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The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate as a Potential 'Tool' of Russian Soft Power in the Wake of Ukraine's 2013 Euromaidan

VICTORIA HUDSON

Abstract

This article considers the religious and spiritual aspect of the Euromaidan protests; specifically, the role of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and to what extent the UOC(MP) can justifiably be seen as a tool of Russian 'soft power' cultural and ideational influence. It examines the degree of institutional and ideological leverage that Moscow is able to exercise over the Ukrainian church, and then explores the position of the church during the protests, and how this has affected the authority and legitimacy of its standing as an opinion leader in Ukrainian society in the wake of the 'Revolution of Dignity'.

THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE (UOC(MP)) has often been considered a 'tool' of Russian soft power in Ukraine (Bogomolov & Lytvynenko 2012; Sagan 2015). This article will critically examine the presumed role of the UOC(MP) as a source of pro-Russian sentiment and chart the impact of the Euromaidan on its position as a leading cultural and ideational force in Ukrainian society.

At the outset, by way of conceptual excursus, it is worth noting that soft power—like the wider notion of power itself—is a deeply contested concept. Joseph Nye describes soft power as working through co-option—getting others to want what you want, which is contrasted with 'command power'; the capacity to apply coercive pressure to bend others to your will (Nye 1990, p. 267f; 2004). On this basis, it has been understood to refer to a diverse range of phenomena including not only cultural and public diplomacy but also multilateralist and civilian-driven approaches to foreign policy. The haziness surrounding the debate has only been increased by

the fact that the term has also been used interchangeably with distinct but related concepts like nation-branding, cultural relations and public diplomacy (Fisher & Bröckerhoff 2008; Stuenkel 2016).

Western approaches to soft power are generally influenced by Nye's definition, which stresses the notion of 'attraction' as the basis for influence and international leadership. Joseph Nye notes that a state with soft power 'may obtain what it wants in world politics because other countries—admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity—want to follow it' (Nye 1990, p. 5). Although soft power's rare ability to straddle the policy and academic communities has lent the concept a high profile, Nye's approach has nonetheless come under criticism for the weaknesses of its conceptual development, being variously described as 'confusing' (Fan 2008), 'shallow' (Bohas 2006, p. 410; Bilgin & Elis 2008, p. 6;) and as resting on a 'shaky theoretical foundation' (Kroenig *et al.* 2010, p. 412). Indeed, despite the centrality of the concept of attraction to his understanding of this source of power, it remains under-theorised in his work. Consequently, the prevailing impression derived from his work is that 'attraction' is a self-evident result of unbiased exposure to certain intrinsically appealing cultural attributes, which happen to correspond to the central pillars of liberal society as practised in the West such as democracy, self-realisation and consumption-oriented life styles. This approach raises questions about whether non-liberal polities like Russia can enjoy the benefits of soft power, although historical experience shows us that a range of different polities are able to co-opt support through 'attracting' audiences into their cultural and ideological worldview (Cao 2007).

Constructivist scholars, however, challenge this objectivist reading of the notion of attraction, arguing that our understandings of what is 'attractive' are socially constructed as a result of communication (Mattern 2005; Solomon 2014). Accordingly, public diplomacy and other soft power activities that communicate a polity's worldview play a socialising role, promoting values, ideas and interpretations in an international or cross-border context. By this reading, tools or conduits of soft power such as films, books, and cultural events are active elements in the inculcation of values and in the fostering of the attraction that, by Nye's reading (1990, 2004), they purport to merely indicate.

For its part, the Russian Federation has a disparate approach to the term and concept of soft power. On one hand, perhaps due to its American origins, the term 'soft power' itself has often been referenced in rather disparaging terms to describe the Western use of political technologies to illegally undermine national sovereignty

with a view to engendering a soft *coup d'état* (Putin 2012).¹ It is through this lens that Russia interprets the 2004 Orange Revolution and 2013–2014 Euromaidan in Ukraine, as well as other ‘colour revolutions’ elsewhere across the post-Soviet space and Middle East.

On the other hand, when it comes to the substantive content of soft power activity—endeavours to increase international cultural influence—Russia has been quite proactive over the past decade (Saari 2014; Barr & Feklyunina 2015; Kiseleva 2015; Feklyunina 2016). Policy documentation contains references to enhancing Russia’s positive image abroad, augmenting its cultural, spiritual, linguistic, moral-ethical, ideational and informational influence as well as preserving and supporting the ethnic and cultural identity of diaspora ‘compatriot’ populations (President of the Russian Federation 2009).² This proceeds from an understanding of Russia as a distinct civilisational centre in its own right, which should accordingly maintain sovereignty not only in the political, economic and security arena, but also exercise international leadership in the cultural and spiritual sphere too (Surkov 2006, 2008; Matveychev 2009; Curanović 2012).

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia’s relationship with Ukraine has been 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 (Kuzio 2002). Clarity in this regard has sometimes been sought by defining the nation against its presumed ‘other’, Russia, which has at times engendered political discourse highly critical of Russia and a sensitivity towards any Russian policy that smacks of an encroachment on Ukrainian self-determination. Meanwhile, seen from the perspective prevalent in Moscow, although its western neighbour is of clear material

¹ President of the Russian Federation (2013) ‘The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation’, adopted by decree of the President of the Russian Federation, 12 February, available at: <http://www.rusemb.org.uk/in1/>, accessed 6 November 2016.

² ‘The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation’, adopted by decree of the President of the Russian Federation, 12 January 2008, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116>, accessed 6 November 2016; ‘The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation’, adopted by decree of the President of the Russian Federation, 12 February 2013, available at: <http://www.rusemb.org.uk/in1/>, accessed 6 November 2016; ‘Strategiya natsional’noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii do 2020 goda’, adopted by decree of the President of the Russian Federation, 12 May 2009, available at: <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html>, accessed 15 May 2009; Kontseptsiya gosudarstvennoi podderzhki i prodvizheniya russkogo yazyka za rubezhom, adopted 3 November 2015, available at: <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/50644>, accessed 15 August 2016; ‘Gosudarstvennaya programma Rossiiskoi Federatsii “inostrannym deyatel’nosti”’, MID, adopted 29 April 2014, available at: http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/62782, accessed 15 August 2016.

and geostrategic significance, discussions of Russo-Ukrainian relations status are also coloured by deep emotion: Ukraine is considered not simply as a neighbouring country but as a ‘brotherly nation’ with a shared East Slavic culture and as the cradle of Russian statehood (D’Anieri 1999; Leontiev 2009; Richters 2012).

By this interpretation, 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 (Leontiev 2009; Richters 2012, p. 99). Hence Russia has tried by various means 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 capitalise on its soft power to facilitate cooperation between the two countries. Russian public diplomacy tends to depict the predominantly East Slavic, Orthodox nations of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus as timelessly united on a profound level by their shared history, closely related languages, and common cultural and spiritual heritage. The logic of this worldview points towards a future of close cooperation as a distinct, viable civilisational actor, the ‘Russian World’ (*Russkii mir*) (Curanović 2012). The Russian World is intentionally defined in ambiguous terms. Like concentric circles with graded levels of intensity, the idea variously represents ethnic Russians and ‘compatriots’³ living beyond the borders of the Russian Federation, the global community of Russian speakers or, when understood with less emotion, simply individuals of any nationality with an interest in Russia and its language and culture.⁴ From the perspective of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Russian World is interchangeable with the notion of Holy Rus’: a transnational cultural collective of people united by a common Russian Orthodox faith regardless of native language or ethnicity, sharing a ‘way of life that has been passed down to us through the centuries by such great saints of the Russian Land’.⁵

³ The notion of ‘compatriots’ is broader than merely ethnic Russians or citizens living beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. It also includes populations—whether ethnic Russian or not—outside Russia that consider themselves as bearers of Russian culture, or whose ancestors lived on the territory of the Russian Federation or the Soviet Union. (Federal’nyi zakon ot 24.05.1999g. No. 99-F3 ‘O gosudarstvennoi politike Rossiiskoi Federatsii v otnoshenii sootchestvennikov za rubezhom’, adopted 24 May 2005, entered into effect 1 June 1999, available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/13875>, accessed 15 August 2016).

