

Russian Orthodox Church: Kremlin's 'invisible hand' in war against Ukraine

A Igreja Ortodoxa Russa: a 'mão invisível' do Kremlin na Guerra contra a Ucrânia

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Abstract

The article intends to demonstrate that the foreign policy of the Russian Orthodox Church (IOR) affects the implementation of Moscow's policy in the war against Ukraine. The main goal is to determine how the Kremlin, through various hybrid capabilities and techniques, uses the IOR to implement its foreign policy vectors. The study is based on a historical analysis of the international activities of the IOR, focusing on the activities of the Department of Church External Relations (DREI) of the Patriarchate of Moscow, which was created, in 1946, by Stalin and taken over by Vladimir Putin. In this context, the DREI of the Patriarchate of Moscow was and continues to be "the invisible hand" of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB), which works under religious cover at the world level.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church; Ukrainian Orthodox Church; Holy Rus; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia; Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople; Russkiy Mir.

Resumo

O artigo pretende demonstrar que a política externa da Igreja Ortodoxa Russa (IOR) afeta a concretização da política de Moscovo na guerra contra a Ucrânia. O objetivo é determinar como o Kremlin, através de diversas capacidades e técnicas híbridas, usa a IOR, para a concretização dos seus vetores de política externa. O estudo tem como base uma análise histórica das atividades internacionais da IOR, focando-se nas atividades do Departamento de Relações Externas da Igreja (DREI) do Patriarcado de Moscovo, que foi criado, em 1946, por Estaline e retomado por Vladimir Putin. Neste contexto, o DREI do Patriarcado de Moscovo, foi e continua a ser, "a mão invisível" do Serviço Federal de Segurança da Federação Russa (FSB), que trabalha sob cobertura

religiosa a nível mundial.

Palavras-chave: Igreja Ortodoxa Russa; Igreja Ortodoxa Ucraniana; *Holy Rus*; Ministério das Relações Exteriores da Rússia; Patriarcado Ecuménico de Constantinopla; *Russkiy Mir*.

Introduction

Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine appears to have a religious component, as the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has supported Russian aggression, recognising the annexation of Crimea, and assisting in the development of military actions in eastern Ukraine. The historical conservatism of Orthodoxy has always aimed to recover Russian supremacy and its empire together with the state, whether with the tsars, the Russian emperors, or Putin. The Orthodox Church and the FSB (formerly the KGB) were the only two institutions that survived the fall of the Soviet Union. It is therefore not surprising that the IOR, began to actively develop and promote *Holy Rus*, encapsulating the geopolitical project of the *Russkiy Mir* which envisages a Moscow-dependent Ukraine. When Putin began to outline military aggression against Ukraine, the hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate began to prepare for it. It should be emphasised that this operation was carried out long before the annexation of Crimea and the start of the undeclared war in the Donbass region. Moreover, Putin and Patriarch Cyril I agreed on a policy of involving the structures of the Moscow Patriarchate in the implementation of their domestic and foreign policy with a view to overthrowing the Kiev regime (Soldatov and Borogan, 2023). Senior Siloviki officials, former NKVD, KGB and FSB intelligence officers, have long recognised the use of the IOR as an unofficial arm of the state. In 2002, the St Sophia Cathedral of Divine Wisdom was reopened inside the Lubyanka as an FSB departmental church, and Patriarch Alexy II himself blessed its opening at a ceremony attended by the then FSB chief Nikolai Patrushev. Since 2010, the army has invited the Church into its ranks by introducing an institution of military priests, or chaplains, with salaries paid by the army itself. Since then, the Church's presence in the military has grown, culminating in the construction in 2020 of the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces on the outskirts of Moscow, the largest Orthodox church in the country. However, so far this overlap has been top-down, overseen by the Kremlin and the Patriarch (Soldatov and Borogan, 2023). How involved is the IOR in the Kremlin's security forces in the Ukraine crisis?

