technologically, to effectively compete with Brussels, but it does have an often underappreciated asset in its relations with the countries indicated – the sense of closeness that has

its roots in the community of faith. In the tradition of Orthodox nations of south-eastern Europe, the image of Russia as a defender of the church and liberator of the Slavs is very strong. Older generations in this part of Europe still remember such slogans of “*Slavic solidarity*”, “*Orthodox brotherhood*” or “*Orthodox identity*” (Curanović 2012: 181). This is the case of Moldova too. In this country, the ROC is one of Russian diplomacy’s most important allies in supporting the sense of closeness, propagating the solidarity of Orthodox nations.

According to statistics provided to the *National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova* in 2014, only 6.9% of country’s population (2,998,235) did not declare what their religion was. Out of the total number of people who declared what was their religion, 96.8% were Orthodox (Natsionalnoye Byuro Statistiki Respubliki Moldova 2017). According to a recently published survey conducted by the *Pew Research Center* in 2017, almost 92% of the Moldovan respondents identified themselves as an Orthodox believer. This percentage represents the first place among 18 countries of the Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe in which the survey was held. Moreover, 63 % of Moldovan citizens believe, that Orthodoxy is an important attribute of Moldovan national identity (Pew Research Center 2017).

It is clear that Orthodox Christianity serves as an important part of Moldovan society. The MOC or the Metropolis of Chişinău and All Moldova is a self-governing church jurisdictionally subordinate under the ROC. The head of the MOC is Metropolitan Vladimir (Secular name Nicolae Cantarean), who is also a permanent member of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. Its canonical territory is Moldova. The MOC is the largest church in the country, and one of the two main Orthodox churches in Moldova (beside the Metropolis of Bessarabia, a self-governing metropolis of the Romanian Orthodox Church). In October 1992 the MOC was granted autonomy by the ROC.²⁷

As noted above, the ROC sees Moldova as an important part of its canonical territory. According to statements from church leaders like Patriarch of the ROC Kirill, Moldova is part of the territory of “*Holy Rus*” and can therefore be perceived as part of the “*core*” of the Russian World (Suslov 2014). The strong connection between the Moldovan people and the MOC proves to be an adequate basis for the ROC to promote their narrative of an “*Orthodox identity*” and the Russian World as an alternative to an immoral, Western way of living. Due to their role as spiritual authority, the ROC is able to influence the MOC and its clergy. Many of the priests who are active in the MOC have been educated at the seminary of the ROC in Moscow. This institution is a powerful tool in the russification process of the Orthodox priests, and contributes in advocating the concept of Moscow as the “*Third Rome*”²⁸ (Munteanu 2015). The fact that Moldovan clergy are educated in Russia leads to a policy where many of the concepts and narratives that are propagated by the ROC are being repeated by clergy from the MOC. Munteanu writes, that “*the image of Russia as the sole guardian of true Orthodoxy is strongly promoted by the Moldovan Church and its Moscow headquarters*” (Munteanu 2015: 63).

²⁷ Following the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, the USSR annexed Bessarabia and proclaimed the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. The existing Metropolis of Bessarabia was forced to interrupt its activity. In the same period, the ROC established a new Diocese of Kishinev on the territory of the new Soviet republic. In 1990, it was raised to the rank of an Archdiocese. A year after the independence of Moldova from the USSR in 1991, the ROC granted autonomy to its jurisdiction in the new country and raised the rank of the Archdiocese to the Metropolis of Chişinău and All Moldova (Avram 2014).

²⁸ Some Orthodox Christians regard Moscow as the “*Third Rome*”, in succession to the New Rome (Constantinople/Istanbul) after its capture by the Turks in 1453. According to this view the first Rome had lapsed into a state of heresy and schism in 1054, following its unilateral adoption of the Filioque Clause (Medvedev 2000).

