



# Religion and Gender

## Holy Grail or Poisoned Chalice? The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate as a Potential “Tool” of Russian Soft Power in the Wake of Ukraine’s

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The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate [UOC(MP)] has often been considered a “tool” of Russian soft power - cultural influence - in Ukraine (Sagan 2015; Bogomolov and Lytvynenko 2012). This article will critically examine the presumed role of the UOC(MP) as a fount of pro-Russian sentiment and chart the impact of the Euro-aidan on its position as a leading cultural and ideational force in Ukrainian society.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 Russia’s relationship with Ukraine has been a theme fraught with existential anxiety on both sides. Having only a short history of independence within its post-Soviet borders, Ukraine’s recent history has been shaped by endeavours to consolidate Ukrainian national identity and entrench the nascent state. Clarity in this regard has often been sought by defining the nation against its presumed “other,” Russia, which has at times engendered anti-Russian rhetoric and a sensitivity towards any Russian policy that smacks of an encroachment on Ukrainian self-determination. Meanwhile, from Moscow’s perspective, although its western neighbour is of clear material and geostrategic significance, discussions of Russo-Ukrainian relations status have also been coloured by deep emotion; Ukraine is not considered a “normal” neighbour, but a “brotherly nation” with a shared East Slavic culture and the cradle of Russian statehood (Richters 2012, 99).

Moscow’s fledgling post-post-Soviet identity as a pole of civilisation and centre of new regional integration projects looks unconvincing without Kyiv – “the Mother of Russian Cities,” which has declared its intention to embrace a European path of development likely to symbolically and materially jeopardise its relations with Russia. Hence Russia has tried “by hook or by crook” to draw Ukraine into its orbit, employing its relative economic power, leveraging the energy sector, and even becoming militarily involved in the Crimea and Donbas regions. Alongside these tangible efforts, Moscow has also sought to attract Ukrainians through cultural means, in short, seeking to cultivate its soft power as a means to facilitate cooperation between the two countries. Soft power is the ability to attract others, drawing them in to your culture and values so that they, sharing your worldview, wish to follow your leadership (Kiseleva 2015; Nye 2004). Though soft power by no means alleviates the need for hard power resources, (indeed, it ultimately relies on them), its cooptive abilities should reduce the need for more burdensome coercive measures in international relations (Nye 1990, 2004), and it forms now a significant part of Russian foreign policy doctrine (Kremlin 2008, 2013, 2016).

While new, albeit relatively permeable borders now delineate the independent states, the predominantly East Slavic, Orthodox nations of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are depicted in Russian public diplomacy as timelessly united on a more profound level by their shared history, closely related languages, and common cultural and spiritual heritage. This shared worldview should point towards a future of close cooperation as a distinct, viable civilisational actor, the Russian World [*russkiy mir*]. The Russian World is an intentionally ambiguously defined notion. By some understandings, it variously

represents the global community of Russian speakers, or ethnic Russians living beyond the borders of the Russian Federation or simply individuals of any nationality with an interest in Russia and its language and culture. From the perspective of the Russian church, it seems interchangeable with the notion of Holy Rus'; the transnational cultural collective of people united by a common Russian Orthodox faith regardless of native language or ethnicity; a "way of life that has been passed down to us through the centuries by such great saints of the Russian Land."<sup>1</sup>

Given that Orthodoxy has traditionally formed an important pillar of Russian nationhood, the church's conceptualisation of the Russian World undergirds Kremlin attempts to rebuild an ideational backbone, a narrative supporting Moscow aspirations to be a leading state capable of attracting others into its civilisational orbit (Lavrov 2014; Ivanov 2004, 2011; Matveychev 2009). The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has thus often been seen as a well-spring of Russian cultural influence in Ukraine, and is foreseen as having a significant part to play in promoting the sense of the shared spiritual heritage of Holy Rus' and belonging to the Russian World. Certainly there is, in principle, scope for the UOC(MP) to serve as a "soft power tool" or, more precisely, as a conduit for the cultural narrative in Ukrainian society, since it is an influential organisation across most of the country, which retains significant potential as a source of Russian soft power because it could, through its actions and statements, lend symbolic and rhetorical support to the vital spiritual dimension of the "Russian World."

Yet, as this article aims to demonstrate, one must exercise caution in assuming that the UOC(MP) operates as tool of cultural influence directly leverageable by the Kremlin. Firstly, soft power relates to the ability to successfully communicate with, and thereby co-opt, people living in foreign countries; it aims to create a more favourable environment for policy, but does not, in itself, entail structures of material enforcement. Thus, rather than attempting to analyse the Moscow Patriarchate as a "lever" of Russian influence, which would erroneously imply a relationship of direct control out of kilter with soft power logic,<sup>2</sup> it is more appropriate to explore the extent to which it serves as a conduit of Russian narratives, which could, if successful, impact upon the cultural climate in Ukraine.

Indeed, the UOC(MP) has broad powers of autonomy in crucial aspects of church governance which lend a significant degree of independence. This post-Soviet arrangement has facilitated the emergence of a patriotic faction within the Ukrainian church that exerts friction on any would-be flow of influence targeted from Moscow. The more na-

1 "Appeal by Metropolitan Hilarion on the Celebration of the 1,025th Anniversary of the Baptism of Rus," *The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia*, 19 June 2013 [http://www.synod.com/synod/eng2013/20130619\\_enmhappeal1025.html](http://www.synod.com/synod/eng2013/20130619_enmhappeal1025.html) (accessed 19th September 2016)

2 As such, this study does not consider attempts at lobbying by ROC or UOC(MP) clerics in order to directly influence individual policy makers. In such cases, the church would be one voice among others.

tionally-oriented outlook that has developed with the coming of age of a post-Soviet generation also serves to balance a bulwark of clerics within the Ukrainian church that remain in strong support of the Moscow tradition, and have been active in promoting a Muscophile worldview in society. Secondly, it is not inevitable that the UOC(MP) espouses a ‘pro-Russian’ narrative. Thirdly, the assumption of the UOC(MP) as a “tool” of soft power ignores the element of audience receptivity in analyses of soft power. The critical importance of this aspect has been foregrounded by the developments that have unfolded in the wake of the Euromaidan protests across Ukraine and the subsequent Russia-supported separatist conflict in the eastern Donbas area.

Given the formal administrative subordination of the local church to the Moscow Patriarchate, the statements and actions of UOC(MP) clergy and laity have come under close scrutiny. This collective experience of the conflict has amplified critical, patriotically-minded voices decrying the Moscow church as a lingering and illegitimate imperial outpost whose presence in Ukraine as societal opinion-former and spiritual hub is entirely inappropriate given the Russian encroachments on Ukrainian sovereignty. In this context, demands for an autocephalous Ukrainian church have grown; an idea seen as most dissonant with concord [*soglasie*] between fraternal peoples supposed integral to the notion of the Russian World, and opposed strongly by supporters of the Moscow tradition, including the Russian Patriarch himself. Thus, paradoxically, in the current climate, if the Ukrainian church shows itself to be an efficient source of sympathy for the Russian outlook in the eyes of some compatriots, far from fostering “attraction,” it risks engendering resentment and rejection in the eyes of a majority of Ukrainians as a threat to Ukrainian national integrity and thereby strengthening voices who would agitate against it. This underscores the fact that the extent to which the UOC(MP) may espouse a “pro-Russian” position does not necessarily indicate an increase Russian attraction, or bolster support for its ideas and positions.