The activity of the IOR leadership in Ukraine has been a hotly debated issue by a number of researchers in the field of religion (Cherenkov, M. (2015); Gorevoy, D. (2019); Sagan, O. (2015); Zdioruk, S. (2014)). In the context of threats to Ukraine's security, several authors have studied the role of the IOR (Gorbulin, V.; Kovalchuk, P.; Sagan, O.; Yablonsky, V.). However, in reality, some questions concerning the functioning and direction of the IOR's activity abroad and in the geopolitical project of *Russkiy Mir* remain secret and unexplored. Various external structures of the IOR, under the cover of Orthodox ideology, have supported Russian aggression in Ukraine.

The methodology of this study involved materials and documents that reveal the course of the IOR's activities in relation to the situation in Ukraine. In addition, primary sources from some of the leading authors and experts in the study of religion were used (Adamsky, Dmitry (2019); Curanovic, Alicja (2012); Fagan, Geraldine (2013); Garrad & Garrad, (2008); Knox, Zoe (2005); Papkova, Irina (2011)). In this context, it was possible to identify some hybrid means and manipulations that the IOR used to increase the Kremlin's influence in Ukraine. A historical

and political analysis made it possible to establish a correlation between the state, the special security services and the Church. The process of non-recognition of a “*tomos*” or autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kiev Patriarchate (IOUPK) by the Moscow Patriarchate demonstrates how this whole situation has led Russia to a considerable feeling of animosity towards the “West”, in particular Ukraine.

1. Russian Foreign Policy and Religion

Despite the imposition of science and the process of secularisation in the world, and the declining importance of religion in politics and public life, a counter-trend has been observed in recent decades: the return of religion as a political factor. This orientation has been reflected a posteriori in the understanding of religion by political science and international relations (Avanesova, Naxera, 2018). The religious factor in international relations is an increasingly explored subject. However, we cannot say the same about the role of the IOR in its external dimension, i.e. in Russian foreign policy (RFP). The issue of PER in its internal and external dimensions is a regular topic of research in international relations. However, it should be emphasised that the numerous studies neglect the element of religion, or more specifically the angle of Orthodox Christianity, namely the influence of the IOR on the foreign policy of the Russian state.

Samuel Huntington, has reinforced a whole body of empirical work on the relationship of the Orthodox Church to political affairs, on the one hand with a framework of analysis favouring caesaropapism, a context in which the state assumes the functions of the supreme religious authority, and on the other, *symphonia*, a model broadly defined as a concert articulated originally in the ancient Byzantine Empire, in which the Church and the state enjoy the same governing power (Huntington, 1993: 22-49). After the collapse of the Soviet Union very few mention the role of Orthodoxy in this crucial moment of history (Papkova, 2011: 7).

However, the consensus among some Western academics has been that the IOR does not hold a relevant political cachet, given its weakening during the 74 years of sovietisation and discrediting in the face of suspicions of its leader's involvement with the Russian KGB secret services (Armes, 1993: 72-83). In view of the end of communism, many analysts thought that Russia would, at this moment of transition, become a fully secularised society and that religion would play an insignificant role. In formal terms, it is often said that to understand Russia, you have to know the IOR. Does the IOR no longer occupy a predominant place in Russian politics and society? What can we say about the latest developments in the Ukraine crisis, about the role of the IOR in foreign policy and state security activities?

2. The “hidden hand” of the IOR

The main role in the IOR's external activity is played by a special body: the Department of External Church Relations (DREI) of the Moscow Patriarchate. This department was created by Joseph Stalin in 1946. Apparently, at that time it was one of the official organisations through which the Soviet leadership tried to expand its influence in the world. As the sphere of authority of the DREI expanded outside the USSR, it became clear that this body became the shadow of the Soviet secret services, which operated under religious cover. Legislation on freedom of conscience and religious associations, the debate surrounding the burial of Tsar Nicholas II, the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, cooperation with the military, financial privileges