However, it is important to note, that the interpretation and claims of the ROC in Moldova are generally being questioned by the Romanian Orthodox Church. This influential Orthodox Church restored the Metropolis of Bessarabia in Moldova in 1992.²⁹ The Moldavian government could not fully recognize the Bessarabian Metropolis on the grounds that recognizing another Orthodox church would provoke conflicts within the Orthodox community (Panainte 2006). From 1992 to 2004, the Bessarabian Orthodox Church tried to get official recognition from the government eleven times. Finally, they were recognised in 2002 after the *European Court of Human Rights* had forced the Moldovan government to register it (Turcescu, Stan 2003). During this time, the MOC proved to be one of the most outspoken opponents of the recognition of the Bessarabian Orthodox Church, which they saw as a threat to their privileged position in the country. The dispute between the two patriarchates is essentially a cultural struggle and still causes a friction between two important elements in Moldova – the Slavic and the Romanian.

In Moldova, just as in the RF, one of the main tasks of the ROC is not only the fight against the “*harmful*” liberal and secular trends, but also a disruption of some ambitions of Moldova towards the EU membership and other Western integration projects. In this respect, the ROC is one of the most important geopolitical instruments of Kremlin, which significantly influences various events in this region. In Moldova, there are moral, traditional, and “*anti-Western*” values sophisticatedly promoted by the ROC, particularly through Orthodox literature, the Internet and a large number of Orthodox TV channels owned and co-owned by the ROC. These channels have a stable reach in the post-Soviet space. Such channels include for example: *Spas TV*, *Soyuz TV* or *Tsargrad TV*. The influential national and Orthodox channel Tsargrad TV is substantially financially supported by powerful Russian **oligarch** Konstantin Malofeev, who has close ties to the Kremlin. Malofeev is the chairman of the Board of Directors of the media group Tsargrad and he is a zealous Russian Orthodox Christian and mainly a strong advocate of the Russian monarchy before 1917. He is also called an “*Orthodox oligarch*” (ČTK 2017).

In addition, the MOC hierarchs in cooperation with the ROC strongly come out against other religion minorities (for example against the Catholics, the Jews, or against the above mentioned Metropolis of Bessarabia) and against various secular pro-Western NGOs in Moldova. The MOC is now in a complicated position. On the one hand, this church has to comply with the requirements of the ROC and fulfill its instructions, on the other hand, the MOC needs to demonstrate a certain kind of national character. However, its open opposition to Moldova’s European integration and its open aversion to Western European values and democracy (supported by the ROC) could prove to be problematic and not a very appropriate decision with unexpected consequences for the future.

In August 2009, four Moldovan political parties agreed to create a governing coalition called *the Alliance for European Integration*. *The Liberal Democratic Party*, *Liberal Party*, *Democratic Party*, and *Our Moldova* committed themselves to achieving European integration and promoting a balanced, consistent and responsible foreign policy (Rettman 2011). A majority of the Moldovan people (65%) held positive views about the EU at that

²⁹ The Metropolis of Bessarabia, also referred to as the Bessarabian Orthodox Church is a Moldovan autonomous Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan bishopric of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Metropolis of Bessarabia was created in 1918, as the Archbishopric of Chişinău, and organized as a Metropolis, in 1927. Inactive during the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia (1940-1941) and the Soviet rule in Moldova (1944-1991), it was re-activated on 14 September 1992. In 1995, the Metropolis of Bessarabia was raised to the rank of exarchate, with jurisdiction over the territory of Moldova.

time, and were therefore supportive of this new coalition (Montesano, van der Togt, Zweers 2016). In their attempt to block Russia's influence in the region, the ruling coalition made deals with the EU to prepare for an *Association Agreement*.

As soon as the European integration process started in Moldova and the *Moldova–European Union Association Agreement* was signed and approved by the European Parliament on November 2014,³⁰ the MOC in the cooperation with the ROC launched an anti-EU offensive and agitation in the Moldovan society. As Cațus notices *“the MOC has played a role in instigating the fear of the EU”* (Cațus 2016: 70). The MOC opposes the integration into the EU because this would entail changes in the value and legal systems. In an interview for the web site pravoslavie.ru on June 2011, Metropolitan Vladimir of the MOC stated directly:

“The EU is harmful for us. Moldova is not a rich country and has to resort to foreign loans. The EU has been trying to impose on us its European laws by providing loans. These European laws are alien to our spiritual and moral traditions. Orthodox Metropolitans in Moldova have to constantly resist this onslaught, defend or protest against it and we have been doing it for many years...At present, Moldova is seeking to enter the EU. The adoption of a visa-free regime for our citizens is closely linked with the law against discrimination of minorities. The law is significant, but there is one point: not to discriminate gays and lesbians. We have to accept and then: with a passport in your hand, you can visit Europe. However orthodoxy cannot remain indifferent to this point. We pray that the Lord will bring the responsible authorities to the right decision” (Vladimir 2011).

