

Black Sea Security and the Rising Role of Religion

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The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), like any autocephalous church, has an exclusive territory of jurisdiction, but its canonical territory extends beyond Russia's state borders. Russian authorities would like to reinforce the position of the Moscow Patriarchate in the worldwide Christian community in general, and in the post-Soviet states in particular. To do so, it has to cooperate with authorities in Russia's neighboring states. Its efforts, however, have resulted in some differences of opinion, both within the Orthodox Church and between Orthodoxy and the Catholic Church, especially in Ukraine.

The Black Sea region is one of the most complicated areas of relationship between different Orthodox churches:

- 1) It is a region where the Russian Orthodox Church faces a problem of supremacy. Interests of different churches clash specifically in Ukraine and Moldova.
- 2) The Russian Orthodox Church plays a complicated political game in the region in order to protect its status in the Universal Orthodox Church.

The role of religious factors is on the rise in political processes in Russia and other post-Soviet states. This role is twofold. On the one hand, the activity of these churches as institutions might be considered a challenge to regional and national security. When religion artificially becomes a central issue of contention (either by the state or by another actor), it poses a potential threat to domestic and international order. When government and religious organizations are mixed in states with weak civil society institutions, there is a high risk that religious fundamentalism and/or authoritarianism will develop.

On the other hand, religion provides new opportunities and creates a new structural environment for dealing with ethnic separatism, extremism, and terrorism in the region. We believe that the Black Sea region is unique as a region where religion has many

possibilities to reinforce the ability of the state to bargain. The strongest religious actor in the region is the Orthodox Church. Important roles are also played by Muslims in the North Caucasus and Crimea, the Georgian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, and the Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church in Ukraine.

Historical Background

Since 1991, the ROC's international activity has been guided by the formula of "several states but one patriarchate." The main priority for the ROC has been to maintain the unity of its canonical territory. After the collapse of the USSR, the ROC granted various degrees of independence to some local churches in the former Soviet states. Two exarchates were created in Belarus and Ukraine, and the Estonian, Latvian, and Moldovan churches were granted autonomy. Their new status allows these churches a certain freedom of activity limited by the basic rules established by the ROC. The most complicated situation is in Ukraine. In spite of wide privileges, the Ukrainian exarchate, a group of priests led by Kyiv metropolitan Filaret, has been struggling for autocephaly since 1991. In 1992, the Moscow Patriarchate refused to allow the status of the Ukrainian Church to be changed. After this, Filaret was expelled from the priesthood and, from the ROC's point of view, could no longer be considered an official party in negotiations.

As a result of secessionist tendencies, there are several independent Orthodox jurisdictions in Ukraine: the main ones are the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, under the Moscow Patriarchate (Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine Vladimir), and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Kyiv Patriarchate (Metropolitan Filaret has been its leader since 1995). Others include the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church established in 2000 in Kyiv and led by "Metropolitan" Mefodi; the Ukrainian Autocephalous ("renovated") Church, established in 2003 in Kharkiv and led by "archbishop" Igor; the Ukrainian Apostolic Orthodox Church, which has existed since 2002 in Kyiv and led by "archbishop" Luka; the Autocephalous Orthodox canonical Church, established in Kiev in 2005; and the Autonomous Orthodox *obshchina* established in 1999 under the leadership of "Metropolitan" Petr.

Ukrainian authorities are interested in the unification of Ukrainian Orthodoxy and its independence from the Moscow Patriarchate. They consider a united Ukrainian Orthodox Church to be an instrument for integrating Ukraine with the West and a symbol of its independence from Russia. The ROC fears the duplication of the "Estonian Model" in Ukraine. Due to the support of the Constantinople Patriarchate, a canonical Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church was established and subsequently accepted as an autonomous church under the Constantinople Patriarchate's jurisdiction. Currently, there are thus two parallel patriarchates in Estonia.

Moldova is another site of rival Orthodox Churches in the post-Soviet space. There are two in Moldova: the Moscow Patriarchate, which is supported by Moldovan authorities, and the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, reestablished in 1992 and supported by the Romanian Patriarchate. Moldovan officials support the ROC due to its positive role and balanced attitude toward the "frozen conflict" in Transdniestria. According to some experts, the ROC is the only institution that keeps the two parts of divided Moldova together. Indeed, Aleksei II, during a visit to Moldova, officially supported the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the former Soviet states.