## The Religious Landscape of Ukraine

The territory of today’s Ukraine falls on the so-called Huntington (1993) fault line; there Eastern Orthodoxy meets Catholicism. As Ukraine emerged from Soviet atheism, an intense “competition for souls” broke out in the country as missionary activity was directed there and flourished in the tolerant, multi-confessional climate. By 1997 a great number of religious denominations were active there, having established over 17,000 communities, with Islam, Judaism, Roman Catholicism and Evangelical groups all contributing to its diversity.<sup>3</sup> The largest of these has traditionally been the Ukrainian Or-

3 “Relihiyni orhanizatsii v Ukraïny (stanom na 1 sichnia 1997 r. Statystschni dani Derzhavnoho komitetu u spravakh relihiy,” *RISU*, January 1997 <http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/resources/statistics/ukr1997> (accessed 18th September 2016)

thodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which was conferred the status of autonomous church with wide-ranging powers of autonomy and in full communion with the Russian Orthodox Church and had 12,673 communities as of its peak in January 2014.

Initially, the main rival was the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, which was established in the 16th century and retains Orthodox rites while under the authority of the Pope in Rome. The great majority of its 3,763 churches are located in the Galicia [*Halychyna*] region of western Ukraine, which did not join the USSR until 1939 and it has always associated itself more with Central Europe than Russia.<sup>4</sup> A further challenge arose in 1992, when former *locum tenens*, Metropolitan of Kiev and all Ukraine Filaret took the lead in issuing a self-declaration of independence to form the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), taking a minority of parishes and priests with him. This step was not accepted by the majority of Ukrainian bishops, and Filaret was subsequently defrocked and anathematised by the Moscow Patriarchate. Today, although the Kyiv Patriarchate remains outside the global Orthodox communion, the number of parishes has since increased three-fold, particularly during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko (2005-2010), to 4,651 parishes in 2014. The Kyiv Patriarchate is associated with the promotion of a patriotic or even nationalistic narrative of Ukrainian history and statehood, and a pro-European geopolitical outlook and thus the religious divisions in Ukraine can also be interpreted through the lens of competitive tensions concerning Ukraine's proper geostrategic orientation.

In comparison with the contemporary secular West, the opinion forming potential of organised religion in society is quite significant as Ukraine is a relatively religious country, with over three quarters of the population considered themselves a believer, of which 70% profess Orthodoxy.<sup>5</sup>

As the main established denomination to emerge after the independence, the Moscow Patriarchate was well-placed to flourish. With 38.7% of all communities in 1997, the UOC(MP) had more than four times as many as the rival Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate. However, the KP more than doubled the number of its communities in the space of a decade. Moreover, in 2006, a survey by the Razumkov Centre found that, when about their religion, 39.8% said they considered themselves as belonging to the Kyiv Patriarchate while 29.4% said the Moscow Patriarchate, suggesting that the dominance of the MP is not as clear-cut as the figures on the communities suggest.<sup>6</sup>

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4 2014 data given for comparison.

5 "Kil'kist' viruiuchykh Kyïvs'koho patriarkhatu v Ukraïni perevyschyla kil'kist' Moskovs'koho," *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, 15 May 2014. [http://dt.ua/UKRAINE/kilkist-viruyuchih-kiyivskogo-patriarkhatu-v-ukrayini-perevischila-kilkist-moskovskogo-143319\\_.html](http://dt.ua/UKRAINE/kilkist-viruyuchih-kiyivskogo-patriarkhatu-v-ukrayini-perevischila-kilkist-moskovskogo-143319_.html) (accessed 7th September 2016)

6 "Viruyuchim yakoi tserkvi, konfesii Vi sebe vvazhaete?," *Tsentr Razumkova Tsentr*, 20 April - 2 May 2006. [http://razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll\\_id=300](http://razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=300) (accessed 6 November 2016)



Nevertheless, the church also has a significant presence in the mass media, where religious figures have been able to gain a relatively high profile, appearing on main secular channels at peak times and penning frequent columns in leading print media. It is also the best resourced religious denomination in Ukraine.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, since becoming head of the MP in 2009, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' - seen by some as the "second foreign minister of Russia"<sup>8</sup> - placed a special emphasis on cultivating the relationship with the Ukrainian population. Strongly opposed to autocephaly for the Ukrainian church, he has frequently involved himself directly in Ukrainian life, paying frequent pastoral and official visits, honouring figures within the Yanukovich regime with church awards and generally raising the profile and dignity of the MP in Ukrainian society.

Thus, the UOC(MP) has been well placed to shape Ukrainian society, although it is important to consider the extent to which the UOC(MP) now performs as a specifically pro-Russian lever of influence in Ukraine.

### Balance Between Kyiv and Moscow "Steering Wheels" of the UOC(MP)

The previous section demonstrated the potential for ideational influence of the UOC(MP) in Ukraine. This, however, should not be straightforwardly equated with direct Russian leverage in Ukraine. Indeed, the relationship between the Danilov Monastery, the seat of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Moskva River, and the UOC(MP) is not one that necessarily compels direct coordination. After the fall of the Soviet Union, at the moment when the Georgian and Armenian Orthodox Churches gained full autonomy from the Moscow Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was able to negotiate the broadest powers of autonomy of any of the local churches affiliated to the Moscow patriarchate. According to a church decree (*Tomos*) of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia of 25-27 October 1990 and the church's own statute, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has control over the management of its own administrative and financial affairs. Moreover, and crucially, Kyiv is able to appoint diocesan and vicar bishops without the approval of the Moscow, and the Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Ukraine is appointed by Ukrainian bishops, and only *blessed* [благословляется] by the Russian patriarchate,<sup>9</sup> rather than being appointed by him as is the case for churches under the Moscow Patriarchate with lesser degrees of ecclesiastical autonomy. Ukraine is also home to a number of seminaries for the training of future clergy, which potentially gives it independence

7 At its recent peak at the start of January 2014, it could count on 214 affiliated monasteries, 10,456 clerics, 20 educational establishments, 4,232 Sunday schools and 109 periodicals.

8 Interviews with anonymous source close to the Kremlin by the author, Moscow June-July 2011.

9 "Statut UPTs," *Ukrains'ka pravoslavnaia tserkva*. <http://orthodox.org.ua/page/statut-upts> (accessed 1st November 2016).

in this regard; a matter of some significance with regard to the development of future generations of Ukrainian church leaders. Furthermore, as primate of the Ukrainian Church, the Metropolitan of Kyiv is a permanent member of the Holy Synod, the supreme governing body of the Russian Orthodox Church, second only to the Russian Patriarch himself. This further underpins the independence of the Ukrainian church by preventing Moscow from acting against the Kyiv leadership.

These arrangements have given significant freedom to the Kyiv church, and facilitated the emergence of a division in the episcopate, between those clerics supporting the so-called Moscow “steering wheel” and advocating close ties with the Russian church, and those adherents of the Kyiv “steering wheel” who favour developing the Ukraine flavour of the church, including support for autocephaly. There is a generational cleavage at work here, with older clerics tending towards ties with Moscow, and younger ones possessing a stronger Ukrainian vision. Metropolitans Volodymyr (1992-2014) and Onufriy (2014-) have both tried to stand for a balanced position in this debate (Olszański 2014).