In the context of *“trying to impose its European laws on Moldova”* Metropolitan Vladimir meant that *“the EU had consistently promoted a certain worldview and pushed for cultural changes that were perceived as controversial in Moldova”*³¹ (Cațus 2016: 70). For that reason, Cațus argues, that the *Eurasian Economic Union* (the EEU) is perceived by the Moldovans as a good alternative to the EU since the model of the EEU is similar to that of the EU but, in contrast to the EU, closer to Moldova culturally and religiously (Cațus 2016). The various *“edifying”* activities of the ROC and MOC, but also other factors such as corruption, anti-European propaganda spread by Russian media and the pro-Russian EEU have

³⁰ The European Parliament approved the *EU-Moldova Association Agreement* on 13th November 2014. This agreement included the *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area – DCFTA* too. This agreement should form the basis for strengthening political cooperation and economic integration between the EU and Moldova and ensuring mutual free market access. Moldova ratified the Association Agreement on July 2, 2014 (Európsky parlament: Spravodajstvo 2014).

³¹ The equal opportunities bill adopted in May 2012 is a case in point. It ensured equal legal status to minorities, including sexual minorities and the Roma minority. The EU had insisted that such a bill should be enacted in Moldova and had made its decision to abolish the visa obligation for Moldovans entering the Schengen area conditional on its adoption. The traditionally conservative Moldovans were firmly opposed to the bill, seeing it as a first step towards the legalisation of same-sex marriage. The Moldovan government did hardly anything to change the public perception of the bill or explain the real intentions behind it. As a result, the image of the EU suffered (Cațus 2016).

caused a widespread distrust of the EU and NATO in the Moldovan society. Recent opinion polls clearly confirm this fact.

For example, the socio-political poll made by the *Public Opinion Fund (FOP)* at the demand of *Poliexpert* conducted during 26 May – 5 June 2017 with the participation of 1,798 people in 110 localities of Moldova reveals that 57% of respondents think, that Moldova should be closer to Russia and only 43% of respondents think it should be closer to Europe and the West. In addition, about 67% of Moldovans hold positive views of the RF, 56% – the EU, Romania – 44%, Ukraine – 39% and the U.S. – 38%. 48% of the respondents said they would vote for Moldova to join the EEU. Only 40% of Moldovans would vote for joining the EU. Some 65% of Moldovans would vote against joining NATO, while 21% of respondents would vote for joining the military alliance. 38.5% of Moldovan citizens trust strongly pro-Russian president Igor Dodon the most, followed by Maia Sandu (17.3%). Other politicians like Pavel Filip could not get more than 3.7% of people's trust (Vlas 2017).³²

From Kremlin's point of view, ROC's activities in Moldova are one of the most effective tools of Russian diplomacy. The ROC has over-standard relations with the political authorities in Kishinev and this church is beneficial in promoting Kremlin's interests. The priority objective of both the ROC and the RF is to defend the promotion of "*Romanianism*" in the Moldovan cultural sphere and the western vector in the geopolitical sphere. The image of the "*Great Russia*" as a single and true guardian of Orthodoxy is consistently promoted by the MOC in Moldova. According to its representatives, it provides "*traditional values*", alongside morality and spirituality as an alternative to the "*degrading and immoral European lifestyle*" (Munteanu 2015: 63). The MOC in cooperation with the ROC also organizes various spectacular cultural orthodox events and festivals for the broader classes of the Moldovan population.