The Georgian Orthodox Church is bound to the Russian Orthodox Church by history. Patriarch Aleksei and Catholicos Ilia had good personal relations, and the two churches have traditionally emphasized their friendly relations. The Moscow Patriarchate values Catholicos Ilia's support of the Patriarchate's policies in Ukraine, Moldova, and Estonia. However, the Georgian government has several times accused the Moscow Patriarchate of interference inside Georgian canonical territory. In reality, the ROC conducts a very delicate policy in the region, refusing to extend its jurisdiction over the territory of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, even after Russia's official recognition of these two republics' independence in September. The ROC is more interested in receiving Ilia's support in negotiations with Constantinople Patriarchate Bartholomaios than it is in protecting its interests in Estonia, Moldova, and Ukraine. This suggests that the ROC can afford, or is allowed to have, its own foreign policy based on interests that do not always coincide with the official position of the state.

Historically, the ROC has had its most complicated relationship with the Catholic Church. Catholics first appeared in Russia in the sixteenth century, and after the division of Poland in the eighteenth century, 10 million Catholics became citizens of the Russian Empire. Today, there are 177,000 Catholics living in Russia. The Vatican is very active in the post-Soviet space, which worries the ROC. There are two main issues of disagreement between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church: dogmatic contradictions and proselytism. The ROC has never been involved in missionary activity in "foreign" territory (with the exception of old believers). The most complicated situation is in Ukraine. The Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church with strong links to the Vatican is a very active actor in Ukraine's domestic political life, and not only in the west.

The Church as a Political Instrument

In summer 2008, Ukraine celebrated the 1020th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus. Ukrainian political authorities tried to convince Patriarchate Aleksei to grant the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) autocephalous status. There are pros and cons to such a decision, both for Ukraine and Russia. In general, however, there are several risks. First, the Universal Orthodox Church might lose ground due to the generally weakened position of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Some experts predict that contradictions between the several existing churches in Ukraine will not be solved peacefully in this situation. As a result, the influence of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church might grow, and the Vatican's position in Ukraine would strengthen.

Second, the ROC worries about the involvement of the Constantinople Patriarchate. From the formal point of view, Patriarch Bartholomaios can grant autocephalous status to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. However, experts predict that this would have several negative consequences. First of all, the Constantinople Patriarchate does not have enough power and authority to interfere in the domestic affairs of Ukraine. It would create a power vacuum in the country. The Vatican could also easily broaden its influence in the region, simultaneously developing a dialog with the Constantinople Patriarchate.

As well, a policy aimed at increasing the influence of the Constantinople Patriarchate in Ukraine would stimulate negative reactions not only from the Moscow Patriarchate, but from other Orthodox Churches (for example, the Greek Orthodox and Romanian Orthodox) which are not interested in the weakening of Universal

Orthodoxy.

Third, the creation of a new independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the current circumstances could stimulate a split in Ukrainian society due to the fact that a majority of the eastern and southern parts of the country are still oriented toward the Moscow Patriarchate. In this case, some experts do not exclude a scenario in which Ukraine is starkly divided into two Churches: Greek Catholic and Orthodox.

Fourth, Ukrainian authorities might face a struggle over property such as buildings, monasteries, and churches. Some monasteries and cathedrals that are sacred for all Orthodox are located in Ukraine (for instance, the Kyiv-Pechersky Monastery and the Sofia Cathedral) and could be sources of rival claims.

Conclusion

Unlike in secularized Europe, the Black Sea region is witnessing the rising role of religion. There is a need for a new definition of religiosity in order to understand the situation in this region. The governments of Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia use the Church as a political instrument. There is evidence that they want to see the Church as an ally in political games (both domestic and international). There is also a risk that rising religiosity here will increase inequalities and consequently cause counter-mobilization. It is thus necessary to avoid framing political and socioeconomic issues in terms of religious heritage. States, international organizations, and other nonreligious actors should stay out of the Churches' disagreements and let them overcome their disagreements themselves.

In the Black Sea region, Orthodox Churches lack the authority and mechanisms needed to influence outcomes by encouraging policymakers to adopt policies formed by their religious tenets and beliefs. This is the difference between these states and Western Europe and the United States. It is a well known fact that domestic evangelical groups work to convince the U.S. government through a mixture of soft and hard power to oppose funding for contraception and abortion internationally. The Russian Orthodox Church, like other Orthodox Churches in the region, does not seek to influence foreign policymakers in this manner, but this does not mean that policymakers do not seek to influence religious leaders. As a consequence, the Church is often used as a political instrument, which is very destructive. The security dimension of the rising role of religion in the region warrants additional investigation.

The future role of the Church as a political instrument is an actively discussed issue among experts after the death of the Patriarch Aleksei II. There are two views: either the Church should be absolutely independent from the state, or the state should more actively participate in religious life with the Church considered (to some extent) an instrument of state policy. The former patriarch was against state interference. The most influential candidate to be the new patriarch, Metropolitan Kirill, would follow Aleksei's tradition. At the same time, we should expect a rise in the activity of the ROC on the post-Soviet space.

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