⁴ ‘Fond russkii mir’ (Russian World Foundation), available at: <http://russkiymir.ru/fund/>, accessed 18 June 2017.

⁵ ‘Appeal by Metropolitan Hilarion, the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, on the Celebration of the 1,025th Anniversary of the Baptism of Rus’, Russian Orthodox Church Outside of

Given that Orthodoxy has traditionally formed an important pillar of Russian nationhood, the Russian Orthodox Church's conceptualisation of the Russian World tacitly undergirds Kremlin attempts to rebuild an ideational backbone; a meaningful narrative supporting Moscow's aspirations to be a leading nation capable of attracting others into its civilisational orbit (Ivanov 2004, 2011; Matveychev 2009; Lavrov 2014). Participation in this project by other nationalities and confessions is encouraged; indeed, the role of Russia as an actor bringing together diverse groups is part of the self-identity of this vision. Having said this, Russian Orthodoxy is envisaged as playing a leading role in mounting an interfaith front of resistance to the universalising spread of liberal secularism, much as the Russian state positions itself as a bastion of resistance to pressure to follow the course of political development advanced by Western countries (Putin 2012).

The UOC(MP) has thus often been seen as a well-spring of Russian cultural influence in Ukraine, and is envisaged 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. Indeed, to the extent that the UOC(MP) articulates a narrative echoing that of Danilov Monastery, the seat of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Moskva River, it could be seen to serve as a 'soft power tool' or, more precisely, as a conduit for Russian cultural narratives in Ukrainian society: as an influential organisation across most of the country, its actions and statements lend symbolic and rhetorical support to the spiritual dimension of the 'Russian World' and thereby increase Russian soft power attraction. This article will examine the extent to which this assumption can be upheld, suggesting that the reality is often more complex than commonly depicted.

Given the amorphous nature of the soft power concept, it is necessary to outline a working definition prior to the empirical discussion. Thus, soft power is understood as a polity's ability to successfully communicate its worldview in a way that co-opts a target audience into the projected cultural narrative and thereby supports the realisation of foreign policy goals (Hudson 2014). Attraction in this sense refers not simply to phenomena perceived as 'appealing' but should be conceptualised in more profound terms, as relating to our value preferences concerning what we believe to be the proper ends of human endeavour, the true nature of reality and therefore, by extension, the correct course of state policy to realise those meta-goals. Accordingly, the question of which value narratives prevail is of great importance in politics since this has direct implications for the foreign policy measures that appear justifiable in the light of the dominant perspective and for individual identity choices, which in turn have an impact upon the activation or otherwise of popular mobilisation and consent.

Russia, New York 19 June 2013, available at: http://www.synod.com/synod/eng2013/20130619_enmhappeal1025.html, accessed 19 September 2016.

In the light of this understanding, a polity's soft power standing should be assessed not simply in terms of the resources it invests in projecting its worldview in the world—though this is likely to be relevant—but also with reference to how successful those communications are in co-opting a given target audience into its worldview (Hudson 2014). This stance acknowledges that communications are co-constructed and circuitous, with audience members negotiating incoming information with reference to a wide range of objective and subjective factors in order to determine how to apply the new knowledge to their experience of the world around them. Thus, receivers may understand or 'decode' communications very differently from how the sender-producer intends, thereby leading to degrees of subverted meaning, distortion or misunderstanding (Hall 1980; Hallahan *et al.* 2007; Livingstone & Das 2013). Among the plethora of influences over this decoding process, it is necessary to draw attention to the role of competing meaning-making entrepreneurs, who encourage audiences to make sense of their realities (including a given polity's soft power overtures themselves) through alternative narratives. The framing effect of such alternative perspectives is highly significant in political contestation, as will be shown in the empirical discussion of the standing of the UOC(MP) in post-Maidan Ukraine.

On this basis, this article will explore the extent to which the UOC(MP) may be considered a conduit of Russian cultural narratives in Ukraine.⁶ The analysis shows that there are certainly some grounds for positively appraising the UOC(MP) as a potential source of cultural influence given that it has traditionally been the largest and best-resourced church in Ukraine and has enjoyed relatively close ties to the Ukrainian establishment, with the exception of the Yushchenko presidency. Nevertheless, one must exercise caution in uncritically assuming, as has often happened in commentaries on this theme, that the UOC(MP) operates as a 'tool' of Russian cultural influence. Indeed, the notion of a 'tool' conveys the idea that the UOC(MP) is under the direct influence of Moscow, which is incongruent with the broad powers power of autonomy in crucial aspects of church governance enjoyed by the UOC(MP). Furthermore, this post-Soviet institutional arrangement has facilitated the emergence of a patriotic faction within the Ukrainian church that acts to resist any attempt at control from Moscow. The more nationally 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 strongly supportive of the Moscow tradition, and has been active in promoting a pro-Moscow worldview.

⁶As such, this study does not consider attempts at lobbying by ROC or UOC(MP) clerics to directly influence individual policy makers. In such cases, the church would be one lobbying group among others contending for influence.

In assessing the contemporary standing of the UOC(MP) in Ukrainian society, it is also necessary to account for the impact of the Euromaidan, both the events themselves and the highly politicised discursive climate they engendered. Unsurprisingly, 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 public scrutiny in this context. The collective experience of the Euromaidan, the loss of Crimea and the conflict in the Donbas have amplified patriotic and nationalistic voices decrying the Moscow Patriarchate as an illegitimate imperial outpost whose lingering presence as a societal opinion-former and spiritual hub is inappropriate to an independent Ukraine. Where the UOC(MP) has sought to frame its stance as one of political neutrality grounded in Christian values, the narratives of competing meaning-making entrepreneurs in the media, civil society and politics have foregrounded suggestions of UOC(MP) partiality towards the Russian perspective, with a view to encouraging audiences not to take the UOC(MP) position at face value. In this context, demands for an autocephalous Ukrainian church have reportedly grown; an idea seen as dissonant with the concord (*soglasie*) between fraternal peoples supposedly integral to the notion of the Russian World, and strongly opposed by supporters of the Moscow tradition, including the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' himself. Thus, paradoxically, in the current climate, if the UOC(MP) shows itself to be sympathetic to the Russian outlook in Ukrainian eyes, far from fostering 'attraction', it risks engendering further resentment and rejection as a threat to Ukrainian national integrity and thereby strengthening voices who would agitate against it.

The religious landscape of Ukraine

As Ukraine emerged from Soviet atheism, an intense competition for souls broke out in the country as missionary activity flourished in the tolerant, multi-confessional climate. By 1997 a great number of religious denominations were active and over 17,000 communities had been established, with Islam, Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Protestant, evangelical groups and others all contributing to Ukraine's religious diversity.⁷ The largest religious denomination was traditionally the UOC(MP), which in 1990 was accorded the status of autonomous church with wide-ranging powers, in full communion with the Russian Orthodox Church. At its peak in January 2014 it had 12,673 parishes⁸.

⁷'Relihiyni orhanizatsiï v Ukraïny (stanom na 1 sichnia 1997 r.)', *RISU*, January 1997, available at: <http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/resourses/statistics/ukr1997>, accessed 18 September 2016.

⁸'Relihiyni orhanizatsiï v Ukraïny (stanom na 1 sichnia 2004 r.)', *RISU*, January 2004, available at: <https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/resourses/statistics/ukr2014/55893/>, accessed 20 September 2018.