In addition to the resistance to the EU, the MOC stands vigorously against various (secular and religious) minorities. Such activities included, for example, the public overthrow and destruction of the Jewish nine-branched candelabrum, called the Menorah (Hanukkah), one of the symbols of Judaism, in a park in the center of Chisinau by a group of some 200 fundamentalist Orthodox Moldovan Christians in December 2009. Menorah (Hanukkah) was subsequently replaced by the Orthodox Cross. During this ceremony, an Orthodox Moldovan priest said, that "*the Jews can try to kill us, to traumatize our children, but Moldovan Orthodox believers will resist*" (Gruber 2009). According to this priest "*Moldova was an Orthodox country, and the Jewish people are trying to dominate people. Allowing the menorah to be set up had been a sacrilege, an indulgence of state power today*" (Gruber 2009).

However, the largest attacks of the MOC are (not only in Moldova, but in the canonical territory of the ROC in general) exerted mainly on the LGBT minority. As already stated, according to Patriarch of the ROC Kirill, LGBT agenda poses a "*significant threat for the existence of the human race*" (Kirill cited in Hodges 2016) and it is a symbol of decadent West. Thus homosexuality has turned into the new external enemy of the church (and the state), by

³² In March 2018, *the International Republican Institute* published another poll on the social-political opinions of Moldovan people. 45 % of respondents (March 2017), 43 % of respondents (October 2017), 41 % of respondents (February 2018) declared against Moldova joining NATO. Only 21 % of respondents declared for Moldova joining NATO. In addition, 42 % of respondents (February 2018) supported an affiliation of Moldova with the EEU and at the same time, 43 % of respondents supported an affiliation between the Moldova and the EU (Vlas 2018).

association, of the Russian people. In this context, a dangerous trend have been taking place in Moldova. A new radical and extremist group of leaders have appeared within the MOC.

These hierarchs and activists call for a closer relationship with the ROC (and Russia) and openly and radically oppose the EU and various (secular and religious) minorities. A typical example in this respect are activities of Ghenadie Valuta, leader of the association “Pro-Ortodoxia”, Christian Orthodox association “*Fericiata Maica Matrona*”, priest Anatol Cibric, famous for his anti-Semitic initiatives, the Bishop of Bălți and Fălești³³ regions Marchel. On 30 September 2012, in a TV interview Bishop Marchel stated: “*The equality law, which has widely opened – I’d say, creating for them, in a sense, conditions of Eden – the gates of the paradise for homosexuals, shall do little to stop them – it should not allow them employment in educational, health care or in public catering. Just imagine if a homosexual – 92% of them have HIV, are sick of AIDS – is employed at the blood transfusion centre. It is a disaster*” (Bishop Marchel cited in Munteanu 2015: 63).

Bishop Marchel (along with representatives of pro-Russian political parties – the *Social Democratic Party* and the “*Patriots of Moldova*”) also took part in a spectacular demonstration in front of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova when the law on equality was being passed (in May 2012) openly asking to stop “*Moldova’s sodomisation*” (Unimedia 2012). The official stance of the MOC does not declare the institution’s support for such actions, but neither does it dissociate from them (Munteanu 2015).

Apart from mutual Russian-Moldovan spiritual co-operation in defending the “*negative*” trends of Europeanisation in Moldova, there are strong and significant activities of the leading representatives of the ROC with the political representatives of Moldova. Patriarch Kirill has officially visited Moldova twice: in 2011, 2013. Kirill’s planned visit of this country in October 2018 was postponed to a later date. It should be stressed that already his first visit of Moldova was significant. In October 2011, Patriarch Kirill and his entourage met in Chişinău with Marian Lupu, the President of the Parliament of Moldova (2010-2013) and – from this position he served as Acting – President of Moldova (2010-2012). Kirill again promoted Orthodox unity and stated that the disagreement between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the ROC regarding Bessarabia was entirely a problem to be addressed by the two churches. It was not to be understood as a political problem. In return Lupu reaffirmed his position in regards to the relationship between the Moldovan state and the ROC. He affirmed his loyalty and his willingness to promote the values of the Orthodox Church while working with the Archbishop of Chişinău (Otdel vneshnikh tserkovnykh svyazey: Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov 2011a).