These divergent trends have been reinforced by the fact that the MP is well established across the entirety of Ukraine, with the possible exception of the three Galician regions of L’viv, Ternopil’ and Ivano-Frankivsk. Indeed, its parishes are predominantly located in the more nationally oriented and rural regions of western and central Ukraine, rather than the southern and, especially, eastern regions which were more heavily influenced by Soviet culture and atheism. Thus, the outlook of the clergy of the MP, may be said to be as diverse as the population of Ukraine as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

Distribution of religious organisations affiliated to the Moscow Patriarchate by region of Ukraine (2004)

All	Western	n	Central	n	Southern	n	Eastern	n
	Chernivtsi	404	Cherkasy	470	Crimea	512	Dnipropetrovsk	483
	Ivano-Frankivsk	26	Chernihiv	485	Mykolayiv	250	Donetsk	469
	Lviv	61	Khmelnysky	858	Odessa	495	Kharkiv	254
	Rivne	583	Kirovohrad	195	Kherson	314	Luhansk	321
	Ternopil	121	Kyiv Region	186	Zaporizhzhia	289		
	Volyn	547	Kyiv City	562				
	Transcarpathia	574	Poltava	394				
			Sumy	341				
			Vinnytsia	803				
			Zhytomyr	557				
<b>10554</b>		<b>2316</b>		<b>4851</b>		<b>1860</b>		<b>1527</b>
<b>%</b>		<b>21.9%</b>		<b>46.0%</b>		<b>17.6%</b>		<b>14.5%</b>

Source: <http://risu.org.ua/en/index/resourses/statistics/ukr-reg2004> (accessed 23rd June 2016)

<sup>10</sup> Interview with A. Zolotov conducted by the author in Moscow in June 2011.

Clerics associated with the Moscow “steering wheel” have tended to be more in harmony with the Russian outlook, and the Russian world narrative. Senior clerics considered as part of the pro-Moscow wing include Metropolitan Agafangel of Odessa and Izmail (b. 1938), Metropolitan Hilarion of Donetsk and Mariupol (b. 1951), Metropolitan Antonii of Boryspil and Brovary (b. 1967) (Olszański 2014, Mitrokhin 2015), Metropolitan Lazar of Simferopol and Crimea (b. 1939) (Richters 2012, 16) and Metropolitan Pavlo of Vyshgorod and Chernobyl, the abbot of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra (Mitrokhin 2015). Metropolitan Agafangel, for instance, has made statements reproducing the Kremlin perspective on the position of the Russian language in Ukraine, noting:

*It is not an exaggeration to say that the question of the preservation, protection and development of the Russian language is a part of a wider objective, namely, to defend the Orthodox civilization choice, the spiritual integrity and independence of the peoples inhabiting the vast space of the Holy Rus', the Church unity.*

*The struggle for the status of the Russian language is the struggle for real equality of the residents of Ukraine. Therefore, the questions of the state status of the Russian language, its free use in official documents, the legal field, of lifting the criminal yet formally legalized inhuman restrictions regarding the use of the “non-state language” on TV and radio are still on the agenda.<sup>11</sup>*

Such interventions on topics beyond the realm of strict spirituality have only strengthened suspicions about the political intentions of the MP among the citizens of Ukraine, and served to undermine the standing of the institution, even prior to the Maidan and not only in the regions seen as more critical of Russia, but also among young people in the purportedly more pro-Russian eastern regions (Hudson 2015).

Furthermore, clerics more aligned with Moscow tend to emphasise the characterisation of the Kyiv Patriarchate as a schismatic outgrowth grounded in political reasons, and echo the Russian Patriarch in awaiting the “inevitable” return of the entire Ukrainian flock to the fold of the, as yet, only canonical Orthodox church in the country. Some within this group even ignore the existence of the UOC and “believe it to belong exclusively to the Russian Church” (Mitrokhin 2015: 14).

Meanwhile, the Kyiv “steering wheel” is led by Metropolitan Sofronii of Cherkasy (b. 1940) and Metropolitan Olexandr of Pereyaslav-Khmelnitsky and Vyshneve (b. 1977), who served as secretary and “right hand” to the late Metropolitan Volodymyr. Some believe that the numbers of clergy and laity associating<sup>12</sup> themselves with the patriotic ori-

11 “Metropolitan Agafangel of Odesa and Izmail Calls to Protect Russian Language in Ukraine,” *RISU*, 18 October 2011. [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/orthodox/uoc/44919/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/44919/) (accessed 24 April 2016)

12 Viktor Yelenskyi, “How Do We ‘Get Out From Moscow?’” *RISU*, 31 March 2016. [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/expert\\_thought/authors\\_columns/vyelenskyi\\_column/62961/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/expert_thought/authors_columns/vyelenskyi_column/62961/) (accessed 1 November 2016)



entation are greater in number than those of the Muscophile wheel, although the latter seems stronger in terms of church leadership.

The Kyiv wing gained influence under Metropolitan Volodymyr as the MP strove to demonstrate its credentials as a genuinely Ukrainian church, not simply as the Ukrainian exarchate of the Russian church. With regard to language, a number of Ukrainianisation measures have been enacted, including the shift towards the almost exclusive use of Ukrainian on the MP website, and the use of Ukrainian language in church services.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, pro-Kyiv clerics of the Moscow Patriarchate have also engaged with issues of significance to patriotically-minded Ukrainians with a view to building greater national legitimacy for their church. For instance, in March 2013, academic and MP policy advisor Professor Archimandrite Viktor Bed' served a memorial liturgy for the repose of the soul of Ivan Mazepa, on the anniversary of the medieval Ukrainian hetman's 374th birthday. Mazepa is considered a great defender of Ukrainian statehood, but is anathema to Russia because of his defection from the Russian imperial army at the Battle of Poltava and remains a controversial figure in Moscow's eyes.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the UOC(MP) conducts an annual commemorative event in the National Museum Memorial to Victims of Holodomors in Ukraine.<sup>15</sup> The term Holodomor ("hunger-extermination") refers to the 1932-3 famine in Soviet Ukraine in which approximately 3 million Ukrainians perished and is considered by many as a genocide against the Ukrainian people perpetrated intentionally by the Soviet Union to quell Ukrainian nationalism, although Moscow denies this. The commemoration of this tragic period of Ukrainian history constitutes a show of support for narratives constitutive of Ukrainian nationhood, and a marker of difference from the position of Russia, whose claims to be a brotherly nation seem critically undermined by the murderous intent presumed by the Holodomor discourse. More recently, Metropolitan Oleksandr has spoken out directly against the Russian World narrative, and the failure of the MP to meet society's expectation through a "clear and unequivocal condemnation of modern imperialist policy of Russian military aggression."<sup>16</sup>

Thus, although Metropolitan Volodymyr maintained a neutral position in public, under his leadership the orientation of the UOC(MP) shifted in favour of the Kyiv wheel. Indeed, Volodymyr is reported to have been in favour of EU accession and of the eventual

13 "UOC-MP Prepared to Switch to Services in Ukrainian," *RISU*, 7 February 2013, [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/orthodox/uoc/51223/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/51223/) (accessed 24 April 2016)

14 "Reps of UOC-MP Deny Validity of Anathema Declared on Ivan Mazepa," *RISU* 22 March 2013. [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/orthodox/uoc/51699/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/51699/) (accessed 24 April 2016)

15 "UOC-Moscow Patriarchate remembers victims of Holodomor," *RISU*, 22 November 2012. [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/culture/religious\\_ceremonies/50314/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/culture/religious_ceremonies/50314/) (accessed 24 April 2016)

