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POLICY BRIEF

DEFENDER OF THE FAITH? HOW UKRAINE'S ORTHODOX SPLIT THREATENS RUSSIA

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May 2019

SUMMARY

- The Orthodox Church in Ukraine this year became 'autocephalous' – meaning it is no longer answerable to the Moscow Patriarchate Church.
- Autocephaly is of huge symbolic importance: for Ukraine, as a sign of political independence; for Russia, as a sign of political loss.
- The Kremlin and Russian Orthodox Church enjoy a close relationship, but both are biding their time and deciding what to do next.
- The uncertain course of events means that issues arising from autocephaly may not be settled for many years.
- The domestic consolidation and international recognition of the new church will not be easy or quick, but this is an irreversible change – Moscow is unable to overturn it.

Introduction

An average Westerner may well have overlooked the potentially seismic geopolitical event of 6 January 2019. On that snowy Sunday – Epiphany in western Christianity; Christmas Eve in Ukraine – the 39-year-old Metropolitan of Kyiv, Epiphanius, received *tomos* from the Constantinople Patriarchate. This document bestowed autocephalous (self-governing) status on what was now the newly formed Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

The event was historic not just for Ukraine, but for Russia and the whole Orthodox world too. For Ukrainians, autocephaly was a sign of their country moving towards greater independence from Russia, now in matters clerical as well as earthly. For a country still stuck in a slow-moving war with Russia, this was no small matter.

Nor was it a small matter for Russia. Just under one-third of the Russian Orthodox Church's 36,000 parishes are to be found in Ukraine, and their status is now in question. The Russian Orthodox Church is set to lose territory, believers, and a huge amount of symbolic power. And it has not taken it well: "it is impossible for us to separate Kiev from our country, as this is where our history began. The Russian Orthodox Church preserves the national consciousness of both Russians and Ukrainians", said Kirill (Gundyaev), Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus'. Vladimir Putin echoed this, arguing that autocephaly's main objective is to "divide the people of Russia and Ukraine, to sow national and religious divisions".

What will the impact be of these events on Russia's influence in the Orthodox world – and beyond, including the West – given the Russian Orthodox Church's ostensible role as an important soft power arm of Russian foreign policy? And how might the church conflict play out in Russian-Ukrainian relations – especially now that Ukraine has a new president?

To answer these questions, the European Council on Foreign Relations conducted a series of interviews in Kyiv, Istanbul, and Moscow with key protagonists in the recent autocephaly drama and with observers of Orthodox church affairs. The All-Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople; Honorary Patriarch Filaret of-the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine; senior representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church; and multiple experts have shared their on-the-ground insights into this historic event.

Moscow and the Orthodox Church

The Russian state and Russian church have long been close: in 1722 Peter the Great abolished the position of the Russian patriarch and appointed an "ober-prokurator", a government official to supervise the Church Synod, which led to the Synodal rule that survived until the Russian revolution. Even in Soviet times, when the authorities persecuted the church, they also made use of it: during the second world war, for instance, Josef Stalin ordered Orthodox priests to bless defence lines around the capital. After the war, the church was believed to be heavily infiltrated by the KGB and to act in the state's interests, especially from the 1960s onwards. A special parliamentary commission created in the early 1990s vindicated this belief.

In the current era, a prominent symbiosis between the Kremlin and the Orthodox Church emerged after 2012, when Putin returned to the Kremlin amid protests by the liberal urban intelligentsia. The Russian government began to portray itself as a defender of conservative values – including religion – from the onslaught of what it called 'decadent Western liberalism'. This fitted well with the conservative and anti-Western views held by Patriarch Kirill. During the protests, Kirill stepped in to declare the arrival of Putin to the presidency a "miracle from God". Other occasions have seen the church lend its backing to the regime, even in deeply unspiritual matters: Orthodox priests have blessed missiles destined for Syria, as well as Crimea. And, in December 2018, the patriarch himself participated in the 'collegium' – something of an advisory board – of the Russian Ministry of Defence; not your usual meeting for a religious leader.