Initially, the main rival to the UOC(MP) was the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), which was established in the sixteenth century and retains Orthodox rites while under the authority of the Pope in Rome. The majority of its 3,763 churches are located in the Galicia region of western Ukraine, which did not join the USSR until 1939 and has always associated itself more with Central Europe than Russia.⁹ A further challenge arose in 1992, when Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Rus-Ukraine Filaret (Denysenko), then a hierarch of the UOC(MP), took the lead in issuing a self-declaration of independence from the Moscow Patriarchate to form the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC(KP)), taking a minority of parishes and priests with him.¹⁰ This step was not accepted by the majority of Ukrainian bishops, and Filaret was subsequently defrocked and anathematised by the Moscow Patriarchate (Bremer 2017, 12-3). Although the Kyiv Patriarchate to date remains outside the global Orthodox communion, the number of parishes has grown since its secession; in 2014 they numbered 4,651, a threefold increase on 1997.¹¹ This increase was particularly marked during the presidency of pro-European Viktor Yushchenko (2005–2010). The Kyiv Patriarchate is associated with the promotion of a patriotic, even nationalistic, narrative of Ukrainian history and statehood, and a pro-European geopolitical outlook; thus the religious divisions in Ukraine can to some degree be interpreted through the lens of competitive tensions concerning Ukraine's proper geostrategic orientation. The heterodoxy of Ukrainian Orthodoxy is supplemented by the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC),¹² which, despite its name, also remains outside the global Orthodox communion, enjoying the loyalty of 1.8% of Ukrainians.¹³

By comparison with much of the contemporary secular West, the opinion-forming potential of organised religion in society is quite significant as Ukraine is a relatively religious country: in 2014 over three quarters of

⁹2014 data given for comparison.

¹⁰ 'Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate', *RISU*, 16 November 2011, available at https://www.risu.org.ua/en/index/reference/major_religions/~UOC-KP/45457/ accessed 25 September 2018.

¹¹'Relihiyni orhanizatsii v Ukraïny (stanom na 1 sichnia 2014 r.)', *RISU*, January 2014, available at: <https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/resourses/statistics/ukr2014/55893/>, accessed 23 September 2018.

¹² The UAOC was declared independent of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1921 but was disbanded in the 1930s as Soviet atheism took hold. It functioned largely in exile during the Soviet period, with the exception of a relaxation of restrictions on religion during World War II, and was re-established in Ukraine in 1990. As with the UOC(KP), the UAOC has *de facto* autocephalous ("self-headed") status; its head cleric does not report to any higher-ranking bishop, but is not officially recognised as such by all canonical Eastern Orthodox churches. Discussions have taken place about the unification of the UAOC and the UOC(KP), but as yet these have come to nothing.

¹³ 'Relihiya, tserkva, suspil'stvo i derzhava: dva roki pislya Maidanu', report by Razumkov Center, Kyiv, 2016, available at: http://old.razumkov.org.ua/upload/Religiya_200516_A4.compressed.pdf accessed 24 September 2018.

the population considered themselves believers, and 70% of this number professed Orthodoxy.¹⁴ As the main established denomination to emerge after independence, the UOC(MP) was well-placed to flourish. With 38.7% of all parishes in 1997, the UOC(MP) had more than four times as many as the rival Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate. However, the UOC(KP) has more than trebled the number of its communities since 1997. In 2006, a survey by the Razumkov Centre found that, when asked about their religion, 39.8% of respondents said they considered themselves as belonging to the Kyiv Patriarchate while 29.4% indicated the UOC(MP), suggesting that even then the dominance of the latter was not as clear-cut as suggested by official church figures on the numbers of parishes.¹⁵

The UOC(MP) nevertheless had a significant presence in the mass media, where religious figures were able to gain a relatively high profile, appearing on main secular channels at peak times and penning frequent columns in leading print media. It continues to be the best resourced religious denomination in Ukraine.¹⁶ Furthermore, after becoming head of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2009, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' placed a special emphasis on cultivating relations with the Ukrainian population. Strongly opposed to autocephaly for the Ukrainian church, he involved himself directly in Ukrainian life, paying frequent pastoral and official visits, honouring figures within the Yanukovych regime with church awards and generally raising the profile of the UOC(MP) in Ukrainian society (Hudson 2014; 2015). The UOC(MP) was thus well placed to shape Ukrainian society, although it is important to consider the extent to which the UOC(MP) acted as a specifically pro-Russian influence in Ukraine.

Kyiv and Moscow factions of the UOC(MP)

The previous section demonstrated the UOC(MP)'s potential for ideational influence in Ukraine. This, however, should not be straightforwardly equated with direct Russian leverage over the country. Indeed, the relationship between the Danilov Monastery and the UOC(MP) is not one of formal, direct coordination on the part of Moscow. After the fall of the Soviet Union, when the Georgian and Armenian Orthodox churches gained full autonomy

¹⁴ 'Kil'kist' viruiuchykh Kyïvs'koho patriarkhatu v Ukraïni perevyshchyla kil'kist' Moskovs'koho', *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, 15 May 2014, available at: http://dt.ua/UKRAINE/kilkist-viruyuchih-kiyivskogo-patriarkhatu-v-ukrayini-perevischila-kilkist-moskovskogo-143319_.html, accessed 7 September 2016.

¹⁵ 'Viruyuchim yakoi tserkvi, konfesii Vi sebe vvazhaete?', *Razumkov Tsentr*, 20 April–2 May 2006, available at: http://razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=300, accessed 6 November 2016.

¹⁶ As of January 2014, it could count 214 affiliated monasteries, 10,456 clerics, 20 educational establishments, 4,232 Sunday schools and 109 periodicals.

from the Moscow Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was able to negotiate the broadest powers of autonomy of any of the churches affiliated to the Moscow Patriarchate. According to the *tomos* (church decree) of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' of 25–27 October 1990 and the church's own statute, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has control over its own administrative and financial affairs.¹⁷ Crucially, Kyiv is able to appoint diocesan and vicar bishops [*vikarni arkhiierei*] without the approval of Moscow, and the Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Ukraine is appointed by Ukrainian bishops rather than by the Russian patriarchate, as is the case for churches under the Moscow Patriarchate with less ecclesiastical autonomy, and is merely blessed by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'.¹⁸ Ukraine is also home to a number of seminaries for the training of clergy, which gives the UOC(MP) greater independence as regards the socialisation of future clerics; 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 and all Ukraine is a permanent member of the Holy Synod, the supreme governing body of the Russian Orthodox Church, and second only to the Russian Patriarch himself. The Kyiv leadership is thus in a strong position to resist any pressure from Moscow, further underpinning the independence of the Ukrainian church.

These arrangements have given significant freedom to the UOC(MP) and facilitated the emergence of a division in the episcopate between those clerics supporting a “pro-Moscow” faction and advocating close ties with the Russian church, and those adherents of the “pro-Kyiv” faction who favour developing the Ukrainian identity of the church, including support for autocephaly.¹⁹ There is a generational cleavage at work here, with older clerics leaning towards Moscow, and younger ones possessing a stronger Ukrainian vision. Metropolitan Volodymyr (1992–2014) tried to stake out a balanced position on this debate during his tenure, as has his successor Onufriy (2014–) (Olszański 2014).

These divergent trends have been reinforced by the fact that the UOC(MP) is well established throughout Ukraine, with the exception of the three Galician regions of L'viv, Ternopil' and Ivano-Frankivs'k, which are dominated by the UGCC. Indeed, as Table 1 indicates, the parishes of the UOC(MP) have been predominantly located in the more nationally oriented and rural regions of western and central Ukraine, rather than the southern

¹⁷ ‘Statut UPTs’, *Ukrains'ka pravoslavna tserkva*, available at: <http://orthodox.org.ua/page/statut-upts>, accessed 1 November 2016.

¹⁸ ‘Statut UPTs’, *Ukrains'ka pravoslavna tserkva*, available at: <http://orthodox.org.ua/page/statut-upts>, accessed 1 November 2016.

¹⁹ Rev. Dr. Nicholas Denysenko, ‘The appeal of the Ukrainian parliament and the Ecumenical Patriarchate’, *Public Orthodoxy*, 20 June 2016, available at <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/06/20/the-appeal-of-the-ukrainian-parliament-and-the-ecumenical-patriarchate/> accessed 27 September 2018.

and, especially, eastern regions which were more heavily influenced by Soviet culture and atheism. Thus, reflecting a broad variety of experience, the outlook of the UOC(MP) clergy may be said to be as diverse as the population of Ukraine as a whole.²⁰

Table 1

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				
10554		2316		4851		1860		1527
%		21.9%		46.0%		17.6%		14.5%

Source:

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

Clerics associated with the Moscow faction of the UOC(MP) have tended to be more in harmony with the Russian outlook and the narrative of the Russian World. 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.

²⁰ Author's interview with Andrei A. Zolotov, a Russian journalist with interest in religious affairs, Moscow, 6th July 2011.