granted by the state, and collaboration between church and state during Vladimir Putin's rule, all demonstrated that the church enjoyed a privileged status in the high political sphere (Knox, 2005: 105-106). A new stage in DREI's activities began when Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia in 2000. The scale of the department's tasks increased significantly and its spheres of influence expanded. Since the creation of DREI, the only thing that has remained unchanged is its close ties with the secret services for the fulfilment of any tasks set by the Kremlin. During the period from 1998 to 2008, the IOR always tried to transfer its political preferences to federal policy in its four fundamental goals: "Patriarch Kirill called for the introduction of religious instruction in public school, the restitution of pre-Soviet church property, the introduction of military churches and the marginalisation of non-traditional denominations" (Papkova, 2011: 93). Meanwhile, in 2005, the publication of Sergieyevsky Proyeckt's book *Russkaya Doktrina* gained strong support from some IOR hierarchs, including Vladimir Gundyayev, at this time head of the DREI (Curanovic, 2012: 109). This book contains a real political programme for various spheres of Russian society (religious policy, foreign policy, security, welfare state, education, health, ecology and demographic crisis). In broad strokes, this work argues that the Russian Federation should express imperialist ambitions, gain its post-Soviet assets and seek to recognise its interests in its historical *Russkiy Mir space* (Curanovic, 2012: 112).

The DREI came to life in 2009 after the former head of this institution, Metropolitan Kirill (V. Gundyayev), became Patriarch of Moscow. After assuming power, this department was reorganised into several new structures. In particular, the Department of Church-Society Interaction (DIIS) which established its foundations through its head Archpriest V. Chaplin, one of the most prominent leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate. Chaplin, one of the most odious leaders of Kremlin ideology. Immediately, its activities began in Russia under the supervision of semi-public organisations of the DREI, such as the Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods, the Union of Orthodox Citizens and the Association of Orthodox Experts. Later, on the initiative of Patriarch Kirill, a new IOR Information Department was created on the basis of the DREI Communication Service, which was headed by Mr Legoida, an individual known for his extremist positions. Since then, the newly created Information Department began to function as a church service in Russian propaganda media, for example, D. Kiselyov's *Rossiia Segodnya* information service (Goreva, 2018). In 2012, at the Moscow Institute of Engineering Physics (IEFM), Hilarion Alfayev, head of the DREI, stated that "in the education of young physicists, their religious worldview should be expanded and Orthodox culture should be cultivated in their personal attitude" (Adamsky, 2019: 200).

The official authority of the DREI is to create links between churches, charity work and pastoral support for Orthodox Russians around the world with the most conservative demagogic rhetoric of Russian Orthodoxy. In fact, the activities of the DREI Foreign Ministry have little to do with Christian values, as they are very much conditioned by the aggressive policy of the Kremlin. The DREI co-operates secretly with special services, and openly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (Fagan, 2013). In 2004, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Igor Ivanov, referred to the co-operation between the Church and the state at the international level in the following way: "Reuniting 'Russkiy Mir' is a common business of the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church" (Ivanov, 2004). The culmination of the relationship between the church and the military took place on the holy island of Valaam

(considered by Russians as the Mount Athos of the North) with the celebration of the “Orthodox festival of transfiguration” and where an Orthodox military subunit, the 66th military company, is stationed (Garrad & Garrad, 2008: 237). From this perspective, the IOR’s foreign policy does not differ much from the official activities of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

The external activity of the Church has certain advantages over the official diplomacy of the Kremlin. Religion is an area where there are no clear boundaries between spirituality and politics, between the temporal and the timeless. Behind religious rhetoric it is possible to hide certain, sometimes disparate, thoughts and intentions. Religious rhetoric does not appeal to the norms of international law, but to the general norms of Christian ideology. In other words, the Church is more discreet. On the other hand, it is necessary to take into account the perceptions of believers about the instructions and information messages they receive from church representatives. Religious faith is a unique phenomenon because believers are used to accepting the dogmas of the clergy without questioning them. In general terms, individuals trust almost everything that has a spiritual origin. It is precisely this method that the “religious elites” of the IOR often skillfully use in their propaganda to misrepresent certain facts. It should be noted that the IOR has extensive experience in external activities. The most common techniques used by the Church are varied and cover a wide range of actions. Creation and financing of foreign “Orthodox” media working in the interests of the Russian Federation. Financial and personal support of the “Russian Orthodox Fraternity”. Search and selection of pro-Russian agents of influence. Construction of Temples and Churches in the territories of other countries and support for IOR parishes. Creation of public and religious organisations of the IOR abroad that promote the ideas of *Russkiy Mir* (Grigorova, 2020). High-level networking between IOR leaders and representatives of other churches, government officials, businessmen and influential people. Utilisation of Orthodox monasteries on the territory of foreign states, e.g. Mount Athos in Greece.