16 Metropolitan Oleksandr (Drabynko), "Ukrainian Orthodoxy: Path to Recovery of Church Unity, Part II," *RISU*, 5 July 2016. [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/studios/studies\\_of\\_religions/63886/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/studios/studies_of_religions/63886/) (accessed 1st November 2016)

autocephaly of the UOC as the leading church of Ukraine.<sup>17</sup> According to Archbishop Yevstratii, the secretary of the Synod the UOC-KP, he began to “actively resist Moscow’s schemes.”<sup>18</sup> Yet, as the septuagenarian primate (b. 1936) began to ail, a power struggle emerged as pro-Russian elements within the episcopate strove to push the Kyiv church back towards Moscow. During a debate in 2011/12 about church rules and governance, for instance, Metropolitan Hilarion lobbied to bring the Statutes of the UOC(MP) in line with those of the Russian Orthodox Church, which would have meant the selection of Primate and bishops from among a pool of candidates approved by the Russian Patriarch and Holy Synod in Moscow, thereby greatly reducing the freedom of the Ukrainian church.<sup>19</sup> However, even as Metropolitan Volodymyr’s strength failed, and he came to rely increasingly on his secretary, Archbishop Oleksandr, he was able to resist such pressures on his leadership. Following the death of Metropolitan Volodymyr on 5 July 2014, *locum tenens* Metropolitan Onufriy was elected as Primate. Metropolitan Onufriy, though perhaps lacking the personal authority that was the bedrock of Volodymyr’s strength, is seen as relatively bi-partisan, belonging neither to the Kyiv nor the Moscow faction of the UOC (Mitrokhin 2015; Olszański 2014).

This section sought to demonstrate that the structures and statutes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church do not provide a basis for the church to be directly instrumentalised as a tool of Russian cultural and spiritual influence abroad. On the contrary, they provide the local church with significant powers to develop an indigenous church, as has to some extent happened. Nevertheless, it is clear that a significant number of individual clerics, including senior ones, espouse a position congruent with that of the Russian Patriarchate and the Kremlin in reproducing and thereby giving life to the discourse of the Russian World. The exact nature of the relationship between pro-Russian clerics and the Danilov Monastery is not readily apparent and remains under-researched (Richters 2012: 99). There is a lack of evidence to support the claim they are “strictly controlled” by Moscow,<sup>20</sup> and it seems more likely that “pro-Russian” clerics act from their own volition and are genuinely convinced of the rightfulness of maintaining the tradition. This supposition may be supported by the fact that many clerics associated with the Kyiv wheel have tended to be younger clergy who came of age in independent Ukraine, whereas older clerics were formed in the tradition of the Exarch of Ukraine as an integral part of the Russian church. The media convey statements to the effect

17 Metropolitan Oleksandr (Drabynko), “Ukrainian Orthodoxy On the Eve of pan-Orthodox Council, Part III,” *RISU*, 7 July 2016 [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/studios/studies\\_of\\_religions/63890/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/studios/studies_of_religions/63890/) (accessed 1st November 2016)

18 “Rep of Kyivan Patriarchate: Decision of Synod of UOC is Step towards Liquidation of Its Independence,” *RISU*, 23 February 2012 [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/orthodox/uoc/46983/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/46983/) (accessed 24th April 2016)

19 “Committee of Ukrainian Orthodox Church Bring[sic] Its Statutes in Line with Statutes of Russian Church,” *RISU*, 21 March 2012 [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/orthodox/uoc/47398/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/47398/) (accessed 24 April 2016); Statute of Russian Orthodox Church: <https://mospat.ru/ru/documents/ustav/xi-2/>

20 Oleksandr Sahan, “New Challenges in Orthodoxy in Ukraine - Will There Be New Responses?,” *RISU*, 2 July 2013. [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/expert\\_thought/analytic/52824/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/expert_thought/analytic/52824/) (accessed 6 Sept 2016)

that clerics of the UOC(MP) are subject to lobbying by church benefactors in the form of Moscow-oriented oligarchs and politicians, but it is difficult to independently assess the veracity of these claims or their alleged impact.<sup>21</sup> The leadership of the Ukrainian Church has tended to resist pressure and steer a middle course. Thus, while the Kremlin and its partners might wish the UOC(MP) to assume a puppet status, Kyiv has by no means been compliant in this. Now, having critically examined the notion of Moscow Patriarchate as a tool of leverage, the following section will examine the role of the UOC(MP) in the Euromaidan protests and the how this has impacted upon the church's standing in society.

### The UOC(MP) Before, During and After the Euromaidan

The tumultuous events of the Maidan exacerbated the internal tensions and external challenges that the UOC(MP) had faced even prior to the “Revolution of Dignity.” This section will outline how the experience of the anti-government protests, the subsequent Russian annexation of Crimea and involvement in the so-called separatist conflict in the Donbas impacted upon the ability of the UOC(MP) to effectively lead Ukrainian public opinion in a pro-Russian direction.

In retrospect, the collective national experience of the Euromaidan and the events that followed in its wake may prove to be a turning point for the fate of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. The conflict with Russia united Ukrainians in a spirit of defiance, while also forcing individuals and groups like the church to be clear about which of the opposing sides they stood for. This evaporation of the middle ground is awkward for the MP, which in some ways could be argued to have represented the spiritual aspect of a kind of genuinely hybrid Russian-ish Ukrainian identity; not necessarily looking longingly to the Russian state, but expressing a legitimate Russophone Ukrainian personality, distinct from the more folkish, Central European narrative emanating from the nationalist heartland in Halychyna. Yet this identity itself has come into question. The pressure on the MP is particularly intense as the protests came to have quite a strong spiritual dimension (Marynovych 2015), both due to the practical and moral support provided by religious figures, and in the sense of the more unified national spirit that emerged through this experience, and bolstered calls for an united autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox church as the only dignified embodiment of national independence.

The largest rally in Ukraine since the Orange Revolution of 2004 took place on 18 November 2013, urging President Yanukovich to sign the Deep and Comprehensive Free

21 Lana Samokhvalova, “His Beatitude Vladimir’s Cross. Why Alexander Drabynko Was Fired?” Ukrinform, 26 May 2015, <http://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/150527b.html> (accessed 4th October 2016). See also Metropolitan Oleksandr (Drabynko), “Ukrainian Orthodoxy: Path to Recovery.”

Trade Agreement with the EU that would bring Ukraine closer to Europe Union. Protests became established on the Maidan on the night of 21-22 November, following public disclosure that the Council of Ministers, on the instigation of the president, had suspended preparations for the signing of the association agreement.