1951), Metropolitan Antonii of Boryspil and Brovary (b. 1967) (Olszański 2014; Mitrokhin 2015), Metropolitan Lazar of Simferopol and Crimea (b. 1939) (Richters 2012, p. 16) and Metropolitan Pavlo of Vyshgorod and Chernobyl, the abbot of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra (Mitrokhin 2015). Metropolitan Agafangel, for instance, has made statements essentially reproducing the Kremlin perspective on the position of the Russian language in Ukraine:

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.²¹

Given ample coverage in the opposition media, such interventions on topics beyond the realm of spirituality have strengthened suspicions about the political intentions of the Moscow Patriarchate among the citizens of Ukraine and thereby served to undermine the standing of the institution, even prior to the Euromaidan. This trend is apparent not only in those regions more generally critical of Russia but also among young people in the purportedly more pro-Russian eastern regions (Hudson 2014, 2015).

Furthermore, clerics more closely aligned with Moscow tend to characterise the breakaway Kyiv Patriarchate as a schismatic outgrowth grounded in political motivations, and echo the Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus' in awaiting the 'inevitable' return of the entire Ukrainian flock to the fold of the only canonical Orthodox church in the country. It is said that some within this group do not even acknowledge the autonomous status of the UOC(MP) and 'believe it to belong exclusively to the Russian Church' (Mitrokhin 2015, p. 14).

²¹Metropolitan Agafangel of Odesa and Izmail Calls to Protect Russian Language in Ukraine', *RISU*, 18 October 2011, available at: http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/44919/, accessed 24 April 2016.

Meanwhile, the Kyiv faction is lead by Metropolitan Sofronii of Cherkasy (b. 1940) and Metropolitan Olexandr of Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky and Vyshneve (b. 1977), who served as secretary and ‘right hand’ to the late Metropolitan Volodymyr. Some believe that more clergy and laity associate themselves with the patriotic orientation than with the pro-Moscow faction (Yelenskyi 2016), although the latter seems stronger in terms of church leadership. The Kyiv wing gained influence under Metropolitan Volodymyr as the UOC(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 UOC(MP) website and in church services in some areas.²² Furthermore, pro-Kyiv clerics of the UOC(MP) have also engaged with issues of significance to patriotic Ukrainians that may be seen to build greater national legitimacy for their church. For instance, in March 2013, academic and UOC(MP) policy advisor Professor Archimandrite Viktor Bed’ performed a memorial liturgy for the repose of the soul of Ivan Mazepa on the anniversary of the medieval Ukrainian *hetman*’s 374th birthday. Considered a great defender of Ukrainian statehood, Mazepa was anathematised by the Russian Orthodox Church for deserting the Russian imperial army at the 1709 Battle of Poltava and remains a controversial figure in Moscow’s eyes.²³ Furthermore, the UOC(MP) conducts an annual commemorative event in the National Museum Memorial to Victims of Holodomors in Ukraine.²⁴ The commemoration of this tragic period of Ukrainian history can be read as a show of support for narratives of Ukrainian nationhood, by which the UOC(MP) distinguishes its position from that of Russia.²⁵ Furthermore, in July 2016, Metropolitan Oleksandr released an article directly criticising the Russian World narrative and the failure of the UOC(MP) to issue a ‘clear and unequivocal

²²‘UOC-MP Prepared to Switch to Services in Ukrainian’, *RISU*, 7 February 2013, available at: http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/51223/, accessed 24 April 2016.

²³‘Reps of UOC-MP Deny Validity of Anathema Declared on Ivan Mazepa’, *RISU*, 22 March 2013, available at: http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/51699/, accessed 24 April 2016.

²⁴‘UOC-Moscow Patriarchate remembers victims of Holodomor’, *RISU*, 22 November 2012, available at: http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/culture/religious_ceremonies/50314, accessed 24 April 2016.

²⁵ The Russian Orthodox Church also commemorates the famine but emphasises the human tragedy that affected not only Ukrainians but also peasants in several Soviet countries including Russia, thereby not acknowledging the genocidal intent inherent to Ukrainian claims. By contrast, Metropolitan Volodymyr is on record as describing it in terms of a ‘genocide’, although Metropolitan Oleksandr claims he ‘misspoke’ on this point and emphasised that the issue should not be politicised. ‘Moscow patriarchate church calls Holodomor “genocide”’, *Kyiv Post*, 14 November 2008, available at: <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/moscow-patriarchate-church-calls-holodomor-genocid-30908.html>, accessed 15 August 2016; ‘Pro-Moscow Orthodox church in Ukraine calls famine of 1933 genocide’, *Zerkalo nedeli*, 21 November 2008, p. 1.

condemnation of modern imperialist policy of Russian military aggression’ (Metropolitan Oleksandr Drabynko 2016a).

Thus, although Metropolitan Volodymyr maintained a neutral position in public, under his leadership the orientation of the UOC(MP) gradually shifted in favour of the Kyiv faction. Indeed, Volodymyr is reported to have been in favour of EU accession and of the eventual autocephaly of the UOC(MP) as the leading church of Ukraine (Metropolitan Oleksandr Drabynko 2016b). According to Archbishop Yevstratii, the secretary of the Synod of the rival UOC(KP), he began to ‘actively resist Moscow’s schemes’.²⁶ 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 UOC(MP) back towards Moscow. During a debate in 2011–2012 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.²⁷ 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. Following the death of Metropolitan Volodymyr on 5 July 2014, Metropolitan Onufriy, who had held the position of the Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine as *locum tenens* since February of that year when his predecessor was certified as medically no longer able to carry out his duties, was elected as primate. Though perhaps lacking the personal authority that was the bedrock of Volodymyr’s strength, Metropolitan Onufriy is seen as relatively bipartisan, belonging neither to the Kyiv nor the Moscow faction of the UOC(MP) (Mitrokhin 2015; Olszański 2014).

This section has 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 as 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

²⁶‘Rep of Kyivan Patriarchate: Decision of Synod of UOC is Step towards Liquidation of its Independence’, *RISU*, 23 February 2012, available at: http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/46983/, accessed 24th April 2016.

²⁷‘Committee of Ukrainian Orthodox Church Bring [sic] its Statutes in Line with Statutes of Russian Church’, *RISU*, 21 March 2012, available at: http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/47398/, accessed 24 April 2016; Paul A. Goble, ‘Moscow Patriarchate hasn’t “freed” Ukrainian Orthodox Church but rather imposed new limits’, *Euromaidan Press*, 4 December 2017, available at www.euromaidanpress.com/2017/12/04/moscow-patriarchate-hasnt-freed-ukrainian-orthodox-church-but-rather-imposed-new-limits-euromaidan-press/ accessed 24 September 2018.

in reproducing and thereby propagating 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, p. 99). There is a lack of evidence to support the claim they are ‘strictly controlled’ (Sahan 2013) by Moscow, and it is quite plausible that pro-Russian clerics act of their own volition and are genuinely convinced of the rightfulness of maintaining the tradition and the value of canonicity. This supposition may be supported by the fact that many clerics associated with the Kyiv faction are younger and came of age in independent Ukraine, whereas older clerics were formed in the tradition of the Exarchate of Ukraine as an integral part of the Russian Orthodox Church. Reports have appeared in the media alleging that clerics of the UOC(MP) are subject to lobbying by church benefactors in the form of Moscow-oriented oligarchs and politicians, but again it is difficult to independently assess the veracity of these claims or their alleged impact (Samokhvalova 2015; Metropolitan Oleksandr Drabynko 2016a). 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.

Having critically examined the notion of the UOC(MP) as a tool of leverage, the following section will examine its role in the Euromaidan protests and the impact this has had on the church’s social standing.