If we analyse the activity of the IOR in Ukraine, in particular with the participation of DREI, during the last decade, we can highlight some stages of anti-Ukrainian propaganda, developed through powerful information campaigns. In the first stage (2009-2013), the main actions of the IOR focused on the dynamisation of an ideological narrative among Ukrainian society in the context of Russian geopolitical projects, such as the Eurasian Customs Union, the Eurasian Economic Union and *Holy Rus*, among others. The integration activity of Russian Orthodoxy definitely intensified when Viktor Yanukovich took office as President of Ukraine. At this time, several extremist church organisations were created in Ukraine, such as Union of Orthodox Citizens of Ukraine “United Fatherland”, Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods of Ukraine, All Ukrainians: Orthodox Brotherhood of Alexander Nevsky, All-Ukrainian Public Association “Orthodox Choice”, by the “hands” of DREI Moscow Patriarchate and participation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate (IOUPM) which became the amplifier of the discourse of *Russkiy Mir* (Zdioruk, 2014). With the mediation of the “Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the IOR”, the latter carried out subversive anti-Ukrainian activities focussed to spread Russophone ideology, commit the Ukrainian people to spread intolerance of dissent, prevent Ukraine’s accession to the European Union (EU) and promote opposition to the granting of autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarchate (IOUPK) (Zdioruk, 2014). To demonstrate the anti-Ukrainian character of these quasi-religious organisations, a demonstration of Orthodox brotherhoods was held in July 2012, demanding the elimination of the independence of the Moscow Patriarchate

from the IOU and the restoration of the Ukrainian exarchate in IOR and Soviet times (Zdioruk, 2014). The revolution for dignity thwarted the plans of the Kremlin hierarchs. Russia responded to Ukraine with war, and at this stage the IOR not only supported Russian aggression during this most problematic phase, but also ideologically justified its arguments using its inherent traditional Orthodox rhetoric.

In the run-up to the current Ukrainian war that started on 24 February 2022, the IOR consistently supported retaliation against Ukraine and focused its activities on foreign relations (Ivanova, 2022). At the beginning of 2018, the IOR leadership started to send efforts to prevent the IOU's autocephaly. As this issue was to be decided by the hierarchs of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Moscow Patriarchate intensified its external activities (Zdioruk, 2016). Preventing Ukrainian autocephaly at all costs was a strategic task of the Kremlin. In April 2018, Patriarch Kirill visited the residence of the Albanian Orthodox Church, where, under the pretext of discussing the interaction of the Orthodox churches, he discussed with the leaders of the Ukrainian Church the issue of Ukrainian autocephaly. There is no doubt that the Ukrainian issue was also very significant during his June meeting with Greek Foreign Minister N. Kozdiaz. At the same time, Metropolitan Hilarion Alfayev, leader of DREI, visited almost all local Orthodox churches. On 6 May 2018, he met with the Patriarch of Alexandria, on 8 May with the Archbishop of Cyprus and on 9 May with the Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Antioch.

On his return to Moscow on 15 May 2018, Hilarion met with the Greek Ambassador to Russia A. Friganas. Friganas, with whom he discussed issues covering the area of common interests. On a working trip to Romania on 18 May and the following day to Poland. On 1 June 2018, Hilarion met in Moscow with the Ambassador of Bulgaria and on 4 June he visited the Georgian Patriarch Elijah. At the same time, in a spirit of mission, Patriarch Kirill sent Bishop Anthony on a business trip abroad, making several visits. On 18 May 2018, he visited the Primate of the Czech and Slovak Churches, Metropolitan Rostislav, and on 13 June, the Bulgarian Patriarch Neophyte (Pkhaldze, 2012).