One core political message of the Russian church under Kirill – convenient for the Kremlin in its anti-Western shift – has been that the European Union is imposing secular values on Russia, making it comparable to the atheist communist state. Rejection of Christian spiritual heritage will lead to the failure of European civilisation – so the argument runs. For instance, Metropolitan of Volokolamsk Hilarion (Alfeyev) – who is also chair of the department for external relations of the Russian church, something of a foreign affairs minister for the church – regularly issues pronouncements along the following lines: "The militant secularism that is rapidly gaining momentum in today's Europe is also a pseudo-religion. Modern militant secularism, like Russian communism, is seen as a worldview that came to replace the Christian view of the world." This view has implications especially for other Orthodox countries that either are or aspire to be members of the EU: from Bulgaria and Serbia to Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. In these places, the church lobbied hard against the adoption of anti-discrimination legislation, which was a precondition for qualifying for visa-free travel to the EU. These countries' governments overcame this opposition, but it came at domestic political cost.

However, on closer examination, it is evident that the Kremlin and the church each had their own reasons for their conservative positioning. For the Kremlin, this was first and foremost an opportunistic political move: an attempt to marginalise the hostile liberal constituency at home, to build up defences against a West increasingly critical of Russia, and to erode Western unity by reaching out to anti-liberal fringe groups there. The conservative image that it chose to present to the world was not fully rooted in popular values: while homosexuality is indeed still somewhat stigmatised in Russia, in many other respects Russia is not a particularly conservative country, nor a very religious one. Just 5-7 percent of its population go to church regularly, and sociologists argue that religion plays hardly any role in Russians' worldview.[1] Indeed, in recent years, the government's conservative thrust has slowed and even retreated. "It was [former head of the Kremlin administration Vyacheslav] Volodin who tried to market conservatism; from [current head Sergey] Kirienko we hear nothing about it", comments one Kremlin-linked analyst.[2]

Why are Orthodox churches important?

Orthodox Christianity is often portrayed as a highly conservative denomination that refuses to conform to new realities. It is precisely this, however, that has led to the church becoming a pole for current conservative "identity politics". Indeed, societies in predominantly Orthodox countries are very secularised in their attitudes towards morality; generally, the lifestyles there are far removed from Christian doctrine. Polls show that church attendance among the Orthodox population is much lower than among Catholics. According to a Pew survey conducted in 2017, church attendance in Orthodox countries in central and eastern Europe averages 10 percent: it stands at 21 percent Romania;17 percent in Georgia; 12 percent in Ukraine; 6 percent in Serbia; 6 percent in Russia; and 5 percent in Bulgaria. In Catholic-majority countries in the same region, attendance reaches 25 percent; it is 45 percent in Poland and 43 percent in Ukraine.

Nevertheless, in predominantly Orthodox societies, the church is traditionally regarded as the bearer of national identity and a guardian of national consciousness to an even greater extent than the state. The same Pew survey reveals a strong association between religion and national identity – the idea that being Orthodox or Catholic is important to one's national identity is supported by 70 percent of people in Orthodox-majority countries and 57 percent in Catholic-majority countries (78 percent in Serbia; 76 percent in Greece; 74 percent in Romania; 66 percent in Bulgaria; and 57 percent in Russia – compared with 64 percent in Poland and 58 percent in Croatia).

Pew concludes that many central and eastern Europeans might be described as "believing and belonging, without behaving". Although people do not go to church regularly, and religion does not affect their moral choices, they nevertheless feel part of a community whose identity they strongly associate with the church. All the data indicate the important role that Orthodox churches' conservative positions play in modern identity politics. This overlapping of church and nation means that the church retains soft power. But it also explains the importance of the establishment of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, as a function of "becoming" a nation-state.

