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## Religious Representation in Russia-EU Relations: “Traditional Values” Problem

### Introduction

Over the last decades both representatives of the scientific community and the political establishment have been actively discussing the increased role of religion and religious institutions in social and political life. This phenomenon is interpreted in various ways. This is what J. Casanova designated as “deprivatization of religion,” the return of religion from the private sphere to the public one (Casanova, 1994), and P. Berger described as “desecularization,” the return or revival of religion as opposed to the matrix of secularism (Berger, 1999). Interestingly, such a “return of religion” is not always associated with the growth of religiosity and indoctrination: it often has institutionalized forms and is not an expression of the political demand of all strata of society. At the same time, the very ideas of post-secular “religious return” are often interpreted as a rejection of the achievements of liberal democracy and a return to ambiguously understood and poorly conceptualized “traditional values.”

Over the past decade there has been a significant increase in the influence of religion in Russian society. Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) actively lobbies various bills aimed at strengthening religious impact and implementation of traditionalist values in the social life.

Among such manifestations of religious penetration one can note the lobbying and support of various legislative initiatives that challenge both the constitutional principle of separation between church and state and the democratic nature of the political regime itself: it includes the adoption by the Russian State Duma of the law against “offending the feelings of believers,” amendment to the Extremism Law preventing some, but not all, sacred texts – “the Bible, the Koran, the Tanakh and the Kanjur, their contents, and quotations from them” – from being ruled “extremist,”<sup>1</sup> amendment to the law toughening the regulation of religious missionary activity and in fact making the activity of religious minorities impossible and so on.

Widespread public debates centered around the interference of the Church representatives and Orthodox activists in cultural life, their attempts to censor certain works of art, cinema, theatrical performances that could offend the “feelings of believers.” A striking example is the recent controversy surrounding the film “Matilda” (2017) directed by Alexei Uchitel about the relationship between ballerina Matilda

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<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ translation of Bible, for instance, was banned as “extremist” (see: *Russia...*, 2017).

Kschessinskaya and the Russian tsar Nicholas II, canonized by the ROC. It even led to the radicalization of certain groups of Orthodox believers and was strongly criticized by the Church hierarchy with a demand of several bishops and Orthodox activists to ban or at least to significantly limit the screening of the film (*Khanty-Mansiyskaja...*, 2017).

One could also see the growing influence of the ROC in state structures: it includes activities in the State Duma of the “Inter-factional deputy group for the protection of Christian values,” “Christmas educational readings” annually held in state structures, introduction to the school curriculum of the subject “Foundations of religious cultures and secular ethics” actively promoted by the ROC, various joint projects of the church and government agencies concerning “patriotic education” that receive funding from the federal budget.

Meanwhile, the increase of Church influence is due not so much to the religiosity of the Russian population as to the construction of a certain format of the relationship between the ROC and Russian authorities, which is even sometimes referred to as the “church-state fusion.” This “fusion” acquires various forms of political expression. Some researchers (Melville, 2018, pp. 31–41; Agadjanian, 2017, pp. 39–60) point to the “neo-conservative turnout” in the policy pursued by President Putin, especially since his third term (2012–2018). Although such conservatism had been presented in the political discourse long before (Papkova, 2007, pp. 117–134), the third term following the 2011–2013 protests and *Bolotnaya Square* case against the Russian opposition was marked by the tightening of Russian legislation, adoption of several restrictive and repressive laws and the consistent ideologization of the public policy space and education (in particular, in 2013 Putin initiated the creation of a unified textbook on Russian history for the secondary school). If an important element in the political discourse of Russian authorities before was the emphasis on the status of Russia as a sovereign power (which is also connected with the concept of “sovereign democracy”), the notion of “traditional values” has been actively introduced since that period, and Russia has been positioned as the holder and the guarantor of these values, which were even supposed to frame its sovereignty (Sharafutdinova, 2014, pp. 615–621).

On the foreign policy track, the Russian authorities are using a number of mechanisms aimed at promoting the concept of “traditional values” and positioning Russia as their principal guarantor. As it is noted in the resolution of the European Parliament: “the Russian Government is employing a wide range of tools and instruments, such as think tanks and special foundations (e.g. *Russkiy Mir*), special authorities (*Rossotrudnichestvo*), multilingual TV stations (e.g. RT), pseudo news agencies and multimedia services (e.g. *Sputnik*), cross-border social and religious groups, as the regime wants to present itself as the only defender of traditional Christian values, social media and internet trolls to challenge democratic values, divide Europe, gather domestic support and create the perception of failed states in the EU’s eastern neighbourhood” (EU, 2016).

In our study, we draw attention to the politicization of religious narratives and the role of the largest religious institution in Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church, in the creation of such political agenda.