The UOC(MP) before, during and after the Euromaidan

The tumultuous events of the Euromaidan 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 and the subsequent Russian annexation of Crimea and involvement in the conflict in the Donbas affected 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 may prove to have been a turning point for the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. The conflict with Russia united many Ukrainians in a spirit of defiance, while also forcing individuals and organisations—including the church—to be clear about which of the opposing sides they stood for. This evaporation of the middle ground has been awkward for the UOC(MP), which could be seen as reflecting the spiritual aspect of a hybrid Russo-Ukrainian identity: not necessarily identifying with or seeking integration with the Russian Federation, but expressing a Russophone or ‘Eastern’ Ukrainian identity. Such understandings of what it means to be Ukrainian are distinct from the more folkish narratives about Ukrainian identity and nationhood that follow in the Central European tradition of nation

building and emanate from the nationalist heartland in Galicia (Hudson 2014). Indeed, such identities have increasingly come into question following the Euromaidan. As a result of the practical and moral support provided by religious figures, and the more unified national spirit that emerged from the protests, the Euromaidan acquired a spiritual dimension (Marynovych 2015). The UOC(MP) came under increasing pressure, exemplified by the renewed calls for a united autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox church as the only dignified embodiment of national independence.²⁸

The largest rally in Ukraine since the 2004 Orange Revolution took place on 18 November 2013, urging President Yanukovich to sign the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement that would bring Ukraine closer to the European Union. Protests became established on Kyiv's Independence Square (*Maidan Nezalezhnosti*) on the night of 21–22 November, following public disclosure that the Council of Ministers, at the instigation of the president, Viktor Yanukovich, had suspended preparations for the signing of the agreement.²⁹

At the outbreak of the protests, the UOC(MP) found itself in an awkward position owing to its active and prominent cooperation with the Yanukovich administration (2010–2014). Furthermore, despite that fact that Metropolitan Volodymyr is said to have privately favoured EU integration (Metropolitan Oleksandr Drabynko 2016b) much of the UOC(MP) clergy, particularly the pro-Moscow wing, had been openly hostile towards liberal values and struggled to overcome its discomfort with a protest movement that had begun as a rallying of young patriotic liberals. Accordingly, some leading clerics of the Moscow wing were openly critical of the protests, including Metropolitan Agafangel and Metropolitan Hilarion (Olszański 2014). Furthermore, in addition to the UOC(MP)'s delayed rallying to the cause, the impression of UOC(MP) resistance to Euromaidan was strengthened by the fact that pro-Russian organisations associated with political Orthodoxy actually protested against the Euromaidan (Bogomolov & Lytvynenko 2012). Despite their apparent Muscophilia, such organisations of political Orthodoxy generally do not follow the official UOC(MP) line and represent different

²⁸ Kateryna Kruk, 'The last missing piece to make Ukraine truly independent' *Atlantic Council*, 15 August 2018, available at www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-last-missing-piece-to-make-ukraine-truly-independent accessed 27 September 2018; David Stern, 'Ukraine wants to cut ties with the Russian Orthodox Church – here's why', *Euronews*, 14 May 2018, available at <https://www.euronews.com/2018/05/14/a-church-of-one-s-own-ukraine-seeks-independence-from-russian-orthodox-church> accessed 26 September 2018; 'Autocephaly about more than religion' *RISU*, 21 September 2018, available at <https://risu.org.ua/en/index/monitoring/72726> accessed 27 September 2018.

²⁹ 'EuroMaidan rallies in Ukraine—Nov. 21–23 coverage', *Kyiv Post*, 25 November 2013, available at: <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/euromaidan/euromaidan-rallies-in-ukraine-nov-21-23-coverage-332423.html>, accessed 15 June 2017.

shades of religious and political extremism.³⁰ These organisations, which included the Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Brotherhood, the Orthodox Choice organisation and the People's Assembly (*Narodnyy Sobor*) movement, held a procession in Kyiv on 6 December, marching under such slogans as '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, and Western Euro-sodomitic [*sic*] expansion which is again rising against our people'.³¹ During his tenure, Metropolitan Volodymyr tried to distance the church from political Orthodoxy; however, the fact that these groupings tend to reproduce some variant of the Russian World narrative under a religious banner may have muddied the waters and contributed to cementing the notion of UOC(MP) opposition to the Euromaidan in the popular imagination.

At the outset of the protests, other churches in Ukraine had likewise been hesitant about becoming involved, although this changed quickly and religious organisations became very close to the heart of the Euromaidan. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) and the UOC(KP) both engaged energetically almost from the outset, playing an important role in supporting the protestors. Evangelical groups also played a key role, even in the eastern Donetsk region, where a prayer marathon was held over many months. As the significance of the protests became clear, the UC(MP), under the leadership of Metropolitan Volodymyr, followed the other churches in supporting the Euromaidan, with the Primate issuing the following statement on 30 November 2013:

*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.*³²

³⁰ Mitrofanova (2005) notes the following currents of political Orthodoxy: political fundamentalism, contemporary pan-Slavism, neo-Eurasianism, Orthodox Communism and Russian nationalist quasi-Orthodoxy. As she 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.

³¹ 'Orthodox Christians to Hold Sacred Procession in Kyiv', *Interfax: Russia & CIS General Newswire*, 2 December 2013.

³² 'Prayer for Eliminating Discord to be Chanted in all Eastern Orthodox Churches in Ukraine', *TASS*, 30 November 2013, available at: <http://tass.ru/en/world/709667>, accessed 1 November 2016.

Religion became more directly involved following the events on the night of 30 November. Although the protests seemed to be subsiding, 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' (Rettman 2014) to disperse the approximately one thousand protesters remaining on the square. Around 500 fleeing protesters took refuge from the police in the iconic gold-domed St Michael's Monastery, which is under the UOC(KP). The monks counselled the protesters not to fight evil with evil and enabled them to regroup. Church involvement increased henceforth: 'tent churches' were established on the Euromaidan, prayer vigils were held, and choirs sang in the streets. A medical station was set up in the grounds of St Michael's Monastery to treat those injured during the demonstrations.³³ As the protests continued through the freezing days of December and 'self-defence units' of ex-military and police came to Kyiv to support the protesters,³⁴ they acquired a further religious aura when the bells of St Michael's Monastery rang out on the night of 11 December, as in former times, to warn of trouble, when the riot police again tried to clear the Euromaidan. 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-Euromaidan activists who were killed during the protests are known as the 'Heavenly Hundred' (*nebesna sotnya*). As this demonstrates, church involvement became quite ecumenical, with priests from all the three main Orthodox churches participating alongside Catholics, evangelical Christians and others.

The night of 30 November may thus be seen as the moment of the radicalisation of the protest, as many more Ukrainians, outraged by the violent treatment of citizens that was widely covered on opposition television channels, joined the demonstrations, swelling numbers to an estimated 400,000–800,000 (Whitmore 2013). Over time, the protests broadened from the initial anger at Yanukovych's apparent *volte-face* on signing the EU agreement to an expression of more general dissatisfaction with the corruption and ineffectiveness of the Yanukovych administration and its lack of respect for the general public.

Coverage of the UOC(MP) role in the Euromaidan protests has tended to focus on criticising its lack of participation or even resistance to the movement. Its spokespeople, however, maintain that its priests did attend,

³³ 'St Michael's Cathedral, refuge and field hospital for Kyiv protestors', *Euronews*, 19 February 2014, available at <https://www.euronews.com/2014/02/19/ukraine-st-michael-s-cathedral-refuge-and-field-hospital-for-kyiv-protestors> accessed 20 June 2016.

³⁴ 'Self-defense units created in Lviv region', *Kyiv Post*, 10 December 2013, available at <https://kyivpost.com/article/content/euromaidan/self-defence-units-created-in-lviv-region-333387.html>, accessed 24 September 2018; 'Who are Ukraine's "Ultras"?', *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 27 January 2014, available at <https://www.refr.org/a/ukraine-protests-sports-fans-euromaidan/25244357.html> accessed 24 September 2018.

albeit on a more individual basis and being less visible as they were not among the activists and organisers (Olszański 2014). The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations, then chaired by Metropolitan Volodymyr, issued a joint statement on 15 December conveying four main points: that the government needed to listen to the people; violence was unacceptable; Ukraine was an indivisible state; and dialogue was the only legitimate path.³⁵

Despite shared spiritual values and much common doctrine between Ukraine's main churches, the political outlook was clearly fractured. When the UOC(MP) came out in support of the protesters it did so in a way that tried to maintain neutrality, 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.*³⁶

Yet in the intensely patriotic atmosphere, which became even more highly charged as a result of the occupation of government administrative buildings in the eastern regions by anti-Kyiv groups in March 2014 and the annexation of Crimea on 18 March 2014, such calls for peace were perceived by the general public as 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 perceived Moscow Patriarchate tradition of giving implicit support to the incumbent regime (Mitrofanova 2005, p. 166). By contrast, while priests from other denominations prayed for peace and love, they also lent specific support to the popular insurrectionary movement. For instance, Father Yuriy of the UOC(KP) stated: 'We are supporting these people in their fight for liberty and freedom, which God granted to each man' (Danilova 2013). Likewise, Father Korneliy, a UGCC priest, called on protesters to 'Pray for the enemies, forgive them but you have to fight for your destiny and independence'.³⁷ Whereas the UOC(MP) refrained from comment on political issues, Father Lyubomyr Sapranyuk, a Greek Catholic priest from

³⁵ 'AUCCRO condemns violence committed against peaceful protestors and against law enforcers', *RISU*, 10 December 2013, available at https://www.risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/state/national_religious_question/54569/ accessed 24 September 2018.