If the Kremlin's anti-Westernism is driven primarily by geopolitical disagreements with the West, then, for the current church establishment, anti-Western conservatism is a deeper and more genuinely values-led conviction. Many church observers attribute this to Kirill and his leadership. That said, Kirill does not enjoy universal acclaim either among Moscow elites or the wider public. If his predecessor, Alexy II, was a figure of some autonomous gravity and religious authority, then Kirill is often referred to as "the first Soviet Patriarch", which includes a reference not only to his year of birth – 1946 – but also his character and behaviour. His lavish lifestyle is subject to frequent criticism on the Russian internet, and comes across in interviews: "When Pope Francis turned 70, he invited beggars to dine with him in the Vatican canteen", says one figure close to the church establishment.[3] "And then you look at the lavish celebrations when Kirill turned 70."

It is notable too that, while Putin lets it be known that he is religious – he has used the tale of his secret baptism to charm Western leaders, such as George W Bush – in religious matters, he keeps his distance from Kirill.[4] Putin is known to spend time in remote monasteries in northern Russia, or in the company of Tikhon (Shevkunov), currently Metropolitan of Pskov and Porkhov, and until 2018 superior of the Sretensky Monastery in Moscow. Many observers consider this monk-writer-filmmaker to be one of the smartest people among the current Orthodox establishment in Russia, and believe him to be close to the president.[5] "Putin is truly religious", says a Kremlin insider, who also confirms the president's ties to Tikhon.[6] But being religious does not mean Putin views Kirill as a religious guide: "Patriarch Kirill – he is like a government minister for Putin", says Russian analyst Aleksei Makarkin, implying that the president regards the patriarch a political official more than as a religious authority.[7] "Putin certainly does not confess to Kirill – then he could as well confess to [prime minister Dmitry] Medvedev or [former first deputy prime minister Igor] Shuvalov!"

Into Ukraine: Dilemmas for the Russian Orthodox Church

The Kremlin's relationship with the church is not as direct as that with, for example, a government ministry. Although it operates on a largely cooperative basis, the church is not a mere tool of state policy. Like all institutions, the church also has its own interests, agenda, traditions, and sensitivities that it wants to protect. These do not always coincide with those of the state. "While everyone outside thinks that the church just serves the state, the church itself sees exactly the opposite: the state puts pressure on them, but they push back", says one church insider in Moscow.[8] Illustrative of this is the church's position on Abkhazia and South Ossetia: while Russia recognised these as independent states in 2008, the church has – allegedly in defiance of the Kremlin, insiders maintain – stuck to its old position that holds both to be the canonical territory of the Georgian patriarch.

When it came to the escalation of hostilities in Ukraine from 2014 onwards, if the Russian president indeed viewed Kirill as a mere underling, then he may have expected full-throated support in matters as important as the war in Ukraine. In fact, Kirill made some attempts at superficial neutrality. But his efforts may have landed him in the worst of both worlds: he offered neither the Kremlin nor Ukrainian believers the sort of support they expected. As a result, he lost the trust and goodwill of both.

Kirill's most prominent attempt at nominal neutrality took place on 18 March 2014. On that day, Moscow was in a celebratory mood: gathered in the Kremlin, Putin and three Crimean politicians signed the treaty on the "accession of Crimea" to the Russian Federation. The crème de la crème of the Russian political, military, and business worlds was present. Yet Kirill was missing. Given that the patriarch is ready to attend lesser meetings such as the defence ministry collegium, his absence from the Crimea treaty signing pointed to a tricky balancing act in which he attempted to account for both state geopolitical interests and church interests. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate is the largest Orthodox church in Ukraine and is an integral part of the Russian Orthodox Church. This made it far too difficult for the Russian Orthodox Church itself to celebrate an event that was certain to pitch Ukraine and Russia against each other. The decision to stay away – and the reason for it – has since been semi-publicly confirmed by the church itself: "The Patriarch decided not attend the meeting on March 18, and the state officials said: 'point taken'", one high-ranking church official has commented.[9]