### **Between religiosity and traditionalism: the operationalization of concepts**

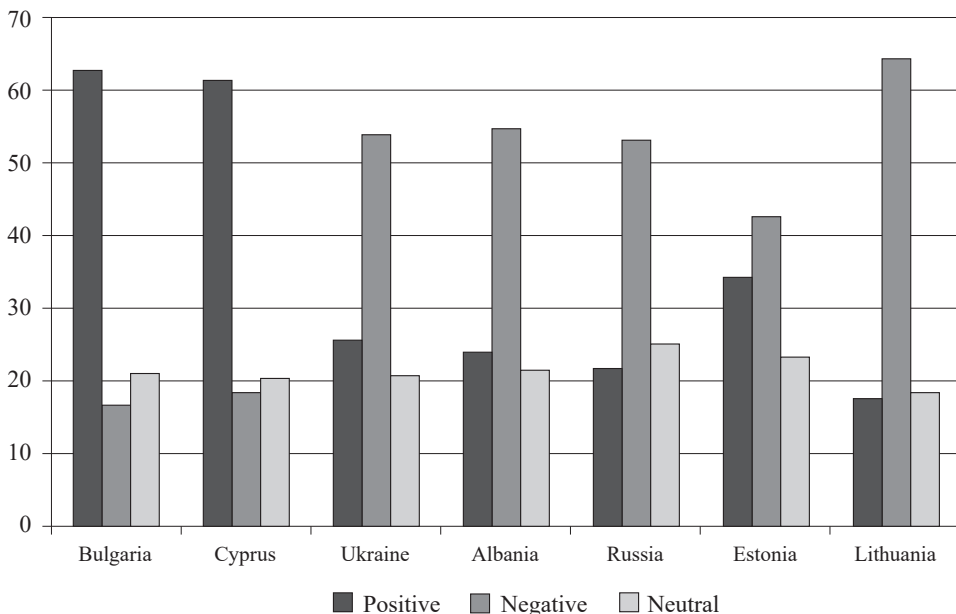
Primarily, it should be mentioned that Russian society is quite secular. The results of the World Values Survey initiated by Ronald Inglehart, who proposed a two-dimensional axis of value measurement (Inglehart, Welzel, 2005), show us that Russia is located in a cluster of states prone to secular-rational values. This means that for the Russian society religious narratives don't play a significant role in everyday life, and the actual religiosity of population, expressed in religious practices and church attendance, is rather low. According to the "Sova" research center and statistics of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, it's about 4,4 million people who visited Easter services in 2018 (Dannye, 2018), which is only about 3% of the whole Russian population (it should be taken into account that Easter services, as it is the most important Christian holiday, are attended, as a rule, by many non-practicing believers). Thus, the number of Russian Orthodox believers who entirely arrange their lives in accordance with the church teaching is at a very low level (e.g. among the EU states there are more religious societies). At the same time, on the axe of survival/self-expression, Russia is situated in a cluster of post-Soviet states with an Orthodox tradition, for which the values of survival are more predominant than the values of self-expression. According to the concept of R. Inglehart, the following markers can be identified for the designation of value patterns: characteristics of traditionalist include patriotism, rejection of abortion and euthanasia, authoritarianism, emphasis on generally accepted norms rather than individual intentions, intolerance towards any kind of otherness, homophobia and other forms of intolerance; in turn, they are opposed to self-expression values expressed in the acceptance of diversity and innovation, gender equality, recognition of the rights of LGBT people, tolerant attitudes towards the Other and political activism.

Thus, the neo-conservatism of Putin's political course can't be explained through the religious demands of the Russian society, because such demands don't actually exist; it is mostly a substitute, a kind of "civil religion," aimed at consolidating the conservative electorate for its support of the constructed political regime. For this reason, political propaganda actively exploits various stereotypes and archetypes of the Soviet era (atheistic (!) USSR), trying to create a hybrid image of the "Soviet power with the primacy of Orthodoxy." Nevertheless, within the framework of such a policy, the ROC is actively involved. The Church itself sees in this the strengthening of its own positions and the possibility to spread its influence (even if imposed from above) on the Russian society. The concept of "traditional values" becomes hence political and tends to be included into the political conjuncture. On the one hand, "traditional values" are not conceptualized in any way: is it even possible to conceptualize them, as values and cultural norms have been constantly changing due to the human development and scientific progress, and aren't they, therefore, exclusively propagandistic and populist element? What are the criteria for these values and on what basis any value can be declared traditional or non-traditional? Finally, who is the value interpreter? These questions remain, as a rule, unanswered.