At the outbreak of the protests, the MP found itself in an awkward position due to its active and more prominent cooperation with the Yanukovich administration (2010-2014). Furthermore, despite that fact that Metropolitan Volodymyr is said to have privately favoured EU integration, much of the clergy of the MP, particularly the pro-Moscow wing, has been openly hostile towards European liberal values and struggled to overcome its discomfort with the protest movement that began as a rallying of young patriotic liberals. Accordingly, some leading clerics of the Moscow wing took a negative stance to the protests, with Metropolitan Agafangel openly condemned the Euromaidan, and Metropolitan Hilarion also criticising it (Olszański 2014). Not only did the UOC(MP) delay rallying to the cause, but pro-Russian organisations associated with political Orthodoxy (Bogomolov and Lytvynenko 2012), namely the Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Brotherhood and the Orthodox Choice organisation and People's Assembly [*Narodnyy Sobor*] movement also held a procession in Kyiv on 6 December to protest against the Maidan. They marched under the slogan "Ukraine, Russia and Belarus are the Holy Rus'!" and called upon St. Alexander Nevsky, a patron saint of Russia, to "protect Rus" from the foreign faith, primarily Western Euro-sodomitic[*sic*] expansion, which is again rising against our people."<sup>22</sup> Despite the apparent Muscophilia, such organisations of political orthodoxy generally do not follow the official line of the MP and represent different religio-political shades of ideological extreme.<sup>23</sup> During his tenure, Metropolitan Volodymyr tried to distance his church from the political Orthodox, however, the fact that they reproduce the narrative of Russian World under a religious banner may have muddied the water and cemented the notion of MP opposition to Euromaidan in the popular imagination.

At the outset of the protests, other churches of Ukraine had likewise been hesitant about becoming involved, although this changed quite quickly and religious organisations became very close to the heart of the Maidan. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) was quickest to rally to the side of the protesters, and became very active. The KP was somewhat slower to show its support to the protests, but having done so, engaged energetically, becoming practically the "official church" of the Maidan. Evangelical groups also played a key role, even in Donetsk region where a prayer marathon was held over many months. Yet before long, under the leadership of Metropolitan Volody-

.....  
 22 "Orthodox Christians to Hold Sacred Procession in Kyiv," *Interfax: Russia & CIS General Newswire*, 2 December 2013.

23 Mitrofanova (2005) notes the following groupings of political Orthodoxy: political fundamentalism, contemporary pan-Slavism, neo-Eurasianism, Orthodox Communism and Russian nationalist quasi-Orthodoxy. As she herself notes (p. 37), in practice it is only possible to distinguish between these different versions as ideal types since they are ultimately different facets of the same ideology.

myr, the UOC(MP) joined the other churches on the Maidan, following a statement by the Primate on 30th November 2013 to the following effect:

*I give my blessing to all the churches and monasteries of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to chant the prayer for the multiplication of love and eradication of any animosity and hatred as of Sunday, December 1, and on all the days of Christmas fasting, through to January 6, 2014.<sup>24</sup>*

Protests continued on Independence Square (*Maidan nezalezhnosti*), but had seemed to be fizzling out until, on the night of 30 November, riot police stormed the protesters' encampment in central Kyiv in the early hours using batons, stun grenades and deploying what EU officials later labelled "excessive force" in an attempt to disperse the thousand of protesters remaining on the square. On this night religion came closer to the heart of the Maidan as around 500 fleeing protesters took refuge from the police in the iconic gold-domed St Michael's Monastery, which is under the KP. The monks counselled the protesters not to fight evil with evil and enabled them to regroup. Church involvement generally increased henceforth as "tent-churches" were established on the Maidan, prayer vigils were held and choirs sang. A medical station was set up in the grounds of St Michael's Church, where even surgery was conducted on those injured during the demonstrations. As the protests continued through the freezing days of December, and "self defence units" composed of ex-military and police came to Kyiv to support the protesters, the protests acquired a further religious aura when the bells of the St Michael's Monastery rang out on the night of 11 December, as in former times, to warn of trouble, as the riot police again tried to clear the Maidan. Led by Father Buryadnyk of the UGCC, cassocked priests placed themselves between the riot police and demonstrators, reciting prayers until eventually the police withdrew. In a further nod to the spiritual nature of events, those pro-Maidan activists who perished in the course of the protests are known as the "Heavenly Hundred."

The night of 30 November may be seen as the moment of radicalisation of the protest as many more Ukrainians, outraged by the rough treatment of citizens that was widely covered on opposition television channels, joined the demonstrations, swelling numbers to an estimated 400,000 to 800,000.<sup>25</sup> Over time, the protests broadened from the initial anger at Yanukovich's apparent volte-face on signing the EU agreement to an expression of general dissatisfaction with the corruption, ineffectiveness and lack of respect of the Yanukovich administration.

.....  
24 "Prayer for Eliminating Discord to be Chanted in all Eastern Orthodox Churches in Ukraine," *ITAR-TASS*, 30 November 2013 <http://tass.ru/en/world/709667> (accessed 1 November 2016)

25 Brian Whitmore, "Ukraine's Threat to Putin: Why the Protests in Kiev Could Deal a Major Blow to Official Corruption in Russia," *The Atlantic*, 6 December 2013. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/12/ukraines-threat-to-putin/282103/> (accessed 8th September 2016)



The atmosphere of the protests was quite ecumenical, with priests from all the of three main Orthodox Churches participating alongside Catholics and Evangelical Christians. The Moscow Patriarchate has sometimes been criticised for not being part of the Maidan movement, but its spokespeople maintain that its priests did attend, albeit on a more individual basis and being less visible as they weren't among the activists and organisers (Olszański 2014). Furthermore, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, then chaired by Metropolitan Volodymyr, issued a joint statement on 15 December conveying four main points: that the government should listen to the people; violence is unacceptable; Ukraine is an indivisible state; and dialogue is the only legitimate path. The churches thereby interceded on behalf of the people.

Yet despite shared spiritual values and much common doctrine between Ukraine's main churches, the political outlook was clearly fractured. When the MP came out in support of the protesters it did so in a way that tried to maintain neutrality between two sides, appealing to overarching Christian values. Metropolitan Volodymyr, for instance, stated:

*We call on all the clerics and laity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, regardless of their political convictions, to join ranks in a common prayer for peace, love and concord, for elimination of discords and enmities, for prevention of violence, and for the surmounting of contradictions.*<sup>26</sup>

Yet in the intensely patriotic atmosphere that became even more highly charged as a result of the occupation of government administrative buildings in the eastern region by anti-Kyiv groups in March 2014 and the annexation of Crimea on 18th March 2014, a narrative came to prevail whereby such calls for peace felt insufficiently patriotic in their failure to truly acknowledge popular outrage at these events. Depoliticised talk of peace and reconciliation seemed to fit neatly in a Moscow Patriarchate tradition of giving implicit support to the incumbent regime (Mitrofanova 2005: 166). By contrast, while priests from other denominations prayed for peace and love, they did so in a way which lent specific support to the insurrectionary movement. For instance, Father Yuriy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church(KP), stated: "We are supporting these people in their fight for liberty and freedom, which God granted to each man."<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Father Korneliy, priest of the UGCC, called on protesters to "Pray for the enemies, forgive them but you have to fight for your destiny and independence." Whereas the MP refrained from comment on political issues, Father Lyubomyr Sapranyuk, a Greek Catholic priest from L'viv in western Ukraine, for example, resonated with much public opinion in explicitly condemning Yanukovych, stating on 7 February 2014 that "I am here to support these

26 "Prayer for Eliminating Discord."