As the war in Ukraine progressed throughout 2014, it became clear that the Russian Orthodox Church would not be able to straddle a conflict that pitted its followers in Ukraine against its followers in Russia. This was revealed during the battle of Ilovaisk in August that year. This was one of the bloodiest battles of the war in Donbas, during which the Russian army appears to have intervened in Ukraine. But, instead of calling for peace – which might have been a useful workaround for him – Kirill issued a statement attacking Ukrainian "Uniates and raskolniks" (schismatics) for engaging in conflict against his flock. He made direct reference to Orthodox and Greek-Orthodox Ukrainians who do not recognise the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Soon afterwards, the Russian patriarch proceeded to publicly extol the virtues of "Russkii mir" – "the Russian world", a concept that the Russian media and political class have made use of to justify Russian political, military, and ecclesiastical activity in Ukraine. He declared that: "Russia belongs to a civilisation that is wider than the Russian Federation. We call this civilisation the Russian world. This is not the world of the Russian Federation, nor Russian empire. The Russian world starts at the Kievan baptismal font. Russian, Ukrainians, Belarusians belong to it." During a crucial battle for Donetsk airport in late 2014, Kirill all but broke with whatever ambiguity remained by decorating the heads of Russia's two leading state-owned television channels with church orders. The official reason was for their services to church and state. But the channels had been instrumental in broadcasting inflammatory propaganda that fuelled the war in Ukraine. Kirill had clearly chosen a side, even if he had initially intended to avoid doing so.

The church's position was not confined to the high rhetoric of the patriarch, but was also reflected on the ground in eastern Ukraine. There, some representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine rose to prominence in supporting the insurgents. One local priest from Sloviansk became notorious for his mix of religion, poetry, and geopolitical activism. He wrote poems professing his "love for the great Russian soldier, ready to die for his Motherland, and defend her from monsters like NATO and other predatory terrorists!" Another activist, a former sacristan of Kyiv Pechersk Lavra – the Kyiv monastery of caves – organised the war's first ambush of Ukrainian intelligence operatives, in early April 2014. And, in one episode in Kyiv-controlled eastern Ukraine, two priests belonging to the Russian patriarchate refused to conduct services for a deceased child who had not been baptised in a church recognised by Moscow. While this was not necessarily the case in every location, in a country at war, just a few such incidents polarised society even further and massively undermined the standing of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Trust levels in Kirill fell across Ukraine, from around 40 percent in 2013 to 15 percent in 2018. And, in the same period, the number of Ukrainians who declared themselves members of the Moscow Patriarchate church fell from 19 percent to 12 percent. Those who claimed Kyivan Patriarchate membership rose from 18 percent to 28 percent.

In sum: once Russia began its war in Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church's long-established close cooperation with the Putin regime left it exposed on difficult terrain. With a large proportion of its parishes on Ukrainian territory and, despite the church's previous history of resisting some Kremlin demands, the Moscow Patriarchate would almost certainly have found it difficult to set a different course. A studied quietness might have been achievable. But not only was the Russian Orthodox Church likely experiencing significant political pressure in Moscow, its room for manoeuvre was further constrained by: Ukraine's highly diverse church landscape; the unusual situation of an Orthodox country lacking its own church; and already-worsening relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul. But, even so, the Russian Orthodox Church's next moves were a masterclass in tactical missteps and strategic haziness.

Autocephaly for Ukraine: How it happened

Church fragmented

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ecclesiastical landscape in Ukraine became greatly diversified. Three different Orthodox churches emerged – an unusual situation in the Orthodox world, where "one country, one church" has become an accepted norm. In Soviet times, Orthodox churches in Ukraine were simply part of the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1990 the Moscow Patriarchate established the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate by granting the Ukrainian Exarchate the status of autonomous self-governing church under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. This included the duty to mention the Moscow Patriarch at each church service as the recognised head of the church. The move did not give the new church the right of independent foreign policy, which was still supposed to coordinate its positions on different issues in the Orthodox world with Moscow. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate claims to have more than 11,000 parishes on the territory of Ukraine. Until recently, it was the only internationally recognised Orthodox church on the territory of Ukraine.