### “Traditional values” as an anti-Western/anti-liberal ideology

One of the vivid examples of the promotion of “traditional values” was the adoption by the Russian State Duma of the VI convocation of a law generally referred to as “banning gay propaganda among the minors.” Representatives of the ROC not only actively lobbied for this law (Stoeckl, 2016, p. 142), but also ignored acts of violence committed by radical groups of Orthodox believers against LGBT people (Zygmunt, 2014, pp. 117–145). At the same time, the adoption of this law caused an international reaction: it was condemned by the resolution of the European Court of Human Rights on June 20, 2017 as discriminating people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and thus violating by the Russian authorities of Article 10 and Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Case, 2017). It is noteworthy that the very notion of “propaganda of homosexuality” was for the first time used in “The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church,” adopted in 2000<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, as noted by Konstantin Michajlov, “this is one of the earliest cases of using this notion in an official document three years before the first bill on the banning the homosexual propaganda, proposed by State Duma deputy Alexander Chuev in 2003” (Michajlov, 2013, p. 90).

**Figure 1. Attitude to sexual minorities among Orthodox respondents from different countries\***



\* Variable freehms: Gays and lesbians free to live life as they wish (strongly agree, agree = positive; neither agree nor disagree = neutral; disagree, strongly disagree = negative).

**Source:** ESS Round 6: European Social Survey Round 6 Data (2012). Data file edition 2.3. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC.

<sup>2</sup> The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church is the main Church document that reflects the position of the ROC on key social and political issues.

Meanwhile, the attitude towards LGBT among Orthodox Christians varies considerably and has no direct correlation with the level of the population religiosity. According to the ESS, the attitude towards sexual minorities among Orthodox Christians in Cyprus or in Bulgaria is much more positive than, for example, in Russia, while the level of religiosity in above-mentioned states (church attendance) is considerably higher.

This shows that religious narratives designated as “traditional values” in political propaganda do not actually correspond to the religiosity *per se*, but express only the politicization of religious ethics and the construction of a certain traditionalist political and religious identity opposed to the Western liberal democracies (Zhuravlev, 2017, pp. 82–100).

In this context, let us turn to the statement made by the Department for External Church Relations of the ROC after the legalization of same-sex marriages in France and in the UK: “...In the countries which have embarked on the path of a radical revision of traditional family ethics, this process has resulted in a demographic crisis which is growing from year to year. The revision of fundamental norms of family law on which the human community has been built for centuries and which are preserved as before in the moral code of major world religions is a path leading to the self-liquidation of whole nations” (*Statement*, 2013). Meanwhile, we can only guess what kind of “crisis” and in which country is meant as there is no any data supporting such a statement. It shows that the rhetoric used by the church officials is, primarily, symbolic and it has no purpose to prove a certain position but there’s a purpose to convince potential supporters on the basis of their own personal predominantly conservative identity.

The growing influence of the ROC on society is also characterized by the penetration of the religious component into the sphere of education: introduction since 2012 to the school curriculum of the subject “Foundations of religious cultures and secular ethics,” actively promoted by the ROC, recognition of theology as a scientific specialty, state accreditation of several Orthodox educational institutions.<sup>3</sup> While speaking about the need for the religious education, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeev), head of the Department for External Church Relations, directly stated that it must protect Russians from the ideology of moral relativism allegedly penetrating from the West: “Religious education can become a reliable barrier against the ideology of moral permissiveness, that actively penetrates to us from the West. When people do not have anything sacred, when same-sex cohabitation is legislatively equated with a marriage between a man and a woman, when homosexual couples are allowed to adopt children, who instead of father and mother have parent number one and parent number two, when euthanasia is legalized as a convenient way to get rid of unnecessary people, whether sick or old, it is impossible not to see a deep moral disease of Western society” (*Vystuplenie*, 2017). We should mention that this speech took place in the Federation Council, the state structure, and thus was not an element of the church sermon but a direct appeal to the Russian authorities. It implied the politicization of the moral issues, appeal to state mechanisms for its protection. The very rhetoric of opposition of Russian values to the “Western” ones is aimed, according to Heleen Zorgdrager, at forming the image of a “strong Russian nation,” which “is being threatened by a disease from outside

<sup>3</sup> The first accredited Orthodox school was the Smolensk Theological Seminary in 2011. It means that the Seminary can provide state-recognized diplomas.

the borders.” In fact, we are talking about the opposition of the supposedly “strong, healthy, masculine Russian state to the degenerated, ill, effeminate states of Western Europe” (Zorgdrager, 2013, p. 228). The West is therefore imaged as the “Other” to the Russian identity.