27 Maria Danilova, "Bonfires, Borscht, Wool Socks, Humor Keep Massive Ukraine Protests Alive," *Associated Press*, 7 December 2013. <http://www.ctvnews.ca/world/bonfires-borscht-wool-socks-humour-keep-ukraine-protests-alive-1.1579360>

people so that there is a change at the top,” adding “The current authorities are evil, anti-nation. They only want to enrich themselves.”<sup>28</sup>

In such ways, Ukraine’s revolution of dignity has challenged the post-Soviet model of church-state-society relations, whereby the church has tended to focus more on cultivating the state to ameliorate its standing in society, rather than discharging its pastoral duties towards its flock. Recognising the emboldened citizenry, the churches at the heart of the Maidan sought to show themselves as able and willing to work for and with the people. The Kyiv Patriarchate came to represent that spirit, with its 84-year old leader Patriarchate Filaret declaring,

*Our church is together with the people [...] It supports Ukraine entering the European Union. We pray to God that he will help us enter the European Union in order to keep our statehood, to keep peace and to improve the life of the people.*<sup>29</sup>

The UGCC also spoke out for integration into European standards of law and justice, albeit while maintaining Ukraine’s cultural distinctiveness. By contrast, the leader of the Moscow Patriarchate, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, struck a discordant note in Kyiv’s patriotic atmosphere of the time with his emphasis on the importance of preserving the unity of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus that “continues to be a great spiritual and civilised drive of [the] present-day world.”<sup>30</sup> The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow, of which the Metropolitan of all-Ukraine and Kyiv is a senior figure, also reproduced the narrative of the Kremlin in hinting at the involvement of foreign parties:

*We realize the people of Ukraine have different outlooks for the future of their country and we respect the rights of its people for the choice of their own pathway but still it is important ensure that the pathway is really chosen by the people and is free and based on the knowledge of all the pros and cons rather than dictated by someone’s external will.*<sup>31</sup>

After the flight of Yanukovych from Ukraine in late February 2014 the UOC(MP) offered its support to the interim government. Yet although the official position articulated by the Metropolitan of Kyiv maintained political neutrality and steered clear from references to the supposed orchestration of a coup d’état in Kyiv and other core tropes of the Russian narrative, the leadership has not been able to maintain meaningful discipline

28 Michel Viatteau, “Spiritual Message Bolsters Ukraine’s Protests,” *Agence France Presse*, 7 February 2014, <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/print/world/spiritual-message-bolsters-ukraines-protests>

29 David M. Herszenhorn and Oksana Lyachynska, “Kiev Protesters See Potent Ally Under a Spire,” *New York Times*, 5 December 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/05/world/europe/ukrainian-protesters-find-powerful-ally-in-orthodox-church.html>

30 “Patriarch Kirill Calls for Preserving Unity of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus,” *ITAR-TASS*, 3 January 2014. <http://tass.com/russia/713726>

31 “Russian Church Urging People of Ukraine to Avert ‘Spiritual Blinding,’” *ITAR-TASS*, 26 December 2013. <http://tass.com/non-political/713066>

over the statements and actions of many of its clergy. It has been reported that a number of priests, particularly in the Donbas, have spoken publicly in support of the rebels (Hovorun 2014) and the now dissolved *Berkut* special police units<sup>32</sup> by leading special sermons for them and invoking the Russian terminology of threats posed by “Banderoivtsy-Uniates,” (referring to the allegedly fascist outlook of the latter day supporters of Stepan Bandera, and a derogatory reference to members of the UGCC church) and “US aggression.”<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, Metropolitan Hilarion gave his blessing to Andriy Manych, Rector of the Church of the Holy New Martyrs in Donetsk, to act as confessor to militants on the territory of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) military unit in Makiyivka. Some clerics of the MP are accused of actively collaborated with the annexation of Crimea, in the case of Archimandrite Kalinik, by allegedly leading an “anti-Ukrainian campaign” and maintaining an arms depot for the “self-defence of Crimea” in his local church in the village of Zatyshne on the strategic Kerch peninsula.<sup>34</sup> Some MP priests have refused to preside over the funerals of fallen Ukrainian soldiers who fought in what the government labels “anti-terrorist operations.” A particularly salient moment in the minds of those who would criticise the MP for a deficiency of patriotism is when Metropolitan Onufriy and other MP clerics did not rise with the other gathered delegates at the session of the Vekhovna Rada, the Ukrainian parliament, when President Poroshenko read aloud the names of those honoured, in some cases posthumously, with the title of the Heroes of Ukraine for their actions during military operations in eastern Ukraine.<sup>35</sup>

The authority of the church in society means that such measures of support may, in the eyes of some sections of the Ukrainian population, have the effect of conferring legitimacy and, thereby, fostering popular support for the separatist military action in the Donbas (Olszański 2014) and maintaining a status quo outlook at a time when many in Ukraine sought a new future for their country along more Western lines.<sup>36</sup> While it is difficult to assert with accuracy the degree of involvement from Moscow at work in these steps - some would suggest direct instrumentalisation and others see it as a spontaneous reflection of a personally held worldview - it certainly plays to Russia’s interests and helps to support the pro-Russian constituency in the region. Either way, in this re-

32 “UOC-MP Priest Blessed Berkut to Fight to the Death against Euromaidan Protesters,” 14 February 2014 [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/state/national\\_religious\\_question/55335/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/state/national_religious_question/55335/) (accessed 24th April 2016)

33 Stepan Bandera (1909-59) was a Ukrainian nationalist leader who is controversial for his collaboration with the Nazis in his pursuit of independence for Ukraine.

34 “Separatist Priest to be Ordained as Bishop at Lyiv-Perchersk Lavra,” 1 February 2016 [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/community/religion\\_and\\_policy/62356/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/religion_and_policy/62356/) (accessed 20 April 2016)

35 “Bishops of the UOC(MP) remained seated when President Poroshenko was reading names of Heroes of Ukraine,” 8 May 2015. [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/community/religion\\_and\\_policy/59943/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/religion_and_policy/59943/) (accessed 24th April 2016)

36 “UOC(MP) Metropolitan Blesses a Priest to Provide Spiritual Guidance for DPR Fighters,” 6 October 2015, [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/community/religion\\_and\\_policy/61309](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/religion_and_policy/61309/) (accessed 2 May 2016)

spect one might certainly see the UOC(MP) as a conduit of Russian soft power here in so far as certain members of the MP have reproduced elements of the Kremlin's narrative.

Of course, not all UOC(MP) clerics played such a role. Across the country many maintained a neutral position, calling for peace and reconciliation. Many focussed on charitable work, particularly with regard to supporting IDPs fleeing the armed conflict in the Donbas, who have been received and cared for at the Svyatogorsk Monastery. During the clashes between protests and Interior Ministry troops and other law enforcement agencies in early 2014, the presence and prayerful influence of MP priests helped reduce tensions and spared bloodshed on a number of occasions (Olszański 2014), as on Hrushevkiy Street in January 2014.<sup>37</sup> On 15 May 2015, as the conflict continued in the Donbas, Metropolitan Onufriy spoke out publicly in support of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, and on the inadmissibility of any calls for military aggression and hostility on the part of clergy and denouncing attempts to justify war with religious slogans.<sup>38</sup> Today, the UOC(MP) website draws attention to its activities honouring the memory of Ukrainian soldiers who fell during what it acknowledges as “anti-terrorist operations.” While there is no comment on its ministering in the occupied areas on the Donbas, the UOC(MP) emphasises that it “does not take any political stand” and, as Metropolitan Hilarion stated, “unites people of various political views and refuses to divide the faithful into good and bad, right and wrong.”<sup>39</sup>