In 1992 a new institution was established that became known as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyivan Patriarchate, headed by Patriarch Filaret, a former archbishop of the Russian Orthodox Church who had sought to become the Moscow Patriarch in 1990, but lost to Alexy II. Moscow immediately declared the new church schismatic, while other Orthodox churches refused to recognise it. Nonetheless, having become the second strongest church in Ukraine, it now claims 4,281 parishes.

The third institution – the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, which claims around 1,200 parishes – was effectively a church in exile in Soviet times. It was created after the Russian revolution and, in the following decades, was supported by Ukrainian emigrants before being reinstated in Ukraine in 1990.

Finally, Ukraine also has the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, an eastern-rite church. The largest Uniate church, it claims 3,828 parishes – mainly in western Ukraine – and has more than four million followers who practice the eastern rite but accept the primacy of the Pope.

This divided church landscape, though, came to contrast markedly with Ukrainian public opinion. By late 2018, 54 percent of Ukrainians supported the creation of a Ukrainian Orthodox Church independent from Moscow. Only 19 percent opposed it .

Autocephaly and Ukrainian unity: an inevitability?

Church observers in Moscow admit that the situation in Ukraine was unusual, and that steps should have been taken to regularise it – preferably by the Moscow Patriarchate itself. One prominent Russian deacon and church affairs commentator, Andrei Kuraev, has all but advocated such an approach: “Moscow should have accepted that Ukrainian church autocephaly was inevitable, and should have offered this autocephaly to Kiev itself, rather than for wait for Constantinople to do that. This would have ensured a strong spiritual relationship between the Ukrainian and Russian church in the future”.[10] But this view is rare in Moscow: church leaders had long preferred to ignore the problem. “Kirill inherited that situation with three churches, but for ten years he did nothing – just pretended that we were united, that the problem did not exist”, says Ksenia

Luchenko, editor of Orthodox website pravmir.ru.[11]

Against this background of war and politics – and in the absence of any leadership on this from the Russian patriarchate – the then Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko set about addressing the issue, partly to benefit from it politically. In April 2018, he sent a letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople requesting autocephaly for Ukraine. Two of the existing church structures in Ukraine – the Kyivan Patriarchate church and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church – supported his request. And his initiative bore fruit.

The role of the Ecumenical (Constantinople) Patriarch

The influence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is primarily based on the historical tradition that places Constantinople as the first among equal Orthodox churches. This gives it the right to convoke Pan-Orthodox Councils with the consent of other churches and to preside over them. Secondly, the Ecumenical See has a wide network of international contacts with all Christian churches. Most important among these contacts are the traditionally good relations between Constantinople and Rome that began after the 1960s.

Elected in 1991, Patriarch Bartholomew is regarded as an ambitious leader who wants to defend and even increase the status of the Ecumenical Throne. He has built on the legacy of Athenagoras (patriarch from 1948 to 1972), promoting reconciliation and dialogue between the Christian denominations. Bartholomew is known for his active position on ecological issues; Pope Francis recognised his contribution in this area in his encyclical “Laudato Si” in 2015.

The weakness of the Ecumenical Patriarchate lies in the fact that it is neither supported nor defended by a powerful state, as it is located in Istanbul. But this is also a strength, since none of the other Orthodox churches and countries suspect the Ecumenical Patriarchate of facilitating intervention by other states – which makes it a recognised arbiter of disputes between Orthodox churches. An important symbolic strength of the Ecumenical Patriarchate also lies in the fact that it controls the spiritual centre of Orthodoxy – Mount Athos, in Greece. Although some of the monasteries in the Monastic Republic of Mount Athos are traditionally connected with other countries – such as Serbia, Bulgaria, and Russia – all of them are within the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch.