At the same time, on the political side, the Kremlin has always strongly opposed Ukrainian autocephaly (Seddon, 2019). During an official visit to Turkey, Russian President Vladimir Putin planned to meet with the Ecumenical Patriarch, but the meeting did not take place and they spoke only by telephone (Pkhaldze, 2012). At the end of May 2018, there were reports that Russia would reduce the price of gas to Turkey by almost 1 billion US dollars. Several religious analysts considered this action as a bribe perpetrated by the Kremlin to the Turkish government, which was supposed to ensure that Ukraine would not receive a "tomos" or autocephaly. According to Turkish law, the Ecumenical Patriarch is considered a government official and to some extent subordinate to the central government. On 7 May 2018, the Russian ambassador to Greece, A. Maslov, met with the head of the Turkish government. Maslov, met with the head of the Hellenic Orthodox Church, Jerome. The topic of the meeting was the issue of Ukrainian autocephaly. A month later, on 8 June, the chairman of the Russian State Duma's profile committee, Mr Gavrilov, travelled to Greece. He attended a meeting of the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church, although he had nothing to do with religious issues. The issue of Orthodox unity and the prevention of a possible scenario of a Ukrainian intrachurch schism within the Orthodox world was discussed. The final stretch of Moscow's plan to counter the IOU's receipt of a "tomos" prompted Patriarch Kirill to meet with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I on 31 August 2018.

However, the meeting did not go well, and Bartholomew I did not make any concessions to the Patriarch of Moscow (Goreva, 2018).

The granting of a “*tomos*” or autocephaly to the IOU in 2019 was perceived by the Kremlin as a defeat that needed revenge. The content of that revenge has been released. The IOR prioritised and Hilarion Alfayev, head of DREI, was given one last chance to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of his superior. The goal of the outlined plan remained the same: fight against IOU autocephaly by means of religious rhetoric (Goreva, 2019). The main tasks for the IOR activity were perfectly defined. On the one hand, to prevent the recognition of the autocephaly of the IOU by other local Orthodox churches. On the other hand, to jeopardise the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I by the external isolation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Through presidential and parliamentary elections, promote the reshaping of the Ukrainian government according to the interests of the Kremlin and maintain positions in Ukraine, relying on the support of the IOUPM. To solve these problems, the Moscow Patriarchate intensified external activities, mainly through agents of influence in countries where there were local Orthodox churches (Goreva, 2019).

The Kremlin has given a special role to public and religious organisations operating under the IOR's “*baton*” in other countries, providing a kind of “springboard” for lobbying interests. Indeed, its activities have an extremely wide range of action, yet its anti-Ukrainian strand has gained unprecedented scope. In this context, the organisation that has remained most active is the International Union of Russian Orthodoxy, also called the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society (IORS), which was created at the end of the 19th century. Its task is to assist the IOR in developing links with the various countries of the Middle East and the Mediterranean region. The intensification of the UIOR's activities began with the coming to power of Vladimir Putin. Since 2007, the organisation has been headed by S. Stepashin, former head of counterintelligence, and then by the FSB, former Minister of Justice and Interior and Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. Honorary members of the UIOR include well-known people such as the president of the Transneft company, retired FSB general M. Tokarev, Patriarch Kirill, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the mayor of Moscow, businessman Sergei Mikhailov, who was once considered the leader of one of the largest criminal groups in the country, among others (Goreva, 2018).

UIOR representatives work in different places: in Abkhazia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Montenegro, Serbia, Syria and Ukraine (in the occupied territories of Donbass). In February 2019, a UIOR branch was opened in London (Goreva, 2019). However, the IOR's special attention and efforts have turned to Greece, a country considered to be the true stronghold of world Orthodoxy. In Greece, there are two Orthodox churches, the Hellenic and the Constantinople, between which there are some contradictions. Contradictions that Moscow is trying to exploit to its advantage. In collision with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the IOR has the support of the monasteries of Mount Athos, influenced by the active work of the charity organisation, Russian Athos Society (SARS) (Gorevoy, 2019). Through SRA, the IOR administers financial injections into the Orthodox world. The chairman of the SRA board of directors is the former governor of St Petersburg, G. Poltavchenko, the executive director is Gazprom manager M. Gilerovych, and the members of the society are deputies, businessmen and representatives of the special services. According to official reports, more than 30 infrastructure projects have been implemented on Mount Athos through the efforts of the SRA (Gorevoy, 2019).