Yet in the polarised, highly-charged atmosphere, constantly stimulated by emotive media reporting on any perceived threat to Ukraine's revived path of national self-determination, the position of neutrality that the MP leadership sought to carve out has often been deemed insufficient to demonstrate satisfactory patriotic credentials in the eyes of a significant number of Ukrainians. The actions and utterances of some individuals have readily been interpreted as representative of the whole. What started as a protest in support of Ukraine's European choice broadened into a “Revolution of Dignity” which was seen as demanding both individual dignity for citizens and national dignity for Ukraine as an independent sovereign state. On the one hand, charged by a sense of empowerment, citizens called for the authorities to respect the citizenry, through greater accountability of the authorities and more effective tackling of poverty. On the other, the very fact of a key contender for the role of national church of Ukraine being under

37 “Monks from the Kiev-Caves Lavra Stand Between Police and Demonstrators in Kiev,” 22 January 2014 <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/67776.htm> (accessed 31st October 2016)

38 “Poslannia Predstoiatelia UPTs shchodo vidznachennia 1000-littia muchenyts'koï konchyny sviatykh kniaziv Borysa I Hliba,” 15 May 2015, <http://news.church.ua/2015/05/14/poslannya-predstoyatelya-upc-shhodo-vidznachennya-1000-littya-muchenickoji-konchini-svyatix-knyaziv-borisa-i-gliba/> (accessed 1 November 2016)

39 “Metropolitan Hilarion: There Always Be [sic] Spiritual Unity Between the Russian and Ukrainian Nations,” 15 September 2014. <https://mospat.ru/en/2014/09/15/news107982/> (accessed 19 October 2016)

the ultimate authority of the former imperial centre is seen by some as an affront to the dignity of Ukrainians as an independent nation. As young men died to resist Russia-supported encroachments on Ukraine's territorial integrity, the notion of the UOC(MP) as a truly Ukrainian church reconciling both pro-Kyiv and pro-Moscow groups has been described by critics as "an abstraction in which everyone has believed,"<sup>40</sup> referring to it ultimately being a church rooted in a foreign land and the incommensurability of that status with symbolically being Ukraine's national church.

Indeed, one of the consequences of the events of the Maidan has been the reported strengthening of calls for an autocephalous Ukrainian church. The issue of Ukrainian autocephaly was withdrawn from the agenda of the historic pan-Orthodox Council in Crete in 2016 as the churches of Constantinople and Moscow, the largest in Orthodoxy, could not reach agreement on this topic. Nonetheless, President Petro Poroshenko, a leading oligarch who came to power in 2014 as a result of the Maidan protests that his television channel(Channel 5) supported, openly favours autocephaly and has observed the need for a Ukrainian church "that is united in the Eucharist and prayer, but is administratively independent of other church jurisdictions."<sup>41</sup> For him, 'it's a historical trend, and this trend cannot bypass Ukraine!'<sup>42</sup> Yet, he does not permit the state to intervene in this regard, saying it is a matter for the episcopate and for the churches to decide among themselves. Although many supporters of autocephaly are now believed to have switched their allegiance to the Kyiv Patriarchate, there are still those within the UOC(MP) who favour a de-coupling of the Ukrainian church from Moscow. One prominent example is Metropolitan Oleksandr, who believes that the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church meets all the necessary conditions for the autocephalous being, and as such, wants UOC(MP) to lead the way, to be a UOC without qualifiers, capable of uniting Ukrainians.<sup>43</sup>

However, in the wake of the Euromaidan, the issue of the canonicity of the MP has in any case become less of a trump card. For most of the first two and a half decades of independent statehood, the fact of the Moscow Patriarchate being the only canonical Orthodox church in Ukraine gave it a significant competitive advantage, both in the eyes of believers and of the clergy themselves, who were also purposefully attracted by the enjoyment of greater freedoms than their Russian counterparts (Richters 2012, 113). Yet of late this has changed: in the eyes of Ukrainians the fact of a denomination's canon-

40 "Archbishop Ihor Isichenko of UOAC Called Existence of Pro-Ukrainian group in UOC-MP Abstraction," 1 March 2012 [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/orthodox/uoc/47073/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/47073/) (accessed 24 April 2016)

41 Lally Weymouth, "Interview with Ukrainian Presidential Candidate Petro Poroshenko," *Washington Post*, 25 April 2014. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/interview-with-ukrainian-presidential-candidate-petro-poroshenko/2014/04/25/74c73a48-cbbd-11e3-93eb-6c0037dde2ad\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/interview-with-ukrainian-presidential-candidate-petro-poroshenko/2014/04/25/74c73a48-cbbd-11e3-93eb-6c0037dde2ad_story.html) (accessed 8th September 2016)

42 "Poroshenko Believes Ukrainian Orthodox Church Will Get Autocephaly," *Interfax: Russia & CIS Presidential Bulletin*, 12 May 2016.

43 Metropolitan Oleksandr (Drabynko), "Ukrainian Orthodoxy on the Eve."



icity has declined as a criterion of merit relative to its political and patriotic-national orientation. This has been manifested in a number of other ways.

In the wake of the Euromaidan it has been anecdotally reported that the actions and utterances of certain clerics have significantly weakened the UOC(MP)'s standing in society.<sup>44</sup> It is difficult to get clear figures for the number of individuals who have actually changed their religious allegiance, not least since this may in some cases be a declarative rather than a practical, physical act. Still, an April 2014 a study reported in the Ukrainian press found that 32% of respondents considered themselves members of the KP (up from 26% the previous year), while 25% of those questioned expressed their belonging to the MP (down from 28% in 2013).<sup>45</sup> The figures of 2014 excluded the Crimea region which is likely have been more in favour of the MP, so the growth in support for the newer KP is clearer than a decline in support for the MP. Another obvious conclusion from the data is the greater degree of political polarisation, with the number professing “just Orthodoxy” down to 21.2% in 2016.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to the believers “voting with their feet” and simply joining an alternative congregation to show their dissatisfaction with the Moscow Patriarchate, problems have arisen in rural settlements where there is only one church. Believers have raised challenges to the affiliation of the their place of worship and formal transitions in ownership have occurred. The Religious Information Service of Ukraine reports that 65 parishes in total, predominantly though not exclusively in Western Ukraine, have switched their affiliation from the MP to the KP, noting that almost 50% of them have done so on the basis of unanimous support from their community.<sup>47</sup> While the MP takes the position that the switched parishes have been “usurped” or “seized by raiding” as a result of external interventions supported by Right Sector militants, the KP states the transitions occur as a result of pressure from the congregations and even priests themselves. For instance, one priest left the MP having come to perceive it as a “very concrete political force [...] – I wouldn't even call it a church – which is working against Ukrainians,” and even going so far to state that “to be part of the Moscow Patriarchate right now is to take

44 Nataliya Trach, “Ukrainians Shun Moscow Patriarchate as Russia's War Intensifies in Donbas,” *Kyiv Post*, 23 January 2015. <http://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine/ukrainians-shun-moscow-patriarchate-as-russias-war-intensifies-in-donbas-378168.html> (accessed 1st November 2016); Paul Coyer, “Putin's Holy War and the Disintegration of the ‘Russian World’,” *Forbes*, 4 June 2015. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/paulcoyer/2015/06/04/putins-holy-war-and-the-disintegration-of-the-russian-world/#449455cd1097>; Maksym Bugriy, “The War and the Orthodox Churches in Ukraine,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 12 (30), 18 February 2015. [https://jamestown.org/program/the-war-and-the-orthodox-churches-in-ukraine/#.V8\\_P7vkrKUN](https://jamestown.org/program/the-war-and-the-orthodox-churches-in-ukraine/#.V8_P7vkrKUN) (accessed 1 November 2016)

45 “Kil'kist' viruiuchykh Kyivs'koho patriarkhatu v Ukraïny.”