When ECFR met the All-Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, he was explicit about the impact of Poroshenko's démarche: "The Ukrainian church asked for autocephaly seven times, and we did not answer their petitions before. But this time we also received petitions from the Ukrainian president and parliament. One could see a united Ukrainian desire for autocephaly. I also received private messages in favour of autocephaly from multiple bishops who are in the Ukrainian church under the Moscow Patriarchate".[12] His motivation was also religious. He wanted to bring millions of Ukrainians who belonged to the uncanonical churches of Ukraine into the fold of the canonical Church. The patriarch also said he felt it was unfair for the 500,000 believers of the Polish Orthodox Church, and the 100,000 Orthodox believers in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, to have independent churches while 40 million Ukrainians did not.

Moscow's missed chance

However, this is not the full story. This ecclesiastical conflict has complex roots, ranging from clerical matters to political and interpersonal ones.

The biggest impediment to Moscow exerting any significant influence over the move to autocephaly was probably Kirill's decision not to attend the Pan-Orthodox Council in Crete in 2016. Planning for this council began in the 1960s; for Constantinople, the presence of the Moscow church mattered. The Russian church had insisted that each document for the council should be approved unanimously by all churches represented at the council. And the location of the council was even moved from Istanbul to Crete in order to make things more palatable to the

Russian government, after Turkey had shot down a Russian fighter jet in 2015.

Yet the Moscow Patriarchate still eventually decided to boycott the council, claiming that the gathering would be insufficiently representative: the churches of Antioch (whose patriarch resides in Damascus), Bulgaria, and Georgia announced their decision not to attend the council before Moscow did, on the grounds that some of the documents for the meeting would lead to a dangerous modernisation of church doctrine (it is widely believed that three other churches consulted on their decision with the Russian church, although there is little hard proof of this). The Moscow Patriarchate appears to have made its decision not to attend at the last minute; its true motivations for doing so remain unclear. Several observers in Moscow told ECFR that they believe it to have been made under the influence of secular authorities rather than through purely clerical calculations.

Again, geopolitics bled into inter-church politics: growing anti-Westernism in Russia also increased the strain on relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Moscow Patriarchate had at times portrayed the Ecumenical Patriarchate as a "Western" institution due to its vast international network and ecumenical position with regard to other Christian denominations. "They associate Bartholomew with the US – via the Greek diaspora in the US", says church expert Ksenia Luchenko.[13] Russian politicians' persistent belief that the West instigated the Maidan protests in Kyiv and other post-Soviet "colour" revolutions has likely only reinforced this stance. Latterly, Putin has openly accused the United States and Constantinople of working together to support the Ukrainian government and the move towards church independence.

None of this prevented the Moscow Patriarchate from trying to avert the inevitable. In August 2018, Kirill went to see Bartholomew in Fener, the formerly Greek neighbourhood of Istanbul, in a last-minute effort to prevent him from granting autocephaly to Ukraine. Diplomatic finesse left at home, it seemed more of an attempt to bulldoze Constantinople into submission than a charm offensive. It proved wholly counterproductive. Publicly available video shows Kirill's Russian bodyguards offering drinks, with the Russian patriarch refusing to have anything that was offered to him by his hosts. The hosts seem to have interpreted this as fear of being poisoned and took offence.

At this meeting, Kirill told Bartholomew: “Your All-Holiness, if you give autocephaly to Ukraine, blood will be poured out.” To this, the Ecumenical Patriarch replied: “Your Beatitude, we neither have an army at our disposal nor any weapons. If blood is to be poured out, it will not be spilled by us, but by you!”

At one point during the meeting, Bartholomew turned to Hilarion to say: “You stated that President Poroshenko has bribed the Ecumenical Patriarchate. I ask you directly, can you prove this? If you can’t prove it, you are doing the Mother Church an injustice and consequently will be cursed by Her. Knowingly misleading others through lying is unforgivable.” The Moscow Patriarch’s choice of adopting the Kremlin-style rhetoric of great-power entitlement did not help him on an issue where Russia was clearly a *demandeur*. The Russian Orthodox Church may be able to provide ballast to the Kremlin; but the inverse turned out not to be true – neither the Kremlin nor Kremlin-style rhetoric helped the Moscow Patriarchate in its dispute with Constantinople.