As Payne notes “*this meeting is significant because the head of the ROC met with the secular President of Moldova, basically telling him that the ROC would handle the matter in Bessarabia and for the government to stay out of the ecclesiastical issue*” (Payne 2015: 69). During Kirill’s visit to Chişinău, President Lupu awarded Kirill with the highest award, the Order of the Republic. In presenting the award, Lupu stated: “*This award is an expression of lofty relations between the Church and the state in the Republic of Moldova. It is an evaluation of your work to achieve the great goal of consolidation of Orthodox unity and Christian regeneration. Your ideals of Orthodox values serve as a guideline not only in your own life but also in the life of our countries and peoples. Today your voice and your authority are demanded as never because, irrespective of political views and religious beliefs, we all work*

³³ Bălți and Fălești is one of the five eparchies of the MOC, which are subordinated to the ROC.

to achieve the same goal – a dignified prosperous and peaceful life of people” (Lupu cited in Otdel vneshnikh tserkovnykh svyazey: Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov 2011b).

Kirill also maintains a close working relationship with Igor Dodon, a Moldovan politician who has been the president of Moldova since 23 December 2016. Dodon is not only an openly pro-Russian Moldovan president who supports Vladimir Putin’s policy, but he is also a zealous supporter of the MOC and conservative and traditional values in the society. Dodon defends anti-Western, anti-homosexual,³⁴ pro-Russian activities and statements supporting the traditional values, which are spread in the Moldovan society by the MOC hierarchs. Moldovan president and the MOC even organized many events and festivals in support of the traditional family and against same sex-marriages in Moldova (Crosby 2018).

Even though Patriarch Kirill postponed his planned trip to the republic of Moldova (October 2018), the head of the ROC officially met Dodon only in 2018 twice: in June at the patriarchal working residence in Chistyj Pereulok (Otdel vneshnikh tserkovnykh svyazey: Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov 2018c) and at the end of October at the Patriarchal residence in Peredelkino located near Moscow (Otdel vneshnikh tserkovnykh svyazey: Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov 2018d). In particular, the second meeting in 2018 was significant in terms of strengthening Russian-Moldovan relations in secular and religious dimension. Kirill awarded Igor Dodon with the Order of St. Sergius of Radonezh (2nd class) in consideration of his active support of the initiatives of the MOC and thanked him for his work done for the benefit of the Church, saying: *“I am especially happy that the Orthodox Church of Moldova is a spiritually stabilizing factor in society”* (Kirill cited in Otdel vneshnikh tserkovnykh svyazey: Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov 2018d). On the other side Dodon confirmed, that *“the Orthodox Church of Moldova is a part of the Moscow Patriarchate”* (Otdel vneshnikh tserkovnykh svyazey: Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov 2018d) and he added that 98% of the residents of Moldova are Orthodox Christians and told Kirill about cooperation with Metropolitan Vladimir of Kishinev and All Moldova, their common attending of public events and his own visits to divine services celebrated by the Metropolitan Otdel vneshnikh tserkovnykh svyazey: Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov 2018d).

These reciprocal relations between Patriarch of the ROC Kirill and Moldovan President Dodon are based on the principle of rationalism. On the one hand, Dodon is aware that the influence and importance of Orthodox Christianity in Moldovan society is considerable and therefore seeks a support from Patriarch of the ROC Kirill and Metropolitan of the MOC Vladimir. Dodon wanted to achieve this support also for his *Socialist Party of Moldova (PSRM)* in a very important Moldovan parliamentary election set for February 24, 2019.³⁵ On the other hand, Kirill needs pro-Russian influential politicians in Moldova who promote the pro-Russian geopolitical vector and mainly hold a protective hand over the MOC, which is jurisdictionally subordinated to the ROC. This avoids any separatist church efforts, which are in the vast majority initiated by political leadership (after all, a pro-Western political leadership in Ukraine and its support for the autocephalous independent Ukrainian church is a clear example).

³⁴ In May 2018 He said that *„never promised to be the president of gays”* (Dodon cited in Crosby 2018). Dodon responded to the assembly to support the LGBT community in the capital of Chișinău.

³⁵ The Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova won this election (31.15 % of the all votes). However, this party failed to form a government and, on the contrary, the results of the election triggered a constitutional crisis in Moldova in June 2019.