46 Alexandra Markovich, “As More Ukrainians Choose Kyiv Patriarchate, Push Intensifies for Unified National Orthodox Church,” *Kyiv Post*, 23 June 2016. <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/divided-by-politics-orthodox-church-fails-to-unite-ukrainian-people-417077.html>

47 Volodymyr Moroz and Bohdan Voron, “Vid UPTs(MP) do UPTs KP: Interaktivna karta perekhodiv,” [“From UOC (MP) to UOC KP: An Interactive Map of Transfers”] 11 December 2015, <http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/exclusive/review/61901/> (accessed 12 September 2016)

part in the killing.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, even figures within the Moscow Patriarchate acknowledge the damage inflicted as a consequence of the fallout from the insurrectionary events. Metropolitan Oleksandr stated,

*The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is no longer perceived as a local church body. No matter whether we like it or not, in the eyes of a significant part (if not the most part) of modern Ukrainian society we have become a “church of the aggressor state.”*

In the meantime, the MP faces a number of other challenges in Ukraine. While the Verkhovna Rada, works to develop legislation to reduce the immense legal obstacles impeding the change of affiliation (the controversial bill 4128), members of the Ternopil regional council have called on President Petro Poroshenko and the government to remove the Pochayiv Lavra monastery, a highly significant spiritual and ideological hub of Orthodoxy in Western Ukraine, from the authority of the MP. The MP has also come under pressure from a parliamentary bill (4511) regarding “a special status for religious organizations with governing centers based in an aggressor state,” as well as disadvantageous changes to its tax status in Kyiv. Churches of the UOC(MP) have also been subject to repeated alleged arson attacks and vandalism.<sup>49</sup> In this context and to avoid provoking further unrest, Metropolitan Onufriy has given permission for priests to choose whether or not to include Patriarch Kirill’s name in the intercessional prayers of their church, and Patriarch Kirill himself has ceased his previous pattern of regular pastoral visits to Ukraine that had incited controversy even prior to the Euromaidan (Hudson 2015). Furthermore, the UOC(MP) has not accepted the transfer of Orthodox churches forcefully seized by rebels in the occupied areas, and MP parishes in Crimea remain under the Ukrainian church.<sup>50</sup>

This section has traced the role of the UOC(MP) through the course of the Euromaidan protests, arguing that the capacity of the MP to serve as a well-spring of Russian soft power across Ukraine, to the extent that it actually served this role before, is more precarious in the wake of the protests. Although the pastoral activities of some MP clerics in the rebel-held parts of the Donbas and their statements echoing Russian narratives may give credence to the narrative of the Russian World in the eyes of that section of society, from the perspective of the wider Ukrainian audience this may have affirmed the unease or outright prejudice regarding the UOC(MP) as a political force that many already in Ukrainian already felt (Hudson 2015).

48 Katya Kumkova, “Kyiv Making Gains in Religious Dimension of the Ukrainian-Russian Conflict,” *EurasiaNet*, 13 January 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/71611> (accessed 25th August 2016)

49 “A UOC(MP) Church in Babi Yar Set on Fire Again,” *RISU*, 22 April 2015, [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/community/extraordinary\\_situations/59802/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/extraordinary_situations/59802/) (accessed 24th April 2016)

50 “Status eparkhii v Krymu ostalsya neizmennym, zayavili v UPTs Moskovskogo patriarkhata” [“The Status of Parishes in Crimea Remains Unchanged Stated the UOC(MP)”], 10th March 2015, [http://www.newsru.com/religy/10mar2015/krim\\_upcmp.html](http://www.newsru.com/religy/10mar2015/krim_upcmp.html) (accessed 31 October 2016)

## CONCLUSION

The notion of being a channel of Russian soft power implies rhetorical support to Russian cultural and ideological narratives. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the MP was the most nationally established and best-resourced church following independence, and hence was potentially well placed to serve as conduit of the ideas of the Russian World as a fraternal relationship between spiritually and ethnically kindred nations oriented towards Moscow. However, having its own structures of management, finance, training and appointment, the UOC(MP) is not formally a directly leverageable tool of Kremlin influence in Ukraine as such. Indeed, since independence tensions have increasingly manifested themselves between those clergy and laity who wish the canonical church to become a genuinely Ukrainian institution, and those who wish the UOC(MP) to remain symbolically and politically close to Moscow.

The Euromaidan and its consequences sharpened the tensions within the church and in its relations with Ukrainian society at large. If, prior to the Euromaidan, the canonicity of the MP had been a significant trump card in the eyes of the believing population, this was reduced in the wake of the “Revolution of Dignity,” as the church’s patriotic credentials came under acute scrutiny and were often found wanting. Indeed, in the polarised political atmosphere, the UOC(MP)’s close proximity to the Yanukovich regime, its perceived hesitancy towards the protest movement and the pastoral support of Russia-supported rebels by some sections of the clergy in the occupied Donbas have given critical media outlets plenty of ammunition in a campaign to depict the church as an illegitimate imperial outpost and as a organisation hostile to and even guilty of an outright betrayal of the Ukrainian people and its aspirations. Indeed, clerics of the UOC(MP) ministering to those who claim to be fighting for the Russian world seem thereby to lend divine sanction and legitimacy to their cause, and in the broader picture, provide ideological support to the Kremlin’s hybrid wars campaign.

While Metropolitans Volodymyr and Onufriy have taken steps to mollify perceptions of the UOC(MP) as a kind of fifth column, and the church has taken the stance that ministering to pro-Russian insurgents constitutes the personal position of certain clerics, this discourse of “rising above the political fray” seems to have become unacceptable for an increasing number of Ukrainians. Reports tell of a shift - albeit an inexact one - against the MP in the hearts and minds of many Ukrainians. Many in Ukrainian now see

the autocephaly as an eventual inevitability, although it is not yet clear what part the Moscow Patriarchate would play in that process, given the divides within the church on this issue.

Thus, in sum, today the UOC(MP) finds itself in an awkward position. For supporters of the concept of the Russian World, a strong, authoritative UOC under the MP has tremendous capacity to help consolidate a re-imagined cultural and spiritual space shared by Russia and Ukraine, and thus represents a potential boon for Russian soft power. Yet from the perspective of Ukrainian society more widely, to the extent that the UOC(MP) is viewed as sympathising with the Kremlin's narrative and, thereby, serving as a channel of Russian soft power narratives and influence, its presence in Ukraine represents a provocation in the eyes of a significant proportion of the population: a perceptibly pro-Russian UOC(MP) is understood as antithetical to Ukrainian sovereignty and points to a continued imperial grip by Russia. Thus paradoxically, any markers of success in this regard may in turn incite measures to further undermine its standing in Ukrainian society. Under Metropolitan Onufriy the UOC(MP) strives to taken a step back and given way to the KP in the political arena, hoping thus to weather the storm that washes over Ukraine. The future of the MP in Ukraine will ultimately be determined by the resolution of internal tensions within the episcopate about the orientation of the church. Today approximately one third of the parishes of the whole Moscow Patriarchate are located in Ukraine, and with Kyiv representing a litmus test for the viability of the Russian world project, from the Russian perspective the stakes are high, perhaps too high to be left in God's hands.

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