Another „neo-conservative turn” concept was that of the “*Russkii mir*”<sup>4</sup> (lit. Russian world). One of the definitions of this concept was given directly by the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Kirill (Gundyayev): “If we talk about the civilization, then Russia belongs to a civilization wider than the Russian Federation. We call this civilization the Russian world (*Russkii mir*). The Russian world is not the world of the Russian Federation, nor the world of the Russian Empire. The Russian world begins in the Kiev baptismal font. The Russian world is a specific civilization that includes the people who today call themselves in different ways – Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. This world can include people who don’t even belong to the Slavic world but who perceive the cultural and spiritual component of this world as their own. [...] The Russian world is a spiritual, a cultural, and a value dimension of the human person. Russians, even those who call themselves Russians, can, for instance, not belong to this world, because speaking Russian or understanding Russian is not the only condition for belonging to the Russian world. And we know that many people don’t associate themselves with the Russian tradition, nor with spirituality, nor with culture, but they live with other views, convictions and lose touch with their own civilization” (Svjatejšij, 2014). Thus, the notion of the “*Russkii mir*” is proposed as a “civilizational” characteristic interpreted, first of all, through a religious and cultural basis. We can consider such a characteristic as one of the varieties of modern Russian nationalism, which is based on culture, not ethnicity as an integrating element. The development of nationalist concepts in post-Soviet Russia according to A. Verkhovsky has been expressed in two main directions: the ethnic nationalism and the civilizational one (Verkhovsky, 2011, p. 1135). If ethnic nationalism is based on the feeling of the ethnos as the prevailing political subject and regards the national state as a natural actor, the political ideology of civilizational nationalism is based primarily on statist ideas and autocracy, and “Russianness” (*russkost*) as a component of political identity is determined through the correlation with these ideas, and not through ethnic patterns. In addition to the fact that the concept of the “Russian world” is supranational in this respect, the exclusivity of this approach attracts attention: the primate of the Russian Orthodox Church directly declares that “even Russians who call themselves Russians” may *de facto* not belong to the “Russian world” if they “live with other views, convictions and lose touch with their own civilization.” As ethnic nationalism excludes from the nation all those who don’t belong to it on the basis of ethnicity, civilizational nationalism excludes those who don’t share certain views and convictions, shifting the emphasis from ethnos to culture and actively using the notion of the “specific way of Russia.” At the same time, one can only speculate about what views and convictions are being

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<sup>4</sup> In Russian language there are two words that can be translated into English as “Russian”: *russkii* and *rossiiskii*. Meanwhile, they differ somewhat for Russian speakers: “*russkii*” is associated principally with ethnicity, and “*rossiiskii*” is associated with citizenship. Among some nationalistic audiences, the notion „*rossiiskii*” can even carry a kind of pejorative meaning, referring to those who don’t support nationally and ethnically based ideas.

discussed, since ideological diversity is not only declared by the Russian Constitution (Article 13: “In the Russian Federation ideological diversity shall be recognized. No ideology may be established as state or obligatory one”), but was also an integral part of the Russian culture itself.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, there are no any church documents that would operationalize the concept of the “Russian world.” It remains, therefore, exclusively polemic in the ROC itself, which only confirms the artificial construction of certain political concepts. In 2014, in public speeches of Patriarch Kirill, the idea of a “great synthesis” of all the best that was in the Russian history appears: “I think that we must take from all historical periods everything truly significant and valuable. We need a great synthesis of the high spiritual ideals of Ancient Rus’, the state and cultural achievements of the Russian Empire, the social imperatives of solidarity and collective efforts to achieve common goals that determined the life of our society for the most part of the twentieth century, a just aspiration for the realization of the rights and freedoms of citizens in post-Soviet Russia. Synthesis, which is beyond the usual dichotomy “right-left.” Synthesis, which can be described by the formula “faith – justice – solidarity – dignity – statehood (*derzhavnost’*)” (*Slovo*, 2014). Nevertheless, further statements made by the patriarch and other hierarchs of the ROC indicate that the Church understands its place in the Russian political system not as a “conciliator” of the opposing sides, but as a herald of traditionalist values and ideological conservatism *per se* that can be regarded as the church conceptualization of the proclaimed ideas of the *Russkii mir*. In many ways, such attitudes were transformed into the certain anti-liberal political ideology.