Conclusion

Using the linkage and leverage model of Levitsky and Way, we can identify numerous linkages that tie the RF with its “*Near abroad*”. From secular dimension there are information linkages, technocratic linkages and civil society linkages, which are being used by Russia as important soft power tools. However, from all of Russia’s soft power tools in the post-Soviet region, one of the most effective one has been the ROC. In line with the main research question, there is pointed out to the fact, that there are strong connections between the ROC and the MOC. This Church is jurisdictionally subordinate to the ROC, thus the ROC is able to influence the MOC clergy with its ideology and religious concepts. The study has shown that the ROC has the potential to conduct effective foreign policy and enforce its influence both on its own and in cooperation with the state, because this Church has an important transnational nature.

As it was demonstrated, this transnational nature of the ROC is underpinned by three crucial factors: the historical experience; the concept of canonical territory of the ROC; the concept of Russian World. The ROC operates almost throughout the territory of the former Soviet Union to “*its*” canonical territory and has a sophisticated organizational structure, including the Department for External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, which acts as the ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It also receives ambassadors, organizes business trips of the church officials around the world, but also cooperates with international organizations. Its activities abroad are in many cases coordinated directly by the Kremlin that is by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RF. Many experts agree precisely on the fact that the main force of the ROC abroad lies in its ability to consolidate the Russian diaspora. For example, the nearly 20-million strong diaspora on post-Soviet territory is distinguished by above-average religiosity (and with a decidedly greater attendance at religious practices than in the RF) and great attachment to the ROC, which is treated as a substitute institution for the homeland. In these states, where other Orthodox churches exist outside the structures of the ROC, belonging to the ROC is also a manifestation of patriotism (Curanović 2012).

Foreign policy mandate was awarded to the ROC directly by the Russian political leadership during the 1990s (several attempts to negotiation and peacemaking activities in areas of crisis – Yugoslavia or Nagorno-Karabakh). However, only since the advent of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev received the alliance of the Russian state and the ROC a new institutional and formal dimension. The status of the ROC in the RF was defined, along with specific tasks and objectives that must be met. The role of the ROC was codified in national strategic documents of the RF and the Kremlin has gradually taken practical steps to incorporate the views and opinions of the ROC in official foreign policy and diplomatic activities of the RF.³⁶ Sergei Lavrov commented on the cooperation of the Russian state and the ROC in foreign area saying: “*the tradition of cooperation between national diplomacy and the ROC goes back to ancient times. We are still working hand in hand, helping the Russian diaspora and protecting the Russians who found themselves far away from their homeland. The Church, in fact, deals with the same problems as diplomacy*” (Blitt 2011: 457).

³⁶ A very important document was signed in November 2003. At the meeting between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the ROC, the document *Rules of Interaction between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation* was signed. This document sets out the main foreign areas of cooperation between the ROC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and contains provisions on the Working group between the both institutions (Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del Rossiyskoy Federatsii. 2003).

In this study specific activities of the ROC and its subordinate Church: the MOC, have been pointed out, which have been carried out namely in Moldova. In the context of Moldova and Russian “Near abroad” in general, the primary role of religious soft power of the RF is to: 1. Prevent the penetration of Western culture – liberal democracy, globalization trends and the Western notion of human rights. In other words, the main task of the ROC is to try to block Western influence in Moldova and in the post-Soviet region in general. 2. Promote and strengthen Russian influence through official government projects and initiatives abroad such as the EEU. These are cultural events, pastoral activities, support for expatriates, organizing conferences, concerts, workshops. In this way, it effectively substitutes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian federation and presents the RF in a good light.

If influential statesmen and politicians in the U.S. and Western Europe fail to understand this important and sophisticated religious dimension of the Russia’s foreign policy, then they will not fully understand the rationale of Vladimir Putin and his administration in promoting Russianness and Russian values around the (not only) Post-soviet space. It is necessary not to ignore the Russian religious dimension of foreign policy, but to accept it, to point out its imperial and coercive dimensions and actively offer an appropriate (democratic and pro-Western) alternative in this region.

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