It might not necessarily have been this way. In conversation with ECFR, Bartholomew recalled his earlier contact with Kirill almost fondly – the two have known each other for decades and engaged in close discussions over Estonian church questions in the 1990s. Bartholomew also spoke warmly of his visit to Moscow in 2010 and the tour of the Kremlin that Medvedev and Kirill gave him. But previously warm personal relations were not enough to offset the larger forces driving a split. Relations had soured to such an extent that the Moscow Patriarchate could find no way to halt what had become an irreversible change.

There is certainly a struggle between Constantinople and Moscow, but its size should not be exaggerated. The Ecumenical Patriarchate has a lot of soft power, but it has far less access to other levers of power than the Moscow Patriarchate. The Russian Orthodox Church has billions of dollars in revenues, employs thousands of people at home and abroad, and commands an ability to access and rely on the global network of Russian diplomatic and media presence, from RT to dozens of religious websites in multiple languages. None of these is available to Constantinople.

The meaning of autocephaly

Then came the day when the stars had aligned for the autocephaly of the Ukrainian church: Ukraine had requested it; “one country, one church” was an accepted principle in the Orthodox world; and Constantinople felt that it had nothing to lose in its relations with Moscow by applying that principle to Ukraine.

The meaning and procedure of granting autocephaly are complex and have evolved over time. Unlike the Catholic Church, which recognises the Pope as its supreme authority, the Orthodox Church does not recognise the existence of such an authority. According to Orthodox ecclesiology, every church territory has the right to autocephaly and the Ecumenical Patriarch is recognised as “first among equals” by the heads of all autocephalous Orthodox churches. He is not able to interfere in the internal affairs of other churches, but the heads do recognise him as a unifying point in the Orthodox world. He has the indisputable right to grant autocephaly to ecclesiastical territories under his jurisdiction.

In medieval times, the Orthodox world recognised the existence of the Pentarchy – five traditional patriarchal sees in Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Later, several new churches were formed in areas that today fall within the territory of several nation states – these are the autocephalous churches in Cyprus, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Poland, Albania, and the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as autonomous churches in Finland and Estonia. Almost all of them, including that in Russia, received their autocephalous status from Constantinople.

In the Ukrainian case, autocephaly is also a question of historical dispute: namely, the question of how, in 1686, Moscow established its jurisdiction over the Kievan Metropolitanate. The Russian Orthodox Church insists that, when this happened, Constantinople transferred its jurisdiction over Kiev to the Moscow Patriarchate. Moscow, therefore, maintains that Kiev has been a part of the Russian diocese since then. For its part, Constantinople argues that, in that year, it gave Moscow only the *right to ordain* the Metropolitan of Kiev because Ottoman rule made it impossible for the Ecumenical Patriarchate to fully exercise its jurisdiction over Kiev. This reading of history is based on a document issued by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1686. “I … told him [Kirill]: you took ecclesiastic control of Kiev in a non-Orthodox manner", Bartholomew commented to ECFR.[14] "Our Patriarch, my predecessor, went to collect church revenues in Russia. But then he was not allowed to return to Constantinople without concessions over Kiev. So, in 1686, Moscow received only 'the right to ordain' the Metropolitan of Kiev, who was obliged to mention the name of the Ecumenical Patriarch as first in the liturgies. But failed to do it as promised."

For this reason, the initial step before granting autocephaly was to re-establish the jurisdiction of Constantinople over Ukraine. This happened in October 2018 and was accepted by the Kyivan Patriarchate church and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church.

The establishment of the church is just the beginning of a long process – but the Orthodox world is used to taking the long view. Bartholomew himself says all major church decisions – such as the Pan-Orthodox Council or the granting of autocephaly – take decades, at least, to win the acceptance of all involved. Church expert Andrei Kuraev is at pains to point out that: "The Russian church was in a schism with Constantinople for almost a century before the latter recognised it. The same happened later to the Greek church, which refused to be subordinate to the patriarch in Istanbul. Then the Bulgarian schism; the Romanian, Albanian, Serbian schisms." Ukrainian autocephaly was born out of crisis and took decades to heal, just as with many other national Orthodox churches.