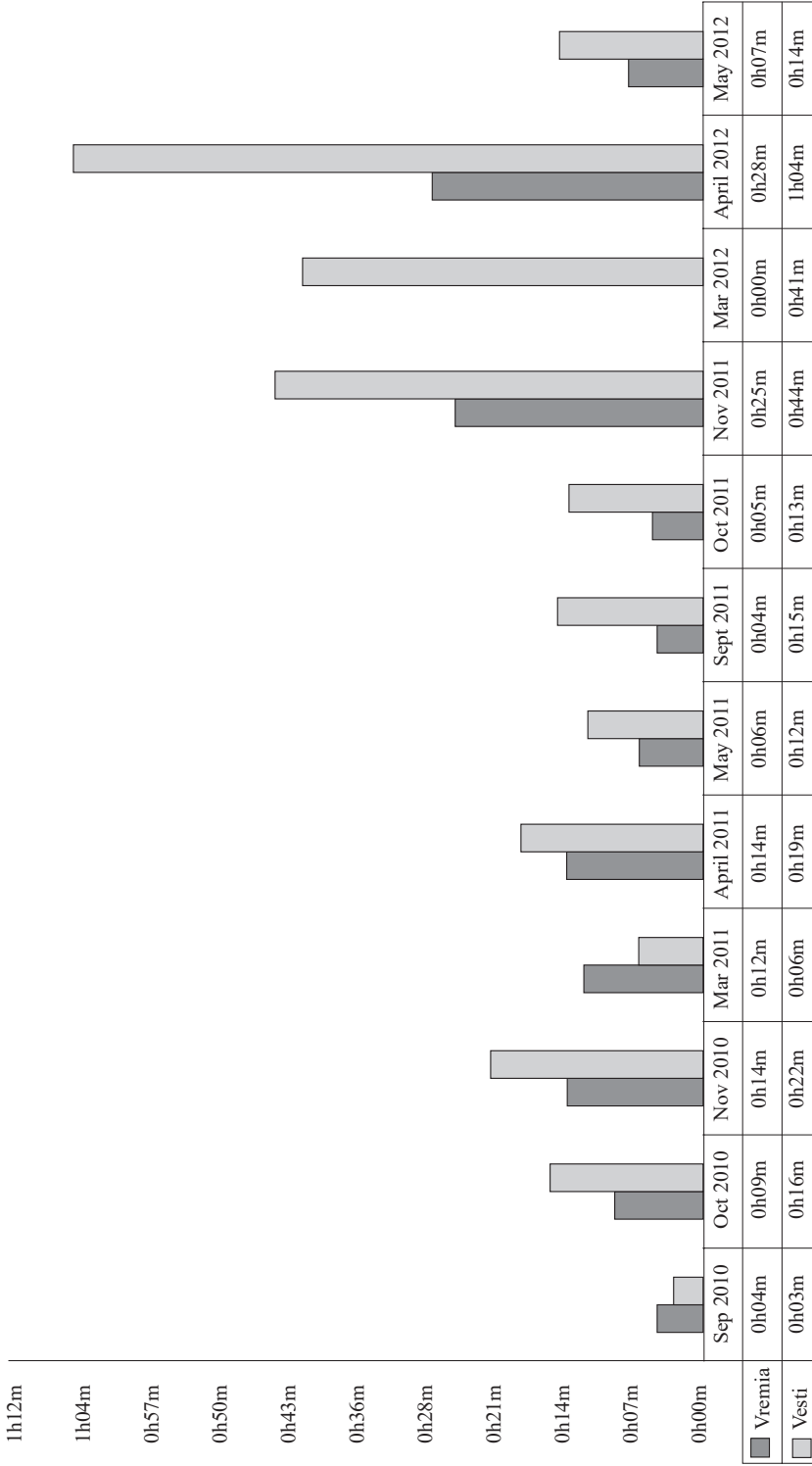
### “Church-state fusion” as a political project

Since the early 2000’s ideas about the “specific civilizational way of Russia” are being actively used in the rhetoric of political authorities, primarily, through the state-controlled media. In 2006, a multi-series program by A. Konchalovsky “Culture is Destiny” appears, and it’s already in 2007 that this phrase is used in a public speech by Vladislav Surkov, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration at that time, with clearly religious connotations: “Culture is destiny. God ordered us to be Russians (*russkimi*), Russian citizens (*rossijanami*), so we will...” (*Surkov*, 2007). According to V. Surkov this “culture” is expressed, first of all, through a strong centralized power (and hence the construction of a power vertical following the example of a monarchical one), idealization of the political struggle goals (which inevitably leads to the formulation of a certain ideology and ideologization of the political field), and finally, the personification of political institutions. Thus, the authorities try to instill to Russian citizens the idea that the very comparison with Western democracies is vicious, because the basis of Russian culture is that it’s initially not “Western” or even “European” but „Other, specific civilization” and therefore relations between political elites and citizens are built in it by other patterns than in countries of liberal democracy. To justify such a position religious rhetoric is actively used and the ROC in this context

<sup>5</sup> A vivid example is the philosophical dispute in the circles of the Russian philosophers of the XIX century, known as the dispute between Westerners (*zapadniki*) and Slavophiles (*slavjanofily*).



Figure 2. Intensity of Russian Orthodox Church-coded stories over the total recording period, *Vremia* and *Vesti*



Source: Kolstø P., Blakkisrud H. (ed.) (2016), *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, Edinburgh University Press Ltd., Edinburgh, p. 314.

and in the current political regime plays a role of the guarantor of this approach and of its religious narratives.

We could also take into account the Putin's visit to the Mount Athos in 2016, where he, during the liturgy, stood on a honorable and elevated place – *stasidion*, surrounded by officials and clergy who accompanied him. At the same time, Russian ultra-conservative media actively disseminated information about allegedly Putin's ascension to the "throne of the Byzantine emperors" (Putin, 2016), which, even if wasn't true<sup>6</sup>, should have emphasize his status as head of the "Orthodox state" or even defender of the "entire Orthodox world" (*Pomazanie*, 2016).