³⁶ 'Prayer for Eliminating Discord to be Chanted in all Eastern Orthodox Churches in Ukraine', *TASS*, 30 November 2013, available at: <http://tass.ru/en/world/709667>, accessed 1 November 2016.

³⁷ 'Rallies in support of Kiev protestors stages across Ukraine', *BBC Monitoring Ukraine & Baltics*, 13 December 2013. Source: Ukrayina TV, Kiev, in Russian 1700 GMT, 11 December 2013.

L'viv in western Ukraine, for example, reflected public opinion in his explicit condemnation of Yanukovych when he stated on 7 February 2014 'I am here to support these people so that there is a change at the top ... The current authorities are evil, anti-nation. They only want to enrich themselves' (Viatteau 2014). Accurately reading the public mood, the churches that engaged with the Euromaidan protests sought to show themselves as able and willing to work for and with the people. The UOC(KP) 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. (Herszenhorn & Lyachynska 2013)

The UGCC also spoke out in favour of integration with European standards of law and justice, albeit while maintaining Ukraine's cultural distinctiveness.³⁸ By contrast, the head of the Moscow Patriarchate, Patriarch Kirill, struck a discordant note in the prevailing patriotic atmosphere of Kyiv 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'.³⁹ The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow 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.*⁴⁰

³⁸ John P. Burgess, 'Borderland churches: faith and identity in Ukraine', *The Christian Century*, 23 March 2016, available at <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2016-03/borderland-churches> accessed 25 September 2018.

³⁹ Patriarch Kirill Calls for Preserving Unity of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus', *TASS*, 3 January 2014, available at: <http://tass.com/russia/713726>, accessed 16 August 2016.

⁴⁰ Russian Church Urging People of Ukraine to Avert "Spiritual Blinding", *TASS*, 26 December 2013, available at: <http://tass.com/non-political/713066>, accessed 16 August 2016.

After the flight of Yanukovych from Ukraine in late February 2014, the UOC(MP) offered its support to the interim government.⁴¹ 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 surrounding the Euromaidan events, the leadership was not able to maintain meaningful discipline over the statements and actions of many of its clergy. A number of priests, particularly in the Donbas, spoke publicly in support of the anti-Kyiv rebels (Hovorun 2014) and the now dissolved *Berkut* special police units.⁴² For instance, some lower level clerics lead special sermons for them and invoked the Russian terminology of threats posed by 'Banderovtsy-Uniates'; a term of abuse referring to the allegedly extremist outlook of the latter day supporters of Stepan Bandera, and a derogatory reference to members of the UGCC, and 'US aggression'.⁴³ 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 the pro-Russian militants on the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) military unit in Makiyivka.⁴⁴ Some clerics of the (UOC)MP were suspected of actively collaborating with the annexation of Crimea. For instance, the Peacemaker ['Mirotvorets'] website reported the case of Archimandrite Kalinik, who is alleged to have lead an 'anti-Ukrainian campaign' and maintained an arms depot for the 'self-defence of Crimea' in his local church in the village of Zatyshne on the strategic Kerch peninsula.⁴⁵ Some UOC(MP) priests refused to preside over the funerals of fallen Ukrainian soldiers who fought in what the government labels 'anti-terrorist operations' (ATO).⁴⁶ A significant moment for those who criticised the UOC(MP) for lack of patriotism was when Metropolitan Onufriy and other UOC(MP) clerics did not rise with the other gathered delegates at the 8 May 2015 session of the *Vekhovna Rada*,

⁴¹ Cyril Hovorun, 'The church in the bloodlands. Ukrainian churches must encourage and engage civil society', *First Things*, October 2014, available at <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/10/the-church-in-the-bloodlands> accessed 25 September 2018.

⁴² 'UOC-MP Priest Blessed Berkut to Fight to the Death against Euromaidan Protesters', *RISU*, 14 February 2014, available at: http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/state/national_religious_question/55335/, accessed 24 April 2016.

⁴³ Stepan Bandera (1909–1959) was a Ukrainian nationalist leader who is controversial for his collaboration with the Nazis in his pursuit of independence for Ukraine.

⁴⁴ 'UOC(MP) Metropolitan Blesses a Priest to Provide Spiritual Guidance for DPR Fighters', *RISU*, 6 October 2015, available at: http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/religion_and_policy/61309, accessed 2 May 2016.

⁴⁵ 'Separatist Priest to be Ordained as Bishop at Lyiv-Perchersk Lavra', *RISU*, 1 February 2016, available at: http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/religion_and_policy/62356/ accessed 20 April 2016.

⁴⁶ 'They perform their function: expert explains why UOC(MP) refuses to serve burial services to ATO soldiers', *RISU*, 4 July 2016, available at https://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/religion_and_policy/63873 accessed 25 September 2018.

the Ukrainian parliament, when President Petro 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 against Russian incursions in eastern Ukraine.⁴⁷ Critics of the UOC(MP) seized upon this as further evidence of dubious loyalties and criticised the church for not upholding the patriotic Ukraine front.⁴⁸ Such criticism did not take into account UOC(MP) statements that its response reflected a politically neutral position and its advocacy of the need to stop the war and mourn all victims of what it considers to be a fratricidal conflict, regardless of which side they supported.⁴⁹

The authority of the UOC(MP) in society meant that such measures of support may, in the eyes of some sections of the Ukrainian population, have had 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. While it is difficult to assert with accuracy the degree of Moscow involvement in directing the UOC(MP)'s response—some would suggest direct instrumentalisation while others see it as a spontaneous reflection of a personal worldview on the part of the clergy — the ambivalent role of the UOC(MP) certainly plays to Russia's interests and helps to support the pro-Russian constituency in Ukraine. Either way, in this respect one might see the UOC(MP) as a conduit of Russian soft power in so far as certain members of the UOC(MP) have reproduced elements of the Kremlin's narrative. Yet such a black-and-white interpretation does not do justice to the complexity of the overall situation, particularly in the light of the ongoing development of the UOC(MP) as an indigenous church, as detailed above.

Indeed, not all UOC(MP) clerics played an actively pro-Russian role during and in the aftermath of the Euromaidan. Across the country many maintained a neutral position, calling for peace and reconciliation. The

⁴⁷ 'Bishops of the UOC(MP) remained seated when President Poroshenko was reading names of Heroes of Ukraine', *RISU*, 8 May 2015, available at: http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/religion_and_policy/59943/ accessed 24 April 2016.

⁴⁸ Serhiy Hrabovsky, 'Who is served by the Stalinist patriarchate in Kyiv?' *Euromaidan Press*, 16 May 2015, available at <http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/05/16/who-is-served-by-the-stalinist-patriarchate-in-kyiv/> accessed 25 September 2018.

