
The Religious Diplomacy of the Russian Federation



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Related Previous Publications

- *The Religious Factor in Russia’s Foreign Policy*, Routledge, New York-London, 2012;
- “Relations between the Orthodox Church and Islam in the Russian Federation,” *Journal of Church and State*, 2010, Vol. 52, No. 3;
- “Czynnik religijny w polityce zagranicznej Federacji Rosyjskiej,” Warszawa, WUW, 2010.
- “Czynnik religijny w rosyjskiej polityce wobec państw muzułmańskich,” *Stosunki Międzynarodowe-International Relations*, 2009, Vol. 39, No. 1-2;
- “The Attitude of the Moscow Patriarchate towards Other Orthodox Churches,” *Religion, State & Society*, 2007, Vol. 35, No. 4.

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Introduction

At the end of the Twentieth Century as the ideological ice was melting on two geopolitical poles, new tensions started to emerge. Religion plays a role in these processes since it serves as a source of political legitimatisation, acts as an identity factor and can still explain the reality to populations faced with an increasingly globalized world. In case of post-socialistic countries, rediscovering religion means regaining forgotten heritage, historical memory and, last but not least, reconstructing national identity. The former Soviet republics are good examples of these phenomena. One of many manifestations of religion's resurgence in Russia's public sphere is a growing convergence of the activities of the Russian state and religious organisations in the international arena. Russian tradition of using religious institutions for the purposes of the state policy, including diplomacy, has a long history and the Soviet period was not an exception.¹

The Russian Federation is shaping its religious diplomacy (i.e.

¹ Some notable works on politics and religion in contemporary Russia are: Z. Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism*, London-New York, Routledge, 2005. K. Richters, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church: Politics, Culture and Greater Russia*, Routledge, London-New York 2012. G. Simons, S. Mozgovoy, *The Role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia Since 1990: Changing Dynamics of Politics and Religion*, Edwin Mellen Pr, 2009. J.H. Forest, *Religion in the New Russia: The Impact of Perestroika on the Varieties of Religious Life in the Soviet Union*, Crossroad Pub Co, 1990. K. Kaariainen, *Religion in Russia after the Collapse of Communism: Religious Renaissance or Secular State*, Edwin Mellen Pr, 1998. J.C. Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia*, Princeton University Press, 2008. B. Forest, J. Johnson, M.T. Stepaniants (ed), *Religion and Identity in Modern Russia: The Revival of Orthodoxy And Islam*, Ashgate Pub Co, 2005. I. Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, Woodrow Wilson Centre, 2011. W.L. Daniel, *The Orthodox Church and Civil Society in Russia*, Texas A&M University Press, 2006. A. Mitrofanova, *The Politicization of Russian Orthodoxy*, Stuttgart, Verlag, 2005. N. Mitrokhin, *Russkaya Pravoslavnaya tserkov: sovremennoe sostoyanie i aktualnye problemy* [The Russian Orthodox Church: Current State and Problems], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, Moscow, 2004. A. Malashenko, S. Filatov (eds.), *Dvadsat let religioznoy svobody v Rossii* [Twenty Years of Religious Freedom in Russia], The Moscow Carnegie Centre, Moscow, ROSSPEN, 2009. A. Malashenko, S. Filatov (ed.), *Pravoslavnaya tserkov pri novom patriarkhe* [Orthodox Church under the New Patriarch], Moscow Carnegie Endowment, Moscow, ROSSPEN, 2012. S. Filatov, A. Malashenko (ed.), *Religia i konflikt* [Religion and Conflict], Moscow Carnegie Endowment, Moscow, ROSSPEN, 2007. A. Sitinkov, *Pravoslavie i demokratiya* [Orthodoxy and Democracy], MGIMO University Press, Moscow, 2006.

the use of religion in foreign policy) and exercises it with a growing efficiency. This is, to a certain degree, a consequence of processes taking place in Russia, first and foremost, the solving of the crisis of identity and values. Closely connected with this is the renaissance of religion in Russian political and social life. For many Russians, including the political elite, religion is a crucial component of tradition and as such the foundation of values for spiritual recovery of Russian society and Russia's regaining its power status. These internal processes have consequences for Russia's external activity and religious diplomacy is a part of a wider phenomenon of rapprochement between Church and state in Russia.

Religion appears frequently in Russia's official concepts of state policy: the country is depicted as a "civilisational pole" with its own cultural space (*russskiy mir*) and mission (i.e. promoting interfaith dialogue). Both *russskiy mir* and interfaith dialogue are connected with state security and soft power. The highest priority of state-Church external cooperation is the interfaith dialogue—one of the central components of Russia's national image and mission. Loyal religious organisations, capable of conducting transnational activity, are a valuable asset of state diplomacy. This is the case of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and Russian *muftiates*.

Religion in the State Concepts of Russia's Policy

Cultural security and soft power

Religion features in three documents presenting the Russian Federation's foreign policy: "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" of 2008,² "The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020" (2009) and "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation" (2010).³ In these documents, religion appears as a component of culture and a distinctive feature of a civilisation—either as an isolated factor or within a wider context.

In the "Foreign Policy Concept" the current state of international affairs is characterised as "transitional", "for the first time [...] global competition is acquiring a civilisational dimension which suggests competition between different value systems...".⁴ In such a vision of the emerging world order the "clash of ideologies" has been replaced by the "clash of civilisations". It is important to note, that religion serves as a criterion for distinguishing civilisations (understood as geo-cultural communities with particular system of values and a distinctive tradition). Religion is explicitly named as one of the factors whose influence on international relations is growing.⁵

Importantly, in order to determine its identity, position and role on the international arena Russia applies the "paradigm of civilisation" also in relation to itself. Although the notion "Russian civilisation" does not appear in the aforementioned documents, it is repeatedly stressed that Russia is special. It has developed a unique civilisation with its own "space of the Russian language and culture" – the so called *russskiy mir* (the Russian world). Furthermore, the Russian language has become "an integral part of the world culture and an

² "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," *Kremlin Archive*, 12 July 2008, <<http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>>.

³ "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation," 5 February 2010, available courtesy of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_military_doctrine.pdf>.

⁴ "The Foreign Policy Concept," *op. cit.* [2].

⁵ "A religious factor in shaping the system of contemporary international relations is growing, *inter alia*, as regards its moral foundation." *Ibidem*.

instrument of inter-ethnic communications.”⁶

Significantly, Russia's new identity and international image is presented in the documents in connection to the dialogue of civilisations: “Being the biggest European state with multinational and multiconfessional society and centuries-old history, Russia stands ready to play a constructive role in ensuring a civilisational compatibility of Europe, and harmonious integration of religious minorities...”⁷ Thus, initiating and moderating the intercivilisational dialogue is the new international task of the Russian Federation; it is eager to take its own actions “to develop, including through the use of the resources, potential and initiatives of the institutions of civil society in public diplomacy, international cultural and humanitarian cooperation as a means of building intercivilisational dialogue, achieving concord and ensuring mutual understanding between peoples, paying special attention to the interfaith dialogue.”⁸

The intercivilisational or—narrower—interfaith dialogue is connected to Russia's security and soft power. Two kinds of “spiritual” threats are mentioned in the documents. The first one is religious extremism.⁹ The second threat is the erosion of national cultural identity by globalisation. At the moment when “authentically Russian ideals and spirituality are being born”¹⁰ the main challenge is “Westernisation.” According to the authors of “The National Security Strategy” the West's reaction to the prospect of losing its “monopoly in global processes finds its expression, in particular, in the continued political and psychological policy of ‘containing’ Russia”.¹¹ Hence, a strong national identity is seen as necessary to ensure Russia's “civilisational sovereignty.” The latter, however, does not mean a complete isolation from the external influences but rather assumes the existence of Russia's own cultural space with values, traditions and an indigenous system solutions that would enable it to produce its own ideas and not merely copy those of others. Naturally, this is perceived as a feature of a true power.