On the eve of the presidential elections in 2012, there has been a course toward a noticeable convergence of the ROC and the state. Interestingly, the very presence of church narratives was considerably intensified in the state-controlled media during the pre-election and post-election period.

At the same time, Patriarch Kirill, head of the ROC, speaking about the 2000s and turning to Vladimir Putin said that it was "with the active participation of the state leadership we had managed to get out of the terrible, systemic and destructive the very foundations of the people's life crisis. [...] I should tell quite openly as the Patriarch, who is called to speak the truth, regardless of the political situation, or the propagandist accents, that you personally, Vladimir Vladimirovich, played a huge role in correcting this curvature of our history. I would like to thank you. You once said that you had been working as a galley slave, with the only difference that the slave doesn't have such a contribution, but your contribution is very significant" (*Vystuplenie Svyatejshego Patriarha...*, 2012). During the pre-election presidential campaign, such a public statement made by the Church leader was widely seen as an obvious political agitation and support from the ROC of the ruling party, current political elite and personally Vladimir Putin. This statement was followed by a political action of the punk band "Pussy Riot" in the Moscow Cathedral of Christ the Savior against such a "fusion between the church and the state," which caused a mixed reaction in the Russian society and gave rise to broad discussions about rapprochement between the ROC and state authorities.

As a "response" to this action, the Supreme Church Council organized in all dioceses the "collective prayer in defense of faith, desecrated sacred places, Church and its good name," which was a definite apogee in the split of the society into the opposition demanding for liberal reforms and paternalist supporters of the ruling elite and strengthening the religion influence in the state and society. This was followed by a tightening of legislation and the adoption of the law against "offending the feelings of believers" (*Russia introduces*, 2013) which *de facto* opposed "believers" to other groups of citizens. As it was noted even by one of the authors of the "Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church" Andrej Zubov: "Unfortunately, the current church leadership clearly positions itself as a supporter of the current regime. And this, in general, violates the ecclesiastical principles in the sense that the Church is outside politics" (*Istoriik...*, 2016). It means that a conditional "split" occurred even among the Orthodox believers, revealing both sup-

<sup>6</sup> In fact, *stasidion* is a common chair-like element in Greek churches for honorary guests, and is not at all analogous to the "imperial throne."

porters of such a policy of the church leadership and its opponents (see: Zhuravlev, 2017, pp. 82–100).

Thus, the Russian authorities, on the one hand, tightened the legislation and led to the restriction of rights and freedoms; on the other hand, it was actively substantiated through the religious rhetoric, the construction of the political Orthodox identity and the introduction of the concept of “traditional values.” This approach clearly reflects the construction of Orthodox identity through the prism of anti-liberal ideology in the current discourse of the ROC. According to Boris Knorre, the very construction of the idea of “Orthodox civilization” was transformed into the politicization of Orthodoxy and the formation of “political Orthodoxy” which is characterized by the vision of a specific civilizational status achieved by politico-militaristic methods (Knorre, 2016, pp. 15–38). This shows that the measures taken by the European Union to oppose neo-conservative populism, which is a challenge to liberal democracy, are fully justified.

### **ROC as an element of the Russian “soft power”**

Of course, the use of the ROC as a “soft power” and an instrument of the Russian influence in the West is not something new. For several decades of the existence of the USSR, the church leadership was incorporated into the system of state power and, despite the atheistic oppression of ordinary believers, the hierarchy worked closely with the Soviet leadership, receiving hence a certain benefit. For the USSR, the use of the Church was necessary in order to promote the “humane face” of the Soviet regime in the West, and ecumenical contacts of the ROC with Western confessions (Catholics and Protestants) were actively used to promote the socialist agenda. By the end of the 80’s many Western countries donated a lot of money for humanitarian assistance and the revival of Orthodoxy in Russia. A special role in this was played by a large Russian-speaking diaspora abroad, descendants of Russian emigrants who recognized the Soviet power as completely hostile to religion. After the collapse of the USSR and the ROC’s gaining freedom in carrying out its own policy, the situation has changed significantly. At the same time, the financial aid to the Church didn’t come to the ordinary clergy, and the emergence in Russia of many Western religious communities (especially Protestant, but also Catholic) soon gave rise to a certain resentment, accusations of proselytism perceived as competition and an attempt to gain the traditional flock of the ROC (Mitrokhin, 2016, pp. 3–18). However, after the collapse of the USSR, the first wave of post-Soviet emigration to the countries of Western Europe occurred. This caused the emergence of new Orthodox communities in historically non-Orthodox countries, and for the ROC it meant a new field of work with compatriots abroad. In 2007, the act reunited the two branches of the Russian Orthodox Church: the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) and the Moscow Patriarchate (ROC) was signed and provided a certain monopoly of the united Russian Orthodox Church in the Russian-speaking Orthodox communities abroad. This allowed the ROC to significantly strengthen its positions in Western and Southern Europe. Moreover, the educational level and the ability to communicate with a diverse flock of many priests

sent to serve in Western parishes were, as a rule, much higher than of those who stayed after ordination in Russia.