⁴⁹ 'Metropolitan Onuphry: The Blame for the War That is Going On Is Attributable Not to God, but to Man', *RISU*, 20 July 2015, available at: <http://www.pravmir.com/interview-with-metropolitan-onuphry-about-the-war-in-donbas/>, accessed 13 June 2017; 'Glava UPTs MP obyasnil svoi postupok v Rade trebovaniem mira', *Vesti*, 9 May 2017, available at: <http://vesti-ukr.com/donbass/99078-glava-upc-mp-objasnil-svoj-demarsh-v-rade-trebovaniem-mira-v-donbasse>, accessed 13 June 2017; 'Onufriy: "Moi postupok v Rade - pryziv k prekrasheniyu voyny"', *Vesti*, 30 May 2015, available at: <http://vesti-ukr.com/donbass/101757-onufrij-moj-postupok-v-rade-prizyv-k-prekraweniju-voyny>, accessed 13 June 2017.

website of the UOC(MP) highlights how many clergy focussed on charitable work, in particular supporting people fleeing the armed conflict in the Donbas, some of whom have taken refuge at the Svyatygorsk Lavra.⁵⁰ During the clashes between protestors and Interior Ministry troops and other law enforcement agencies in early 2014, the presence and influence through the medium of prayer on the part of UOC(MP) priests helped reduce tensions and prevent bloodshed on a number of occasions (Olszański 2014), as on Hrushevkiy Street in January 2014.⁵¹ 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.⁵² Accordingly, the UOC(MP) has not accepted the transfer of churches of other denominations seized by rebels in the Donbas, and Moscow Patriarchate parishes in Crimea remain under the Ukrainian church.⁵³ Nowadays, 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’.⁵⁴ 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 in a statement by Metropolitan Hilarion, the church ‘unites people of various political views and refuses to divide the faithful into good and bad, right and wrong’.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ ‘Report by Metropolitan Onufriy of Kiev [sic] and All Ukraine to the Russian Orthodox Church Bishops’ Council (November 29 – December 2, 2017)’, *The Russian Orthodox Church Department for External Church Relations*, 30 November 2017, available at <https://mospat.ru/en/2017/11/30/news153525/> accessed 25 September 2018; ‘Svyatogorskaya Lavra v gody voennogo protivostoyaniya na Vostoke Ukrainy’ Svyato-Uspenskaya Svatogorskaya Lavra, available at www.sylavra.church.ua/istoriya/materialy-stati-publikacii/svyatogorskaya-lavra-v-gody-voennogo-protivostoyaniya-na-vostoke-ukrainy/ accessed 25 September 2018.

⁵¹ ‘Monks from the Kiev-Caves Lavra Stand Between Police and Demonstrators in Kiev’, *Orthodox Christianity*, 22 January 2014, available at: <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/67776.htm>, accessed 31 October 2016.

⁵² ‘Poslannia Predstoiatelia UPTs shchodo vidznachennia 1000-littia muchenyts’koï konchyny sviatykh kniaziv Borysa i Hliba’, [Sinodal’nyi Informatsiino-Prosvitnits’kii viddil UPTs, 15 May 2015, available at: <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.

⁵³ ‘Web-Atlas Tserkvi’, *Ukrain’ska Pravoslavna Tserkva*, available at www.church.ua/karta/ accessed 25 September 2018.

⁵⁴ ‘Volins’ki svyashcheniki proveli v ostannyu put’ zabiglogo v ATO ukrains’kogo voïna’, *Sinodal’nyi informatsiino-prosvitnits’kii viddil UPTs*, 13 August 2018, available at www.news.church.ua/2018/08/13/svyashhennosluzhiteli-volinskoji-jeparxiji-proveli-v-ostannyu-put-zagiblogo-v-ato-ukrajinskogo-vojina/ accessed 25 September 2018.

⁵⁵ ‘Metropolitan Hilarion: There Always Be [sic] Spiritual Unity Between the Russian and Ukrainian Nations’, *The Russian Orthodox Church Department of External Relations*, 5 September 2014, available at: <https://mospat.ru/en/2014/09/15/news107982/>, accessed 19 October 2016.

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 taken by the UOC(MP) leadership was deemed insufficient to demonstrate satisfactory patriotic credentials in the eyes of a significant number of Ukrainians. The actions and utterances of clerics engaging in actions perceived as hostile to Ukrainian nationhood have readily been interpreted as representative of the UOC(MP) as a whole. What started as a protest in support of Ukraine's European choice broadened into a 'Revolution of Dignity' that demanded individual dignity for citizens and national dignity for Ukraine as an independent sovereign state. Charged by a sense of empowerment, citizens called for the authorities to respect them through greater accountability and more effective tackling of poverty. At the same time, the fact that the largest and most powerful church in Ukraine was under the ultimate authority of the former imperial centre was seen by some as an affront to Ukraine as an independent nation.⁵⁶ 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 struggled to gain credibility. One critic, a cleric of the UAOC, described it as 'an abstraction in which everyone has believed',⁵⁷ citing a lack of what he considers to be Ukrainian patriots among its clergy. Ultimately, the fact of the UOC(MP), a leading church of Ukraine, being rooted in a foreign land, and one that has engaged in hostile behaviours towards Kyiv at that, is seen as incommensurate with Ukraine's nation building aspirations.

Indeed, one of the consequences of the events of the Euromaidan 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 in the run-up to the historic event (Metropolitan Oleksandr Drabynko 2016). Nonetheless, President Poroshenko, a leading oligarch who came to power in 2014 as a result of the Euromaidan protests supported by his television channel (*Kanal 5*), 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' (Weymouth 2014).⁵⁸ Yet, Poroshenko has not permitted the state to

⁵⁶ Kateryna Kruk, 'The last missing piece to make Ukraine truly independent' *Atlantic Council*, 15 August 2018, available at www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-last-missing-piece-to-make-ukraine-truly-independent accessed 27 September 2018

⁵⁷ Archbishop Ihor Isichenko of UOAC Called Existence of Pro-Ukrainian group in UOC-MP Abstraction', *RISU*, 1 March 2012, available at: http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/47073/, accessed 24 April 2016.

⁵⁸ 'Poroshenko Believes Ukrainian Orthodox Church Will Get y', *Interfax: Russia & CIS Presidential Bulletin*, 12 May 2016.

intervene, saying it is a matter for the episcopate and the churches to decide among themselves. Although many supporters of autocephaly among the clergy and laity are now believed to have switched their allegiance to the UOC(KP), 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 autocephalous existence, and as such, wants UOC(MP) to lead the way and become the Ukrainian Orthodox Church without qualifiers, capable of uniting Ukrainians (Metropolitan Oleksandr 2016b).

However, in the wake of the Euromaidan, the canonicity of the UOC(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 UOC under 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 attracted by the enjoyment of greater freedoms than their Russian counterparts (Richters 2012, p. 113). The alleged decline of the denomination's canonicity as a criterion of merit relative (Korniichuk 2016, 253) to political and patriotic-national orientation in the eyes of Ukrainians has been manifested in a number of 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 public standing (Bugriy 2015; Coyer 2015; Trach 2015; Coyle 2016). An April 2014 study reported in the Ukrainian press found that 32% of respondents considered themselves members of the UOC(KP) (up from 26% the previous year), while 25% of those questioned declared their belonging to the UOC(MP) (down from 28% in 2013).⁵⁹ Yet the trend is more ambiguous than these figures might suggest. Firstly, the 2014 figures excluded the Crimea region, which is likely to have strongly favoured the UOC(MP), so the shift in proportionate support in favour of the newer UOC(KP) is inevitably a partial reflection of this. This phenomenon is likely to be more pronounced now, given that the regions of the Donbas no longer under Kyiv control are also likely to have been more predominantly under that of the MP. Secondly, the survey counted self-professed 'supporters' (*prikhil'niki*) of the respective churches and hence it is difficult to get a clear picture of the number of individuals who have actually changed their religious allegiance, since a shift in support may be declarative rather than a practical, physical act of attending a different place of worship. Thirdly, there is significant inconsistency between

⁵⁹ 'Kil'kist' viruiuchykh Kyivs'koho patriarkhatu v Ukraïni perevyshchyla kil'kist' Moskovs'koho', *Dzerkalo Tizhnya*, 5 May 2014, available at: http://dt.ua/UKRAINE/kilkist-viruyuchih-kiyivskogo-patriarkhatu-v-ukrayini-perevischila-kilkist-moskovskogo-143319_.html, accessed 7 September 2016.

the figures reported by different surveys.⁶⁰ Hence, caution is advised in interpreting this data as the situation is likely to still be in flux. Nevertheless, despite these caveats, the overall picture seems to be one of a shift in the balance of favour towards the Kyiv Patriarchate. Another obvious conclusion from the data is the greater degree of political polarisation affecting religious outlook, with the number professing ‘just Orthodoxy’ without indicating a particular denomination down from 28.8% in 2013 to 21.2% in 2016 (Markovich 2016).