By promoting an efficient interfaith dialogue on the national level, the Russian authorities hope to prevent the interethnic and interreligious tensions and clashes at home. At the same time, it is a good starting point for building Russia's international credibility as a unique civilisation which has developed a successful model for achieving harmonious religious coexistence. This is a part of its

⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹ According to “The Military Doctrine,” the main external military threats to Russia are “the emergence of seeds of interethnic [interfaith] tension [...] and the growth of separatism and violent [religious] extremism in individual parts of the world.” It is repeated also in “The National Security Strategy.”

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

cultural appeal and therefore an asset of Russia's soft power.¹²

Mentioning Russian religious institutions, the "Foreign Policy Concept" prepares the conceptual ground for the religious diplomacy. It stresses that as a multinational and multiconfessional state, Russia consistently pursues intercultural and interfaith dialogue within international organizations, including the United Nations, UNESCO, OSCE and the Council of Europe, as well as other international and regional organizations, including in the context of cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference. It also mentions the Russian state's efforts to support civil society initiatives and actively cooperate with the ROC and other main confessions of the country.¹³

Significance of religious diplomacy

Religious diplomacy can be described as a state activity consisting of the use of a religious factor in foreign policy; that is, the whole set of mechanisms for state cooperation with religious associations in the pursuit of pragmatically defined national interest, use of the international activity of religious institutions, ideas and religious symbols (appropriately interpreted to comply with current political aims) and so on.

It is important to emphasise pragmatism of architects of religious diplomacy for it does not depend solely on the—professed—religiosity of political elites. Nor is religious diplomacy exclusive to theocratic states. Religious institutions (actors) and religious ideas, symbols etc. are treated in this context foremost as assets, which can be used in order to achieve political goals. However, it is not easy to draw a clear-cut line between personal convictions of an individual and his political decisions and it is practically impossible to determine if a particular act was a result of a sheer political calculation or stems—at least partly—from religious motives. Although decision-makers usually have at least a sentimental relationship to the given belief, this does not necessarily have to be the case—the religious factor can be used in foreign policy regardless of a decision-maker's attitude to faith.

Cooperation is intentionally used to describe relations between the state and religious organisations in the context of religious diplomacy as it is a term with neutral connotations. However, there is no obvious pattern here. Sometimes it is the state which instrumentalizes weaker religious institutions but often Church-state relations resemble a collaboration, which is profitable to both sides and based on a mutual dependency. Nevertheless, in the field of

¹² "The Foreign Policy Concept," *op. cit.* [2].

¹³ *Ibidem.*

diplomacy, a state is by definition the stronger player. The dominant position of the state is reflected, *inter alia*, by the fact that when opinions or interests diverge it is a religious institution which adapts to the demands of secular authorities and not *vice versa*.

One of the main aspects of the “paradigm of civilisation” is the assumption that in the emerging world order power is divided among civilisations and not nation states.¹⁴ Russia wants to present itself as a unique civilisation with a long tradition of harmonious coexistence between Orthodox Christianity and Islam. The Kremlin favours interfaith dialogue as one of the key elements of Russia's new global role.¹⁵ Considering these Russian foreign policy goals, religious diplomacy turns out to be useful. Conducting efficient religious diplomacy depends on two conditions. Firstly, Church-state relations require a minimum level of mutual trust. Secondly, religious institutions become useful to state diplomacy if they are able to take actions on the international arena.

¹⁴ It is hard not to notice the influence of the Huntington's vision on Russian elites. See A. Tsygankov, *Whose World Order? Russia's Perception of American Ideas after the Cold War*, University of Notre Dame, 2004; V. Tsymburski, *Rossiya--Zemlya za Velikim Limitrofom. Civilizaciya i ee Geopolitika* [Russia—Land Beyond a Big Border. Civilization and its Geopolitics], Editorial URSS, Moscow 2010.

¹⁵ This is not contradictory to Russia's fight against Islamic extremists in the North Caucasus. The Russian authorities consistently present the view that the target is terrorists and not Muslims. For example, after attacks in Vladikavkaz in September 2010, Putin announced that the extremists had tried to place the bone of contention between Russian citizens of different faiths and expressed hope that Russian Muslims would aid their defeat. Obozrevatel.com: “Putin nadeetsya, chto musul'mane pobedyat terroristov” [Putin Hopes Muslims Will Defeat Terrorists], 9 September 2010, <<http://obozrevatel.com/news/2010/9/9/389880.htm>>.

The Reasons for the Diplomatic Church-State Collaboration

Developing social partnership: the rapprochement of the state and “traditional” religions in Russia

More than two decades after the fall of the “atheism-friendly” USSR a rapprochement of Church and state is taking place in the Russian Federation. What is more, a specific post-Soviet religious model is being formed. It carries three distinctive features.¹⁶

The first is the legally binding principle of a secular state. This did not, however, hinder the emergence of a group of religious organisations with a special status, resulting from the support of the state authorities. Springing from concern over national identity and cultural heritage, “traditional” religions have been distinguished. In Russia, these are Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism. To make things more complicated, the four religions are usually associated with one single institution, e.g. Orthodox Christianity is identified exclusively with the Russian Orthodox Church and Buddhism only with the *Gelug* school represented by the Traditional Buddhist Sangha of Russia. Although the notion of “traditional religions” still lacks a legal definition, it does have significant political consequences. The existence of the category of fairly privileged “traditional” religions is the second feature of the post-Soviet model.

The third one is connected to the power arrangement between state and Church: the state expects a return on its investment. It should not come as a surprise that there is a price to pay by religious institutions for their privileges. In return for convenient legal solutions¹⁷, financial¹⁸ and political support¹⁹ the power elite demands

¹⁶ It is characteristic not only for Russia but also for Islamic former Soviet republics.

¹⁷ An illustrative example of this was the coming into force in December 2010 of the new law on “Return of property of religious character held by the state or the municipalities to religious organizations”. With it, the long awaited process of returning property to the ROC was initiated. “Federal'nyj zakon RF ot 30 noyabrya 2010 g. ‘O peredache religiozным organizacijam imushhestva religioznogo

loyalty. “Traditional” religions are expected to legitimate the Kremlin’s actions whether it concerns the policy in Chechnya, Putin’s third presidential term or Russia’s cordial relations with Iran. If the Kremlin loses its confidence in a religious organisation’s dedication, it can abruptly reduce benefits²⁰. Under these circumstances, it can be said that the state grants the loyal “traditional” religions with a certain “licence to preach”.