In 2004, in Strasbourg (France) there was registered the parish of All Saints and there was created the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Strasbourg to represent the position of the Church in the Council of Europe and to maintain contacts with various EU structures. Of course, such steps by the ROC in the West could not remain without attention and support from the Russian authorities, who saw in this, first of all, a new area for the promotion of Russian foreign policy interests and started to use the ROC as a “soft power.” The development of the concept of the “*Russkii mir*” should have directly served these tasks, as it assumed a cultural association of people living abroad with Russian Orthodoxy and their loyalty to the Russian Orthodox Church, and thus to the supported by the Church Russian authorities. In this context, it is not surprising that the recently built Holy Trinity Cathedral in Paris is merged with the Russian Orthodox Spiritual and Cultural Center, which has the status of a diplomatic territory of Russia. In the light of the “neo-conservative” turn in the policy of the Russian authorities, the Church has become one of the most active allies in the foreign policy direction. The Church’s attempts to build an alliance with conservative denominations in the West (accompanied at the same time by a break in contacts with a number of Protestant churches accused of being too secularized) coincided with attempts by the Russian authorities to find conservative supporters in the West, mostly Eurosceptics. “Traditional values” became thus a political tool for searching the conservative allies ready to support the image of a “strong Russia” and, for sure, not to interfere in any way in its internal political situation, characterized by strengthening the vertical of power, dismantlement of independent media and suppression of any oppositional movements.

Since the late 1990s, the ROC has concluded a cooperation agreement with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The relationship between the Church and the Ministry is constantly maintained, and every year the Easter meeting takes place between representatives of the Church and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, designed to strengthen existing relations and cooperation. The parishes of the ROC abroad are often situated at the Russian embassies and organize activities aimed at “spiritual education, military-patriotic education, media coverage and communication,” as it, for example, directly stated in the report of the Berlin diocese of the ROC (*Koordinatsionnaja*, 2016). In addition, the obvious allies of the ROC are all the right-wing movements in the EU, which oppose the rights of LGBT people, abortion, gender equality, juvenile justice, and so on. Certain hopes were principally associated with the Catholic Church. But despite the fact that the Vatican shares conservative positions with the ROC on some issues, which is often expressed at joint conferences, it carefully distances itself from the activities of the ROC that are perceived too much politically motivated (Mitrokhin, 2016, pp. 3–18). Even in the joint statement of Pope Francis and Patriarch Cyril in 2016, one can’t find any condemnation and denunciation of the “generalized West” – a favorite theme of the ROC representatives for its Russian audience.

Thus, relying on “traditional values,” the ROC is becoming one of the tools to strengthen and represent the Russian political regime in the West and promote its foreign policy interests.

## Conclusion

In Russia, there is a close relationship between religious representatives and political authorities. An important role in the formation of this format of relations is played by the ROC as the largest confession. The church leadership lobbies numerous bills aimed at strengthening the influence of religion in the life of society and the deeper integration of religious institutions into socio-political field. At the same time, there is a fixed polarization of the society in relation to the incorporation of religious norms into the legislation. Despite the high percentage of people identifying themselves as Orthodox, the level of religious activity and real church attendance is extremely low. This shows that for most Orthodox Russians the religious factor is, first of all, a kind of national or cultural self-identification and is not at all connected with following the religious prescriptions in private or public life. In this context, even a significant part of believers sees the strengthening of religious influence and its penetration into various spheres, including legislation, in a negative way. This leads to an increase of anti-clerical attitudes, exacerbated by a positive but not very high institutional trust indexes towards the Church in society (25%, see Table 1), which tends to decrease (–8 points in relation to data for 2015).