Russia has invested more than \$200 million to support Athos monasteries. An illustrative

example of this is the Monastery of St Panteleimon on Mount Athos, which until 2016 was dominated by Ukrainian clerics. This monastery was even labelled Ukrainian. However, after the death of the Ukrainian monk of the “Orthodox Brotherhood”, other monks quickly dispersed. Today, St Panteleimon’s Monastery is considered the main stronghold of Russian Orthodoxy, called the “Russian Monastery” and on its territory it is strictly forbidden to allow pilgrims from the IOUPK (Gorevoy, 2019). Russian interference in the internal politics of states is traditionally accompanied by the information media. A large number of media outlets appear in Greece, glorifying Russia and mercilessly criticising Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople. One such media outlet is the well-known internet portal of the Greek church Romfeya, headed by E. Polygenis, precisely considered an agent of Russian influence on Greek Orthodoxy (Gorevoy, 2019).

Since the end of 2018, the activities of a small Orthodox community in the Consulate General of the Russian Federation in Istanbul, where the residence of the Patriarchate of Constantinople is based, have intensified remarkably. The leadership of this community maintains secret relations with representatives of the self-proclaimed Turkish Orthodox Church, created in the 1920s, unrecognised by other churches, to oppose the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In this way, the IOR seems to be moving its activities towards discrediting Patriarch Bartholomew I as a form of response for granting autocephaly to the IOUPK (Gorevoy, 2019).

Recently, the IOR leadership has been trying to reshape foreign sectors of Russian Orthodoxy, which still retain some degree of autonomy. Most likely, this is why in December 2018, the Russian Church leadership proceeded with an administrative reform of the Patriarchal Exarchate in Western Europe. Metropolitan Ioan of Korsun and Western Europe, who has considerable experience as a secret member of the Russian secret services, was appointed the highest pontiff of this exarchate (Cherenkov, 2015). According to military experts, the task of the new metropolitan would be to secure the entry of numerous parishes of Russian Orthodox churches in various European countries. Through Orthodox rhetoric, various real estate and properties have been purchased, projects of various kinds are being financed. In addition, local elites are involved in deals and possibly some people are being bribed. Thus, a new Russian intelligence network seems to be reconfigured (Cherenkov, 2015).

However, the Kremlin does not always succeed in fully realising its plans, including on the external religious front. For example, as a result of intensified Russian intelligence activities, the Greek authorities have been forced to take precautionary measures. In July 2018, Greece expelled two Russian diplomats and banned two more from entering the country. At the root of such an unprecedented decision in Greece was the attempt of Russian interference in the country’s foreign affairs, attempts to influence civil servants, Metropolitans of the Hellenic Orthodox Church and the clergy of Mount Athos, which in itself posed a threat to national security (Gorevoy, 2019). As a consequence, Greece suspended issuing entry visa authorisations to Russian priests. After the IOR severed Eucharistic relations with Constantinople, Russian priests lost the opportunity to serve in the temples of Mount Athos and Russian pilgrims lost the opportunity to receive communion and confession. In August 2018, the Synod of the Greek Church suspended the former autonomy of its monasteries and subordinated them to the metropolitans of the regions where they are located. It is assumed that in the near future, the Greek branch of the UIOR will begin to reduce its actions (Gorevoy, 2019).

Governments in many countries are now beginning to assess and question the activities of

alleged “Russian Orthodox diplomats” on the ground. However, restrictive measures will not stop the Kremlin’s outward expansion in the long run. Ukraine therefore needs to prepare for new challenges, particularly on the Russian religious front.

Conclusion

Currently, the IOR’s external activities are aimed at strengthening Russia’s geopolitical influence, with the help of Russian Orthodox communities and public religious organisations based in various countries. The IOR leadership is one of the main “right arms” and the “invisible hand” of the Kremlin’s foreign policy in Ukraine. The main activities of the IOR structures abroad have been aimed primarily at Ukraine. Attention should be paid to the religious factor in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. In the war in Ukraine, Russia may well use these hybrid technologies. For example, resistance to the recognition of the autocephaly of the IOUPK through the involvement of local Orthodox communities, the use of the religious factor to destabilise the internal situation in Ukraine, conducting through agencies in other countries activities aimed at discrediting the political leadership of Ukraine in the religious sphere or the formation of a negative attitude in the local population towards the leadership of Ukraine and the clergy of the IOUPK.

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