The Russian Orthodox Church—the unquestionable leader of the “traditional club”—sets the standard in terms of contacts with the state. The social partnership serves as an official formula of Church-state collaboration on domestic affairs. According to the ROC’s official stand, the Church is separated from the state but not from the nation,²¹ this not only gives it a right but also imposes a duty upon it to stay active in the public sphere. As a result, there are several fields for developing Church-state cooperation, mostly in the area of education and social welfare, i.e. in schools, hospitals, orphanages, prisons and the army. Introducing the Foundations of Orthodox Culture²² into school programme and establishing military and prison chaplaincies are among the more noticeable successes of the ROC’s assertiveness. What is more, in recent years the scope of social partnership has gradually been extended; as a consequence many state organs and institutions have set up permanent mechanisms of cooperation with the ROC, e.g. by signing a bilateral agreement or establishing a working body. Very illustrative to this point is that in the period 2009-2011 the ROC signed agreements with the Federal Treasure Office, Federal Penitentiary Service Office, the Ministry of Health and the Federal Customs Office.²³ Overall, during Dmitry

naznachenija, nahodyashhegosya v gosudarstvennoy ili municipal'noy sobstvennosti” [Russian Federal Law of 30 November on the Transfer to Religious Organizations of Religious Patrimony belonging to State and Municipalities], <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1333877.html>.

¹⁸ For example, on 8 February 2012, Vladimir Putin met with religious leaders at the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus’ residence. He promised to allocate 3.5 billion rubles to renovation projects. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 9 February 2012, <www.ng.ru/politics/2012-02-09/3_putin.html>. See also M. Edelstain, N. Mitrokhin, *Ekonomicheskaya deyatel'nost' Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvy i ee tenevaya sostavlyayushhaya* [Economic Activities of the Russian Orthodox Church and its Shadow Component], Moscow, RGGU, 2000.

¹⁹ During the above mentioned meeting, Vladimir Putin declared the will to increase the presence of the “traditional” religions in the federal mass media. *Ibidem*.

²⁰ This happened for instance to Mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin who called for a jihad against the US, following the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This, and other awkward statements resulted in the loss of the authorities’ favor. A. Curanović, *The Religious Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy*, London-New-York, 2012, p. 99.

²¹ Patriarch Aleksy II during the meeting with President Putin, official Kremlin website, 10 June 2005, <www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2005/06/89353.shtml>.

²² The subject “Religious-Moral Foundations of Cultures of Nations of Russia” is expected to be introduced to the curricula of all Russian public schools from September 2012.

²³ All the agreements (available in Russian on the official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, <www.patriarchia.ru/>) establish the legal basis for the cooperation between the ROC and state organs. The agreement with the Federal Penitentiary

Medvedev's presidency the position of the ROC in the public sphere got stronger.

It is crucial to notice that the rapprochement of the state and "traditional" religions is based on common goals: strengthening national identity by supporting a revival of "traditional values"; integrating Russian society by creating a strong sense of community; preventing interethnic and interreligious tensions. Additionally, the Kremlin profits from the authority of religious institutions to legitimate its actions, e.g. traditional *muftiates* have always taken the Kremlin's side in regards to its policy towards Islamic extremists.²⁴

The result of the rapprochement is the presence of the "traditional" religions in the public sphere. Thus, the clergy is consulted on legal issues by political parties and local municipalities; religious representatives are invited to official celebrations; some religious holidays have acquired national status; and sacral places are being renovated with support from state-owned companies, etc. All in all, a top-down "re-sacralisation" of the public space,²⁵ sometimes called "orthodoxisation" of the state,²⁶ is taking place in Russia. Russian authorities deflect the criticism regarding the "orthodoxisation" of the state by arguing that the resurgence of "traditional" religions in the public sphere is taking place with the approval of the majority of the society and has its roots in a renaissance of religiosity within the Russian society.

According to the studies conducted by the Levada Centre in September 2011, 69 percent of Russians declared themselves Orthodox, 5 percent Muslim, 1 percent Catholics and Protestants respectively, less than 1 percent Buddhists and Jews, and 5 percent atheist. According to surveys, 11 percent of believers participate in religious services less than once a year, while 47 percent do not

Service recognizes the "enormous potential" of the ROC in the field of moral upbringing and resocialization; regulating the problem of financing and the status of prison chapels and churches; establishing educational centers where clergy would be prepared for duties in prisons; common projects for rehabilitation etc. The cooperation between the ROC and the Federal Treasury Office assumes common efforts to limit corruption and improve "the moral climate" in Russia by supporting the "spiritual revival of Russian society." The Federal Treasury Office undertook to support the return of places of worship to the ROC. The two parties set up a Coordination Council. In the cooperation with the Federal Custom Office, the ROC concentrates on the problem of illegal immigration. Both parties established joint commissions. The agreement with the Ministry of Health emphasizes the need for close cooperation with the ROC in order to "secure the health and preserve the gene pool of the nation." This requires, *inter alia*, preparing common programs, consulting the ROC on legal projects, organizing courses by clergy for medical staff etc.

²⁴ For example, in October 2002, after the controversial intervention of anti-terrorist units in the Dubrovka theatre hostage crisis, the muftis unanimously supported Putin.

A. Curanović, *op. cit.* [20], p. 102.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

²⁶ See: A. Malashenko, S. Filatov (eds.), *Pravoslavnaya tserkov' pri novom patriarhe*, *op. cit.* [1]; S. Filatov, A. Malashenko (ed.), *Religiya i konflikt*, *op. cit.* [1].

practice at all.²⁷ In the case of Muslims, the frequency of participation in religious ceremonies appears slightly higher: 12 percent participate once a month, 14 percent several times a year or less, and 50 percent do not take part in ceremonies at all. The large disproportion between the self-identification and ritual attendance is the most characteristic feature of the religiosity of Russian society.²⁸ An important point that has to be made in connection to this data is that while the openness of Russians to religiosity is growing, this does not imply that the population favours the increasing “clericalisation” of the public sphere. In surveys published at the end of 2011, 48 percent expected the ROC to stay separate from the state, while 30 percent supported the idea of making Orthodox Christianity the state religion. According to 55 percent of respondents, the ROC was too dependent on the Kremlin.²⁹

In view of this data, it is important to note the conflicting tendency in the policy of the Russian authorities towards the “traditional” religions in the public sphere, especially the ROC and *muftiates*. On one hand, the Kremlin is cautious to emphasise that Russia is a multiethnic and multireligious state; on the other hand, the leaders argue the need to strengthen the “orthodox core” of the Russian Federation.³⁰ Keeping the right balance between these two narratives seems a very demanding political task, especially if one takes into consideration the already existing interethnic tensions (which, in the case of Russia, are virtually always linked with a particular religion) fuelled *inter alia* by immigration, terrorist attacks and economic crisis.³¹

²⁷ Levada Center Survey, 8 September 2011, <<http://old.levada.ru/press/2011090801.html>>.

²⁸ M. Tarusin, *Religija i obshchestvo* [Religion and Society], Institut obshchestvennogo proektirovanija, Moscow, Otdel sociologii, 2005, <www.religare.ru/book502.htm>.

²⁹ FOM-Penta Survey, 25 November 2011, <www.sova-center.ru/religion/discussions/authorities/2011/12/d23160/>.

³⁰ Interestingly, these two views can often be presented in a single speech or document. See for example the speech of Dmitry Medvedev: “Dmitriy Medvedev vstretilsya s uchastnikami Arhierejskogo sobora” [D. Medvedev Met the Participants of Bishops’ Sobor], 3 February 2011, <<http://kremlin.ru/news/10220>>; or Vladimir Putin on the national question: “Rossiya: nacional’nyj vopros” [Russia: The National Question], January 2012, <www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html>.