Parallel to 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 their place of worship and formal transitions in ownership have occurred. In 2015 the Religious Information Service of Ukraine reported that 70 parishes in total, predominantly though not exclusively in Western Ukraine, had switched their affiliation from the UOC(MP) to the UOC(KP), noting that almost 50% of them had done so on the basis of unanimous support from their community (Moroz & Voron 2015).⁶¹ While the Moscow Patriarchate takes the position that the switched parishes have been ‘usurped’ or ‘seized by raiding’ as a result of external interventions supported by nationalist Right Sector militants,⁶² the KP states that such transitions occur as a result of pressure from the congregations and even priests themselves. For instance, one priest left the UOC(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’; he even went so far as to state that ‘to be part of the Moscow Patriarchate right now is to take part in the killing’ (Kumkova 2015). Indeed, even figures remaining within the Moscow Patriarchate acknowledge the damage inflicted as a consequence of the fallout from the insurrectionary events. Metropolitan Oleksandr has 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

⁶⁰Compare, for instance, the figures reported here: James J. Coyle ‘Ukrainians desert Russian Orthodox church on mass’, *Newsweek*, 25 June 2016, available at <http://www.newsweek.com/ukrainian-desert-russian-orthodox-church-en-masse-474357> accessed 27 September 2018; Alexandra Markovich, ‘As more Ukrainians chose Kyiv Patriarchate push intensifies for unified, national Orthodox church’ *Kyiv Post*, 23 June 2016, available at <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/divided-by-politics-orthodox-church-fails-to-unite-ukrainian-people-417077.html> accessed 27 September 2018.

⁶¹Most of these transfer, though by no means all, have taken place since the Euromaidan.

⁶²‘Fotofakt: “Pravii sector” vikhvalyaet’sya zakhoplenniam khramu’, *Sinodal’nyi informatsiino-prosvitnits’kii vidil UPTs*, 12 June 2016, available at <http://news.church.ua/2016/06/12/fotofakt-yak-kijivskij-patriarhat-zaxoplyuje-xrami> accessed 7 November 2016.

become a 'church of the aggressor state'. (Metropolitan Oleksandr Drabynko, 2016a)

As a result of the charged political atmosphere and critical, patriotic-nationalistic narratives, greater legislative and physical pressure has been brought to bear on the UOC(MP) in the wake of the Euromaidan. While the *Verkhovna Rada* is working to develop legislation to reduce the legal obstacles impeding the change of church affiliations (through the controversial proposed Bill 4128 'on freedom of conscience and religious organizations'⁶³), in May 2016 members of the Ternopil regional council called on President 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 Moscow Patriarchate.⁶⁴ The UOC(MP) has also been targeted by parliamentary Bill 4511, which proposes 'a special status for religious organizations with governing centers based in an aggressor state',⁶⁵ as well being subjected to proposed disadvantageous changes to its tax status in Kyiv.⁶⁶ The UOC(MP) further alleges that its churches have been subject to repeated arson attacks and vandalism,⁶⁷ and that a number of its clerics have even been murdered.⁶⁸ In this context, and to avoid provoking further unrest, Metropolitan Onufriy gave 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, which had incited controversy even prior to the Euromaidan (Hudson 2014; 2015).

⁶³ 'Proekt Zakonu pro vnesennya zmin do Zakonu Ukraini "Pro svobodu sovisti ta relihiini organizatsii" (shchodo zmini relihiinimi gromadami pidlehlosti)', *Verkhovna Rada Ukraini*, available at http://w1.c1.rada.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=58255 accessed 26 September 2018.

⁶⁴ 'Ukrainian councillors demand removal of monastery from pro-Russian church' BBC Monitoring Ukraine & Baltics, 16 May 2016. Source: Interfax news agency, Moscow, in Russians, 10:44 GMT, 16 May 2016.

⁶⁵ 'Proekt postanovi pro priinyattya za osnovu proektu Zakonu pro osoblivnii status relihiinikh organizatsii, kerivni tsentri yakikh znakhodyat'sya v derzhavi, yaka viznana Verkhovnoyu Radoyu Ukraini derzhavoyu-ahresorom' *Verkhovna Rada Ukraini*, available at http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=60234 accessed 26 September 2018. Also see 'Church-related bills nos. 4128 and 4511: main points', *RISU*, 17 May 2017, available at https://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/state/legislation/67015 accessed 26 September 2018.

⁶⁶ 'Ukraine 2015 International Religious Freedom Report', US Department of State, 10 August 2016, available at: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/2015/eur/256253.htm>, accessed 16 August 2016. This proposal has reportedly been quashed in court.

⁶⁷ 'A UOC(MP) Church in Babi Yar Set on Fire Again', *RISU*, 22 April 2015, available at: http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/extraordinary_situations/59802/, accessed 24 April 2016.

⁶⁸ 'Metropolitan Onufriy called Avakov to objectively investigate the murder of the UOC (MP) priest and nun', *RISU*, 12 August 2015, available at: https://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/state/church_state_relations/60796/, accessed 14 June 2017.

This section has traced the role of the UOC(MP) through the course of the Euromaidan protests, arguing that the capacity of the UOC(MP) to serve as a conduit for Russian soft power across Ukraine, to the extent that it served this role before, is more precarious in the wake of the protests. Indeed the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople looks increasingly likely to grant autocephalous status to a single national Orthodox Church in Ukraine.⁶⁹ Although the pastoral activities of some UOC(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 pro-Russian Ukrainians from the perspective of the wider Ukrainian public, this may have affirmed the unease or outright prejudice regarding the UOC(MP) as a political force in Ukraine that predated the Euromaidan (Hudson 2015).

Conclusions

Being a conduit of Russian soft power implies the dissemination of Russian cultural and ideological narratives. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate was the most nationally established and best-resourced church following independence, and hence was potentially well placed to serve as channel for the idea 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 tool of Kremlin influence in Ukraine as such. Indeed, from the time of independence tensions were increasingly apparent between those clergy and laity who wished the canonical church to become a genuinely Ukrainian institution, and those who wished 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 UOC(MP) afforded it a significant advantage 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 sharp scrutiny and were often found wanting when measured against the intensely felt patriotic aspirations of the time. Indeed, in that polarised political atmosphere, the UOC(MP)’s proximity to the Yanukovych regime, its perceived hesitancy towards the protest movement and the pastoral support of Russia-supported rebels by some clergy in the occupied Donbas and Crimea gave critical media outlets plenty of ammunition to depict the church as an illegitimate imperial outpost and an organisation hostile to and

⁶⁹ ‘Sinod vselens’kogo patriarkhatu viznav predstoyateliv UPTs KP i UAPTs kanonicheskimi’, *RISU*, 11 October 2018, available at https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/all_news/orthodox/constantinople_patriarchy/72994 accessed 11 October 2018.

even guilty of an outright betrayal of the Ukrainian people and its national aspirations. By this token, clerics of the UOC(MP) ministering to those fighting on the rebel side seem to lend divine sanction and legitimacy to their cause, and in the broader picture, provide ideological support to the Kremlin's hybrid warfare campaign. Consequently, although Metropolitans Volodymyr and Onufriy attempted to mollify perceptions of the UOC(MP) as a kind of fifth column, and the church took the stance that ministering to pro-Russian insurgents only reflected the personal position of certain clerics, this narrative of rising above the political fray and adopting a balanced stance was very difficult for Ukrainian critics of the UOC(MP) to accept. There is evidence of a shift against the (UOC)MP in the hearts and minds of many Ukrainians, and autocephaly is widely seen 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 Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate 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: 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 highlighting of ability to exercise cultural influence may in turn incite measures to further undermine the UOC(MP)'s standing in Ukrainian society. Under Metropolitan Onufriy, the UOC(MP) has ceded its former position closest to the seat of political power to the UOC(KP), hoping thus to weather the political storm washing over Ukraine. The future of the Moscow Patriarchate 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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