Table 1

### The Trust in Social Institutions Index\*

	2013	2015	2017
The president of the Russian Federation	28	68	62
The military	13	46	54
The FSB/other intelligence agencies	6	27	38
The church, religious organizations	26	33	25
Russian charitable organizations	–	–	4
The Federation Council	–18	10	2
The Public Prosecutor's Office	–13	7	–2
The Russian government	–15	12	–5
The State Duma	–23	5	–9
Small and medium-sized Russian businesses	–	–	–9
The press, radio, television	–20	–2	–9

\* The index calculates the difference between “completely trustworthy”/“not at all trustworthy” and “somewhat trustworthy” as 1/2; the greater the importance of an institution, the lower the level of trust associated with it; ranked in descending order, starting with institutions that command a high level of trust and ending with those with low levels of trust

**Source:** *Institutional Trust* (2017), Levada-Center, <https://www.levada.ru/en/2017/11/10/institutional-trust-3/>.

“Church-state fusion” is, first of all, one of the characteristics of the political regime itself. The Russian authorities use religious rhetoric to emphasize their status of a defender of Christian values and to unite around Russian politics conservatives from Western states (we’d rather call it “Conservative International”) and thus to undermine principles of liberal democracy, while interpreting the western values as the liberal ones. Can we talk about the complete failure of such a project? The Pew Research

Center study shows that the pro-Russian sentiments are the strongest among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe with the Orthodox majority and, in particular, among those respondents for whom the Orthodox identity is significant: they tend to view Russia as a “defender” of Orthodox Christians around the world and a “counterweight” to the West, and perceive their own values as different from the values of the generalized “West” (Pew, 2017, p. 126). A logistic regression analysis finds that two factors in particular are closely associated with this position: Orthodox affiliation, and the view that a conflict exists between the values of the respondent’s country and Western ones.<sup>7</sup>

One of the key concepts in the frameworks of this political discourse is “traditional values.” The rhetoric of “traditional values” is actively supported by the ROC and leads to a close cooperation of the state and the Church leadership and thus to the politicization of religious ethics, militarization of the Church discourse and intra-church split on “liberal” and “conservative” believers. The very policy of “traditional values” and the rejection of the values of self-expression is principally a characteristic of an authoritarian regime (see: Inglehart, Welzel, 2005) and is a challenge for liberal democracy. That is why the counteraction to populist propaganda by the EU is a justified measure. In our opinion, one of the areas of such a counteraction should be in-depth study of existing ties between Russian religious organizations, primarily the ROC, and the ruling political elite, which still remains poorly studied.

Pussy Riot case had a definite effect on increasing interest in studying the features of the Russian political regime and its contacts with religious organizations. Although the religiosity of Russian society is rather low, the degree of Church influence on political processes and lawmaking is higher than in developed democracies. Such cooperation between the Church and the state is mutually beneficial to both parties, since it allows the authorities to substantiate political actions by appealing to the rhetoric of religion, religiously based moral values and national identity, and also increases the level of religious institutions incorporation into public life.

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<sup>7</sup> Exceptions are Ukraine and Georgia due to strained relations with Russia, which reflects the importance of the influence of other factors besides religion.

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### Summery

The author analyzes how the concept of "traditional values" is used in the political discourse of the Russian authorities. Since the third term of Vladimir Putin, there has been a noticeable neo-conservative turn in Russian politics, expressed both in the strengthening of the influence of religion and in the tightening of legislation. An active role in this is played by the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church, which openly supports the current regime and strengthens its own influence on public life, regardless of the absence of direct religious demands of Russian society. The concept of "traditional values" is thus politically motivated, interpreted as an opposition to liberal values (an example is the homophobic policy of the Russian authorities) and is aimed at contrasting Russian values with Western ones. The author describes how this discourse is aimed, principally, at consolidating the conservative electorate within the country and spreading Russian influence on "conservatives" from other countries. This reflects the need to search for effective ways to counter populist rhetoric.

**Key words:** religion in Russia, Russian Orthodox Church, Russian politics, traditional values

### Reprezentacja wyznaniowa w stosunkach Rosja–UE: Problem „tradycyjnych wartości”

#### Streszczenie

Autor analizuje, w jaki sposób pojęcie „tradycyjnych wartości” wykorzystywane jest w politycznym dyskursie władz rosyjskich. Od trzeciej kadencji Władimira Putina zauważalny był neokonserwatywny zwrot w rosyjskiej polityce, wyrażony zarówno w umacnianiu wpływów religii, jak i w zaostrzeniu ustawodawstwa. Aktywną rolę w tym odgrywa hierarchia Rosyjskiego Kościoła Prawosławnego, który otwarcie popiera obecny reżim i wzmacnia własny wpływ na życie publiczne. Pojęcie „tradycyjnych wartości” jest zatem motywowane politycznie, interpretowane jako sprzeciw wobec wartości liberalnych (przykładem jest homofobiczna polityka władz rosyjskich) i ma na celu przeciwstawienie wartości rosyjskich wartościom zachodnim. Autor opisuje, w jaki sposób dyskurs ten ma na celu przede wszystkim skonsolidowanie konserwatywnego elektoratu w kraju i rozprzestrzenienie rosyjskich wpływów na konserwatyistów z innych krajów. Odzwierciedla to potrzebę poszukiwania skutecznych sposobów przeciwdziałania populistycznej retoryce.

**Słowa kluczowe:** religia, Rosyjski Kościół Ortodoksyjny, polityka rosyjska, wartości tradycyjne