³¹ See: S. Hunter, *Islam in Russia*, ME Sharpe 2004. A. Malashenko, *Islam dlya Rossii* [Islam for Russia], Moscow Carnegie Centre, ROSSPEN 2007. Yu. Gavrilov, A. Shevchenko, *Islam et pravoslavno-musulmanskie otnosheniya v Rossii v zerkale istorii i sotsiologii* [Islam and Orthodox-Muslim Relations in Russia through the Lens of History and Sociology], Moscow, Kulturnaya Revolutsiya, 2010. V. Shnirelman, *Porog tolerantnosti. Ideologiya i praktika novogo rasizma* [Threshold of Tolerance. The Ideology and Practice of the New Racism], Moscow, Novoe literaturnoye obozrenie, 2011.

Transnational features of Russian religious organisations

The Russian Orthodox Church has the distinguishing features of a transnational actor, Russian *muftiates*, under pressure from the ROC's growing activity, have just started to develop their potential to conduct activity beyond Russian borders, while Buddhist or Jewish organisations' actions usually raise the interest of the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry only in a very particular context, e.g. in regard to the Dalai Lama or the Jackson-Vanik amendment. All in all, it is *muftiates* and the ROC that matter the most for Russia's religious diplomacy.

The ROC is capable of operating beyond the borders of the Russian Federation due to its vast canonical territory which covers the area of the former Soviet Union with the exception of Armenia and Georgia. Moreover, the ROC takes care of parishes and Church infrastructure on six continents. The diplomatic experience of Russian Orthodox clergy has developed over hundreds of years;³² however, the fully professional Department of External Relations was established in 1946. It is important to emphasise that under the bishop Nikodim (Rotov) in the 1960-70s, it grew to become the most influential synodal department within the whole Moscow patriarchate. According to the bishop Hilarion (Alfeyev), since 1989 it has been the "intellectual kitchen" of the ROC.³³ Under the bishop Kirill (Gundyaev), it came to serve as a breeding ground for new ideas—e.g. it was responsible for preparing "The Social Concept of the ROC." The choice of Kirill as the XVI Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia is another clear indication of the central position of the Department of External Relations within the ROC.³⁴

In 2011, on the occasion of 65th anniversary of the Department for External Relations, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov praised the patriarchate's diplomacy for its skills and involvement, *inter alia* in supporting the Russian Diaspora and interfaith dialogue.³⁵ It is no coincidence that among all the ministries, the Foreign Affairs Ministry is most dynamically developing its cooperation with the

³² A. Curanović, *op. cit.* [20], p. 70-89.

³³ Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, "Missiya dvizhet diplomatiey" [Diplomacy is Moved by Mission], 3 August 2011, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1592039.html>.

³⁴ See: J. & C. Garrard, *op. cit.* [1]; N. Mitrokhin, *op. cit.* [1]; M. Mchedlov, *O social'noy koncepcii russkogo pravoslaviya* [On the Social Concept of Russian Orthodoxy], Moscow, Respublika, 2002.

³⁵ Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, *Pozdravleniye ministra inostrannyh del S. Lavrova Svyatejshemu Patriarkhu Kirillu po sluchayu 65-letiya osnovanuya OVTsC*, [Congratulations of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation on the 65th Anniversary of Founding of the Department for External Church Relations], 24 July 2011, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1584810.html>.

Moscow patriarchate. Although the sides have not yet signed a standard framework agreement, an expert working group of the ROC and Foreign Affairs Ministry was established in 2003 and since then on holds regular sessions. Sergey Lavrov is a declared supporter of renewing the historical ties between the ROC and the MFA, and of the participation of the Church in Russian foreign policy. Joint delegations and exchange of information between diplomats take place on a regular basis. There is also a tradition of common meetings—on the occasion of Easter—of clergy and state diplomats in the headquarters of the ministry.

The ROC is a special institution which represents the Russian state on the international arena to some extent. At the *Sobor* of Archbishops, on 2 February 2011 Patriarch Kirill stated: “more and more countries perceive the Moscow patriarchate as an important and respectful participant in international dialogue [...]. Representatives of high political and diplomatic circles show interest in the ROC’s opinion on concrete problems of current international affairs”.³⁶ Proof supporting this conviction can be found in Russia’s contacts with Cuba, Iceland or North Korea. In these countries the appearance of an Orthodox church was motivated by the desire to accelerate the relations with Russia; it was a sign of good will toward the Kremlin (North Korea³⁷) or an act of gratitude for the Russian government’s earlier help (Iceland).³⁸ Associating the ROC with the state authorities is an important factor in the ROC’s activity, as it increases its transnational capacity. The Moscow patriarchate has its own network of diplomatic contacts³⁹ and uses instruments that allow it to act effectively internationally in its own interest and in that of the Russian state. The ROC has a strong position, the will to act, support of the government and is also seen by the rest of the participants in international relations as an institution that is not only religious, but also political.

In comparison to the ROC, diplomatic activity of Russian Muslims is less impressive. One of the most serious disadvantages

³⁶ Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, *Predstoyatel russkoy pravoslavnoy tserkvi: vse bolshie chislo gosudarstv vosprinimaet Moskovskiy Patrarkhat kak avtoritetnogo uchastnika mezhdunarodnogo dialoga* [The Chief of Russian Orthodox Church: More and More States Perceive the Moscow Patriarchate as an Important Actor of the International Dialog], 3 February 2011, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1399948.html>.

³⁷ The construction of the Holy Trinity Church in Pyongyang in 2004 was meant to give a new impetus to the relations between North Korea and Russia.

³⁸ The ROC was given a site in Reykjavik to build upon in 2005 as a symbolic confirmation of cordial Russian-Icelandic relations. In 2011 the foundation stone was laid.

³⁹ See A. Curanović, *op. cit.* [20], p. 89-98; O. Tserpitskaya, *Vzaimodejstvie Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Cerkvy i rossiyskogo gosudarstva v mirovom soobshhestve* [Cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian State in the World Community], Izdatel'stvo Peterburgskogo Universiteta, Sankt Petersburg, 2006.

that limits the *muftiates*' transnational potential is the dispersal of Islamic institutions in Russia and infighting between muftis. Despite the efforts of different groupings to establish one central institution which would represent an all Russian *ummah*, communities of "traditional" Islam are becoming increasingly fragmented and decentralised. Nevertheless, the Council of Muftis of Russia led by Rawil Gaynetdin manifests the greatest ambition to become the representative of Russian Muslims on the international arena.

The Council of Muftis of Russia worked out in 2001 a document "Basic Guidelines of the Social Program of Russian Muslims."⁴⁰ In this document, the Council of Muftis defined the goals of its activity internally and abroad. For all Islamic structures, domestic matters have priority over foreign ones—each aspires to become the leader of the Russian *ummah* and then consolidate the position of Muslim citizens within the Russian Federation. Internationally, the authors of The Social Program of Russian Muslims recognize contacts with other institutions—notably with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the League of Arab States—and with Muslim states, particularly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Turkey, Iran and Egypt, as the most important goal. In this way, the *muftiates* want to become a part of a process of building "strategic partnership" of Russia with these countries. Naturally, the Russian government assesses such initiatives positively.

It is important to remember that *muftiates* have almost no property and no administrative capacity beyond Russia's borders, thus their activity amounts not to recovering a lost position, but rather to building a new international role. It is one of the reasons why Islamic organizations pay decidedly less attention to international activity than the Moscow patriarchate does. Another reason for such a discrepancy is the lack of institutions equivalent to the Department of External Relations of the Moscow patriarchate. However, this is also changing gradually: for instance, within the framework of the Council of Muftis of Russia, a Department of Foreign Relations was established in 2007⁴¹, the work of which is directed by Mufti Rushan–Hazrat–Abbyasov.⁴²

⁴⁰ Council of Muftis of Russia, *Osnovnye polozeniya social'noy programmy rossiyskikh musul'man* [Basic Guidelines of the Social Program of Russian Muslims], DIAPRESS, Yaroslavl, 2001.

⁴¹ The Department was previously a section which was upgraded in 2007. Sovet muftiev Rossii, "Informaciya o Mezhdunarodnom departamente Soveta muftiev Rossii" [Information on the International Department of the Council of Muftis of Russia], <www.muslim.ru/1/cont/8/44/>.

⁴² Tatarmoscow.ru: "Rushan Abbyasov: v Sovete muftiev Rossii proydet modernizaciya" [The Council of Muftis of Russia will be Modernized], 29 November 2011, <http://tatarmoscow.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3704:2011-11-29-09-22-38&catid=19&Itemid=34>.

One more factor plays an important role in this context: in the post-Soviet space, Russian *muftiates*' diplomatic ambitions face a direct challenge from the Baku-based Caucasus Muslim Council led by Mufti Allahshukhur Pashazade. Pashazade is the main partner of the Moscow patriarchate in initiating and moderating interfaith dialogue in the Community of Independent States (CIS). The Mufti of the Caucasus and the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia co-chair the Interreligious Council of the CIS. Additionally, the Consultative Council of Muslims of the CIS was established in 2010 on the initiative of Mufti Pashazade; unsurprisingly, he became the first head of this Council. This shows that the position of Russian *muftiates* even in their closest neighbourhood is not strong,⁴³ which does not bode well for their international ambitions. As a result, their usefulness for Russia's religious diplomacy is limited.

⁴³ It is worth noticing that it was only in 2011 that a body for the cooperation with the CIS states was established within the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Council of Muftis of Russia. *Ibidem*.

The Characteristics of the Religious Diplomacy of the Russian Federation

Common views on international relations and Russia's national interest

As stated before, in case of Russia's religious diplomacy it is the state which holds the initiative and backs up religious institutions as long as it is convinced that they are loyal and that their activities are beneficial to Russia's national interest. The Kremlin's trust in "traditional" religions is the cornerstone of their cooperation in the international arena. This assumption alone (that they are loyal) makes lending support to the Church sensible in the eyes of the Russian authorities and it is from this perspective that one should interpret the Kremlin's diplomatic "patronage" of religious institutions, especially in relation to the ROC. For instance, Russian diplomats often supported the ROC's claims regarding the recovering of real estate (e.g. in Nice, Biarritz, Sourozh,).⁴⁴

There is one more factor which reinforces state-Church contacts in the foreign policy and gives them solid grounds—common views on international relations.⁴⁵ Both the Russian state and the ROC, consider the so called "near abroad" (which almost perfectly corresponds to the ROC's canonical territory) a sphere of Russia's existential interests.⁴⁶ Therefore, they perceive the activity of non-Russian actors (regardless of whether those are states or religious organisations) in this part of the world as a direct challenge. What is more, the Moscow patriarchate shares the Kremlin's criticism of the

⁴⁴ These are parishes which used to be (before 1930) under the authority of the Western European Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church and later became a part of the Patriarchal Exarchate for Orthodox Parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe. At present they are the object of a conflict between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate. See A. Curanović, *op. cit.* [30], p. 189-190.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 133-138.

⁴⁶ Yu. Rjabyh, "Vneshnepoliticheskie orientiry Russkoy pravoslavnoy cerkvi (1991–2000)" [Foreign Policy Orientations of the Russian Orthodox Church], *Pro et Contra*, 2001, No. 6, p. 118–135.

“unipolar” world; the *Pax Americana* is viewed by both as a threat to global peace and stabilisation.⁴⁷ The ROC is particularly cautious about exaggerated liberalisation of social relations, erosion of the institution of family, moral relativism, which are all associated with “Westernisation” and seen in terms of civilisational pressure performed by the US.⁴⁸

Multipolarity is presented by the Kremlin and the Moscow patriarchate as a remedy against the *Pax Americana*. In their view, a close cooperation of non-Western powers should bring the necessary balance to the global system of power. It is no coincidence that state and Church see Russia's strategic partners in the same countries, i.e. China and India. The Kremlin promotes the vision of the Eurasian “triangle of strategic partnership”, whereas the ROC adds to this geopolitical configuration a civilisational dimension. The ROC underlines the need to establish an “alliance of traditional civilisations”, i.e. civilisations which have protected the system of their traditional values from the harmful impact of “Westernisation”.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the Kremlin and the ROC share the same vision of Russia in the XXI century: they see it as one of crucial global powers with its own unique civilisational identity and culture, actively involved in forming a new world order.

In terms of national interest the Kremlin identifies areas in which the foreign activity of “traditional” religions is important. The existential interests of the state (sovereignty, security, territorial integrity, identity) are connected with the closest neighbourhood of Russia. From the perspective of usefulness of religious factor the “near abroad” can be divided into three parts.

The first one is the “Orthodox Core” (Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova), where the ROC is an influential actor. Two other regions – Central Asia and Caucasus are a stage of geopolitical rivalry, with the strong presence of Islam and the ROC as a Church of a religious minority. In post-Soviet Eurasia the Kremlin expects the ROC foremost to strengthen Russian Diaspora's ties with the Homeland, preserve and reinforce the Russian culture sphere. As a preserver of historical memory the Russian Orthodox Church aspires to recreate an ethos common to the post-Soviet republics. Significantly, *muftiates*

⁴⁷ Archive of the Official Site of the Moscow Patriarchate, “Tserkov prizvana vesti dialog s mirom na urovne serdtsa” [The Church has to Conduct a Dialog with the World on the Level of the Heart], Speech of Smolensk and Kaliningrad Metropolitan Kirill at the Moscow Institute of International Relations], 19 February 2002, <www.mospat.ru/archive/nr208152.htm>.

⁴⁸ Archive of the Official Site of the Moscow Patriarchate, “Mitropolit Kirill posetil s arkipastyrskim vizitom Korolevstvo Tailand” [Metropolitan Kirill Visited the Kingdom of Thailand], 22 November 2001, <www.mospat.ru/archive/nr111195.htm>.

⁴⁹ Archive of the Official Site of the Moscow Patriarchate, “Svyateyshiy Patriarkh Aleksiy posetil Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossii” [Patriarch Alexey Visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], 20 March 2003, <www.mospat.ru/archive/nr303063.htm>.

play a minor role in Russia's religious diplomacy in the CIS territory. This is mainly due to the aforementioned underdeveloped infrastructure, the lack of experience in diplomacy and – last but not least – the relatively weak position in the CIS resulting from strong competition from the Caucasus Muslim Council.

Although the influence of the ROC is noticeably weaker outside its canonical territory and the CIS, the Church can still be useful to Russia's national interest, especially in terms of Russia's soft power – as an intermediary in building its international identity, image and prestige. The first area where ROC can assume this role is Christian Orthodox countries. Referring to common tradition, sympathies and good contacts between Churches, helps Russia to create a cordial atmosphere; it uses the slogan of "Orthodox Brotherhood" to smooth its image and present itself as a leader of the global Orthodox community.⁵⁰ In this way, for example, it legitimises Russia's special interest in the Balkans.⁵¹

The second area is the world of Islam. The ROC and *muftiates* help to create a credible image of Russia – a country where Christians and Muslims live in harmony. A convincing image of a country which is friendly to Muslims is not to be underestimated, especially when it concerns a state wary of Islamic extremism within its own borders. The activity of the Moscow patriarchate or the Council of Muftis of Russia contributes to Russia's rapprochement with Muslim countries – potentially valuable allies in weakening the dominance of the West. Furthermore, this enables Russia to internalise conflict in the Northern Caucasus and isolate extremists from the World *ummah*. Last but not least, good relations with Muslims give Russia a stronger mandate to mediate in the Near East conflict or in negotiations with Iran.

The roles of Russian religious institutions on the international arena

Religion is frequently used as an ideological tool for legitimizing political power; inevitably, the actions ROC can also be read in such a context. Its activity in this regard can be roughly divided into three categories: "classic diplomacy", "efforts connected with the self-identification process of Russia" and "endeavours to bolster Russia's soft power". Metaphorically speaking, in the first category the ROC

⁵⁰ Naturally, by aiming for the leadership of the global Orthodox community the Russian Orthodox Church challenges the position of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which has led to tension and several conflicts. See: A. Curanović, *op cit.* [20], p. 187-193.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 154-160.

assumes the roles of an “unobvious diplomat” and a “mediator and peacemaker”, in the second that of a “(supra)national repository” and a “good shepherd”, while in the third we can observe the ROC acting as “the orthodox leader”, an “experienced reconciler” and a “just protector”.

Let us start with the category of “classic diplomacy”. Possessing their own diplomatic contacts, religious institutions can easily serve as a “back channel” for state officials, especially when the political relations are burdened with problems. An excellent example is the ROC’s close contacts with the Georgian Orthodox Church. Despite the deep post-war crisis on the level of state relations, both Churches keep emphasising their brotherhood and mutual trust. They maintain a valuable communication link – in 2010 the religious organizations mutually appointed representatives to both capitals (archimandrite Wahtang was sent to Moscow and archimandrite Roman (Lukin) to Tbilisi), which act as a kind of message box also for politicians.⁵²

Another example of the ROC acting as an “unobvious diplomat” is the dialogue between Polish Catholic Church and the Moscow Patriarchate which took off in 2009. There have been several meetings of a working group of clergy which is preparing a common memorandum. The initiative, parallel to the efforts of the governments, is aimed at preparing the fertile ground for a symbolic and long awaited breakthrough and reconciliation in Polish-Russian relations.⁵³

The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh can be named as an

⁵² Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate about the visit of the archimandrite Russian Orthodox Church to Tbilisi, 11 January 2010, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/988428.html>; Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate about the visit of the archimandrite Georgian Orthodox Church to Moscow, 13 January 2010, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/995222.html>. Although the ROC continues to emphasize its respect for the integrity of the canonical territory of the GOC, this does not remove all sources of tension in relations between the Russian and Georgian Churches. Significantly, the ROC’s approach towards the two quasi-states is evolving: in case of the South Ossetia the Moscow patriarchate stresses that the local Orthodox communities are led by schismatics and have therefore lost to the unified canonical Church; however, in the case of Abkhazia, the ROC has started to underline the urgent need to take care of the Orthodox believers there. This matter, as the ROC puts it, should be solved in dialogue with the GOC. Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, “Arkhiepiskop Volokolamskiy Ilarion: ‘Politicheskie razdeleniya i izmenenie gosudarstvennykh granic ne dolzhny vesti k izmeneniyu granic cerkovnykh’” [Bishop Volokolamsky Hilarion: Political Divisions and Changes of State Borders Must Not Change Religious Borders], 31 October 2009, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/926233.html>.

⁵³ Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate “Kommyunike po itogam vstrechi predstaviteley Russkoj Pravoslavnoy Cerkvi i Katolicheskoy Cerkvi v Pol'she” [Communiqué on the Results of a Meeting between Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church in Poland], 1 March 2010, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1103693.html>.

example where the ROC has been playing the role of a “mediator and peacemaker”. In 1993 the authority of Patriarch Alexy II brought for the first time to the negotiating table in Moscow the religious representatives of the two fighting nations, i. e. *Katolikos* of All Armenia Karekin and Mufti of Caucasus Allahshukhur Pashazade. All three dignitaries have committed themselves to support only peaceful solutions in the spirit of mutual respect and understanding. The trilateral meeting was reactivated in Baku in April 2010. The next meeting took place in Yerevan in November 2011. Both events ended with the common appeal addressed to politicians to give a new impetus to the peace dialogue. What is more, after the Yerevan summit, Armenian *Katolikos* and Azeri Mufti declared the will to hold a historical meeting at the war frontline in the Nagorno-Karabakh.⁵⁴ Undoubtedly, the ROC is *spiritus movens* of the trilateral initiative. This suits Russian diplomacy which takes the credit for playing the role of a neutral mediator.

The second category of roles refers to the ROC's activity in the post-Soviet space. The ROC appears in a very demanding position. On one hand, it tries to act as “national repository” of Russian civilisational heritage; it considers itself a protector of the true national identity. On the other hand, the ROC takes effort to convince other post-Soviet Orthodox nations that it is not a merely Russian institution, but a “supranational repository” of the Holy Rus and a protector of the memory of those who died fighting against fascism in WWII. A good example of this approach can be seen in the ROC's new strategy towards Ukraine. The ROC joined commemorating of the victims of *Holodomor* in the Ukraine on 26 November 2011; however, the ROC frames the event in a wider context of suffering of all the people living in the USSR in 1932-1933 (Ukraine, Povolzhe, North Caucasus, Southern Ural and Western Siberia were mentioned) and in this way soothes the anti-Russian edge.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Patriarch Kirill during his diplomatic visits has consistently stressed that he is Patriarch of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. In 2011 he sent an Easter address to the presidents of all four Orthodox republics⁵⁶.

The role of “good shepherd” reflects the ROC's involvement in

⁵⁴ Interfax, “Religioznye lidery Azerbaydzhana y Armeniy vstretyatsya v Nagornom Karabakhe” [Religious Leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia Will Meet in Nagorny Karabakh], 29 November 2011, <www.interfax-religion.ru/orthodoxy/?act=news&div=43307>.

⁵⁵ Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, “V khramakh Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi molitvenno pochtily pamyat' zhertv massovogo goloda 1932-33 godov” [Cathedrals of Russian Orthodox Church prayed for the Memory of Victims of the 1932-33 Mass Famine], 26 November 2011, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1783501.html>.

⁵⁶ Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, 23 April 2011, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1456317.html>.

integrating *russskiy mir*.⁵⁷ In this sphere the ROC cooperates closely with the Foreign Affairs Ministry and *Rossotrudnichestvo*.⁵⁸ First of all, it is involved in the Fund *Russskiy Mir* and takes part in the annual meetings of the Assembly of *Russskiy Mir*. Additionally, it participates in the All-World Congress of *Sootchestvenniks* (compatriots) and the All-World Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots. The ROC is also a member of the organisation committee of *Days of Russia* abroad. All in all, this role is crucial for the way Russia defines its neighbourhood and sphere of influence; preserving its status in the post-Soviet Eurasia is a fundamental condition for Russia's rise on the international arena.

Although Russia's plans with building-up its soft power start in the post-Soviet space, its ambitions go far beyond its immediate neighbours. For Russia, this is a global project concentrated on creating a new image suitable for the XXI century. For the Orthodox community, the ROC wants to be considered the leader of the Universal Orthodox Church. If this becomes a fact, that would influence Russia's position as well. The sporadic ideas of setting in Moscow a kind of an "Orthodox Vatican" or establishing a "Conference of Orthodox States"⁵⁹ indicate that *Slavia Orthodoxia* is perceived as a geocultural base for Russia's ambitions. A sense of cultural closeness is fostered by the system of Slavic funds, awards (e.g. the International Fund of Unity of Orthodox Nations grants an annual award named after Alexy II) and festivals (e.g. the Day of Slavic Writing and Culture or the International Festival of Slavic Nations "Slavic Unity").

Finally, the roles of a "reconciler" and "just protector" are interconnected. Russia wishes to be seen as an important mediator in the dialogue of civilisations and aspires to status of the patron of the poor and weak in the "North vs. South" rivalry. Interfaith dialogue is important to both roles.

The interfaith dialogue as the highest priority

Interfaith dialogue is the highest priority of Russia's religious diplomacy. This sphere is the focus of the ROC's most intensive multilateral activity. Islamic organisations are also involved in this

⁵⁷ See V.N. Ivanov, B. Seergeev, *Russskiy mir i social'nye realii* [The Russian World and Social Realities], Moscow, Serebryanye niti, 2008.

⁵⁸ *Rossotrudnichestvo* is a common name for the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation of the Russian Federation.

⁵⁹ Demos, "Deputat A. Mitrofanov predlozhit sozdat' 'russskiy Vatikan'" [Deputy A. Mitrofanov Proposed the Creation of a Russian Vatican], 28 June 2006, <www.demos-center.ru/news/12379.html>.

policy. They are dedicated to intensify and institutionalise the debate on interfaith and intercivilisational contacts. One of the necessary preconditions is the interest and involvement of the international community in this particular problem. The general intention is to encourage international actors to consider opinions of religious representatives during decision-making processes. Religious organisations tend to work out firm mechanisms of cooperation with states and international organisations. Naturally, Russia gets credit for achievements of the ROC and *muftiates* on this issue. Significantly, on this level collaboration between state and Church diplomacy is close. Three areas of operation can be distinguished: the CIS, the Muslim world and international institutions (e.g. UN, UNESCO, OSCE, Council of Europe, OIC).

On the territory of the CIS, the Moscow patriarchate and *muftiates* use their influence to smooth interreligious tensions and moderate the dialogue between actors. The most important platform of their activity is the Interreligious Council of the Commonwealth of Independent States (established in 2004) which meets once a year. Russian clergy as well as Russian state diplomacy promote it as an efficient institutional solution to interconfessional tensions. It is presented as a symbol of the successful dialogue between religions in the post-Soviet area. The activity of the Council is indeed developing, e.g. in January 2011 a new body was founded—the Commission for Peacemaking at the Interfaith Council of Russia.⁶⁰ It is also important to note the initiatives of the Muslim clergy. In attempting to lessen the ROC's diplomatic advantage in the CIS, in June 2009 Russian *muftis* held in Moscow the first summit of leaders of Islamic religious institutions of the CIS, which was dedicated to the strengthening of cooperation between the states and integration of the *ummah* of the former Soviet Union.

Paradoxically, despite all the efforts of Russian muftis, the status of the ROC as the main Russian religious institution moderating the dialogue with the World of Islam will probably remain undisputed in the near future. The Moscow patriarchate prides itself, not without reason, on being the Christian Church with the closest relations with Iranian ayatollahs.⁶¹ The most important effect of cooperation of Russian and Iranian clergy is the activity of the Islam–

⁶⁰ Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, "Igumen Filipp (Rjabykh): Tserkov' mozhet nahodit' obshchiy yazyk s lyud'mi raznykh politicheskikh vzglyadov, esli v svoey deyatelnosti oni prislushivayutsya k sovesti" [Igumen Filipp (Rjabykh): Church Can Find Common Language with People of Different Political Opinion, if Their Activities are Guided by Conscience], 29 November 2011, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1788928.html>.

⁶¹ Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, "Mitropolit Smolenskiy i Kaliningradskiy Kirill: 'Ne izbezhish' radikal'nogo otveta'" [Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad Kirill: It is Impossible to Avoid a Radical Response], 27 October 2007, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/314095.html>.

Orthodoxy Commission, created in 1997. The first session took place in that same year in Teheran, and subsequent ones were organized alternately in the capitals of Russia and Iran (1999, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012). During meetings issues such as: the role of religion in modern societies, dialogue of civilisations, globalisation, terrorism and extremism, moral crisis of societies, Islamic and Christian theology, were discussed.⁶² From the Kremlin's viewpoint, the Moscow patriarchate's cooperation with Iran is of great significance.

Turkey is another country with Muslim population which attracts the attention of the ROC. It is no coincidence that Patriarch Kirill chose Istanbul as the destination of his first visit outside the CIS. During his meeting with Prime Minister Recep Erdogan, Kirill expressed interest in developing close cooperation with Turkish Islamic institutions.⁶³ The ROC seeks to establish forums and create mechanisms for cooperation similar to those present in Russian–Iranian relations. The Moscow patriarchate contributes to the work of the Russian–Turkish Social Forum established in 2010 on the initiative of two presidents.

In terms of proving Russia's friendliness towards Islam, Russia's acquiring observer status at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in 2005 is an incomparable diplomatic achievement. Moreover, the efforts of the state diplomacy were officially supported by Russian muftis as well as the Moscow patriarchate. The most important result of Russia's cooperation with the OIC is the functioning of the international Strategic Vision Group: Russia and the Islamic World. Its framework is gradually expanding, for example with the initiative to create a joint commission on dialogue.

The involvement of international organisations is crucial for promoting interfaith dialogue as a priority issue internationally. That is why the ROC concentrates its efforts on strengthening its presence at different forums. Importantly, Church can always count on the Foreign Affairs Ministry's support. At the United Nations the Moscow patriarchate is active *inter alia* in the Council for Human Rights.⁶⁴ One of the results is a draft resolution on "traditional values" ("Promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms through a better

⁶² Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, "Utverzhen sostav delegacii Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Cerkvi dlya uchastiya v VIII zasedanii Sovmestnoy rossiysko-iranskoj komissii po dialogu 'Pravoslavie-Islam' [The Composition of the Delegation of Russian Orthodox Church is Approved for Participation in the VIIIth Meeting of the Russian-Iranian Commission on Orthodoxy-Islam Dialogue], 16 March 2012, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/2084537.html>.

⁶³ Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, "Svyateyshiy Patriarkh Kirill vstretilsya s Prem'er-ministrom Turcii R.Yerdoganom" [Patriarch Kirill Will Meet Turkey's Prime Minister Erdogan], 6 July 2009, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/687232.html>.

⁶⁴ In 2011 the All-Russian World Sobor got its representative at the UN.

understanding of traditional values of humankind”)⁶⁵ submitted by the Russian delegates in 2009. The resolution, which proved to be seriously controversial for some NGOs,⁶⁶ was considered a diplomatic success on the part of the ROC. The Moscow patriarchate together with the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry is also involved in the work of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) established in 2005 on the initiative of Turkey and Spain.

Another important area of the diplomatic “alliance” of the ROC and the Kremlin is the UNESCO. After a few years of effort, a high level consultative group Peace and Dialogue of Cultures was established at UNESCO with the goal of garnering political support for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Its first meeting, hosted by Patriarch Kirill, took place in June 2009 in Moscow. It is worth remembering that the initiative of setting this group was first raised on the summit of religious leaders in Moscow in 2006. Since then, every year clergy meet in different countries, preceding the annual G8 summit: Cologne – 2007, Sapporo – 2008, Rome – 2009, Baku - 2010, Bordeaux – 2011. Following the ROC's example the Russian muftis organised the international conference “Russia and the Muslim World” on 24 September 2009 in Moscow. Significantly, it was chaired not by Allahshukhur Pashazade but by Mufti Rawil Gaynetdin and strongly supported by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The ROC cooperates also with the Council of Europe; since 2004 it has kept a permanent representative in Strasbourg. Characteristically, when Russia took over the chairmanship of this institution in 2006, it declared intercultural dialogue a priority. The Moscow patriarchate's involvement resulted in the resolution “On the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue” discussed in the Council of Europe in 2011.⁶⁷ The representatives of the ROC also participate in the meetings of the OSCE, e.g. during the Warsaw meeting in 2011 they suggested establishing a council at the OSCE which would prepare recommendations for policies on combating religious discrimination.⁶⁸ The ROC is present in the Committee of

⁶⁵ Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, “Sovet OON po pravam cheloveka prinyal rezolyuciyu, posvyashhennuyu voprosu traditsionnyh tsennostey” [UN Council for Human Rights Adopted the Resolution on Traditional Values], 25 March 2011, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1437337.html>.

⁶⁶ AWID.org: “Joint NGO Statement on Traditional Values UN Human Rights Council Advisory Committee 7th Session – August 2011,” 1 August 2011 <www.awid.org/Library/Joint-NGO-Statement-on-Traditional-Values-UN-Human-Rights-Council-Advisory-Committee-7th-Session-August-2011>.

⁶⁷ Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, “Svyateyshiy Patriarkh Kirill napravil pis'mo General'nomu sekretaryu Soveta Evropy” [Patriarch Kirill Sent a Letter to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe], 8 November 2011, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1668971.html>.

⁶⁸ Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, “Predstavitel' Otdela vneshnikh cerkovnykh svyazey vystupil na soveshhanii OBSE v Varshave” [A Representative of Department for External Church Relations Spoke at OSCE Meeting in Warsaw], 28 September 2011, <www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1633718.html>.

Representatives of the Orthodox Churches at the EU.

Acknowledging interfaith dialogue as the highest priority of Russia's foreign policy should be interpreted in a wider context of saving the world from Huntington's vision of an inevitable civilisational clash. The choice of this priority reflects three aspects of the new discourse that Russia wants to promote on international level: the image of Russia (a unique civilisation); Russia's vision of the global order (multipolarity) and Russia's role (a bridge between civilisations, mediator, conceptual leader, etc.). In this context *russskiy mir* plays the role of a geopolitical "laboratory" where Russia shapes, builds up and tests its cultural appeal.

Conclusions

Russia's religious diplomacy can boast a few achievements. First of all, with help of the ROC, Russia promotes its own visions and views on the world stage. The ROC's transnational potential is growing and this benefits the Kremlin – the Church is increasingly active in many international organisations, hosts international summits in Russia, is consulted on socially delicate issues etc. The status of an observer at the OIC and the additional diplomatic channel in contacts with Iran are undoubtedly noteworthy successes. Russia consciously uses the “Muslim” component of its identity to participate in the work of organizations that are closed to the USA and the EU, and in this way gains an advantage over the West in relations with the Islamic world. The ROC's influence in the territory of the CIS is hard to deny as well as its much appreciated positive role in Caucasus. However, paradoxically, one of the biggest challenges for the Moscow patriarchate in the post-Soviet area is building-up its credibility as a religious institution which does not represent only Russian interests. This is the case especially in the “sensitive” countries like the Ukraine or the Baltic republics.

Religious diplomacy *per se* is rather a positive instrument in relations between states; however, there are some fundamentally false assumptions about the concept itself. The question should be raised on the long-term credibility of interfaith dialogue which is presented as Russia's precious *savoir faire*. Interreligious harmony is considered one of the cornerstones of Russian soft power, its new identity, attractive image and mission. Meanwhile, interconfessional tensions in Russia are rising. The fragile balance is slowly eroding, e.g. in 2010, 54% of respondents in a poll declared a positive attitude towards the slogan “Russia for Russians.”⁶⁹ If it comes to an outburst, it will undermine Russia's credibility as a country of interreligious concord. This is a serious shortcoming of the religious model in which the “licence to preach” is granted only to the few loyal ones. It concerns especially “traditional” *muftiates* which are representative of only part of the Russian *ummah*. Other Muslim communities, even if

⁶⁹ The slogan “Russia for Russians” is understood as “Rossija dlja russkich” which relates exclusively to the country's Slavic population. Hence, it excludes not only immigrants but also other groups, such as Muslims from the North Caucasus. *The Annual Report of the Levada Centre: Obshchestvennoe mnenie 2010* [Public opinion 2010], <www.levada.ru/books/obshchestvennoe-mnenie-2010>.

moderate, are forced to operate in the “grey zone,” without state backing. However, Russian authorities are aware of the problem: in March 2011 the Commission for harmonising interethnic and interreligious relations at the Council at the president of Russia⁷⁰ was established.

Russian soft power has at least one other perceivable flaw. It sometimes might seem that in the Kremlin's opinion, soft power should work even if it is based on a pure construct, a kind of “idea for sale” beyond Russia's borders. This “bureaucratic approach” can create an impression as if soft power were about a handful of PR-tricks and slogans invented by experts, which can work regardless their credibility to Russian citizens. This is obviously a fundamentally flawed concept, as a certain minimum of authenticity and belief in the propagated ideas is needed for it to have a desired effect. Additionally, the cultural appeal of Russia is still weak outside the CIS and is weakening even there (especially Georgia and Moldova with their ever more obvious openness to Western concepts).

Religious diplomacy is not a Russian invention, although it does have a long tradition in this field. The return of religion from the social margins since the fall of the USSR has had a remarkable impact on Russia and its foreign policy. Russia's religious diplomacy is only now taking form; it is hazardous to judge whether it can become a transformative element of Russian soft power. After all, religion is a particular factor and its use as a political instrument has its limits. The full potential of this area of Russia's foreign policy is still to be seen.

⁷⁰ The Council on Cooperation with Religious Associations with the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (established in 1995) is led by the chair of the presidential administration.