After autocephaly: What happens next?

Proponents of Ukrainian autocephaly insist that the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine will become the largest Orthodox church in the country, not only bringing together the parishes of the former Kyivan Patriarchate church and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church but also attracting an increasing number of parishes from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate. For instance, in one of his first public statements, Epiphanius said that the new church already had around 7,000 parishes and that he expected more parishes from Moscow Patriarchate church to join.

He may have been right. Only two bishops from the Moscow church attended the 15 December 2018 Church Council in Kyiv, which established the new Orthodox church of Ukraine and elected Epiphanius Metropolitan of Kyiv and head of the new church. But the ban has not prevented parishes from considering a change of allegiance: at the time of writing, more than 500 formerly Moscow Patriarchate church parishes had announced their decision to join the new church. The number is increasing by the day, and the trend is spreading eastwards – into the more Russian-speaking areas of central and eastern Ukraine.

But tension between the newly autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Moscow Patriarchate is not the only complication. The founders of the Ukrainian church – Epiphanius and Filaret – are also at loggerheads over influence on the new body. Filaret became Honorary Patriarch at the end of 2018, but he is unhappy with his honorary position, which carries little real power. Filaret has, therefore, recently threatened to revive the former, unrecognised Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyivan Patriarchate, claiming that this would eventually lead to recognition of the patriarchal status of the head of the church. This, however, contradicts the conditions for autocephaly and would further complicate relations with other Orthodox churches and even with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Some of these struggles are playing out in the open, which certainly does not help the new church. And yet, the underlying trend – that of an ever-deepening spiritual split between Russia and Ukraine – is here to stay, irrespective of the drama of church politics in Ukraine.

Much will now depend on how the new church and its young metropolitan position themselves in their relations with both the Russian and Ukrainian states. The new church faces a dilemma. For the moment, it is expedient for it to rely heavily on the Ukrainian state for protection and help in building momentum towards becoming the biggest church in Ukraine. Were the double-headed eagle of the Russian state and the Russian church to combine to undermine it, the Ukrainian church would face great difficulties.

However, in the longer term, if the new church wants to win hearts and minds, it could focus on faith, not state, and refrain from replicating Russian-style state-church symbiosis in Ukraine. Doing so may help insulate it from political game-playing. Furthermore, if it wants to be accepted as a regular member of the family of the Orthodox churches, it should distance itself from everyday Ukrainian politics and show a readiness to communicate and take into consideration the opinions of other churches, as well as to defend higher values that are at odds with Ukrainian national goals. Paradoxically, the election of Volodymyr Zelensky to the Ukrainian presidency could contribute to that. When in power, Poroshenko lobbied the new church heavily. Under Zelensky, the autocephalous church may receive less overt support from politicians at the national level, possibly allowing the church to dissociate itself more successfully from various domestic political players.

Given the tense political climate, the decision-making of Moscow-affiliated Ukrainian parishes could well create space for confrontations and provocations. Church officials in Ukraine have declared that they will not intervene or push Moscow Patriarchate parishes to join the new church: the decision is to be made by parishioners themselves. "We have set a high bar – a parish can join, if two-thirds of the parishioners want", said Filaret in October, when the process had not yet started.[15] But divided opinion among parishioners and any decision to switch allegiance could cause trouble, either locally or even internationally – if the Russian Orthodox Church (perhaps with the backing of the Kremlin) began to show an interest in parishes' decisions on their allegiance.

Inevitably, questions of property are bound to be thorny, especially in a contested situation. In Ukraine, most church property belongs to the parishes and would move with them. But there are some high-profile exceptions, such as the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, whose ownership is divided between the state and the Moscow Patriarchate church. The latter uses the monastery as the residence of its head, Metropolitan Onufriy. The Lavra has already seen some tense scenes. In the case of the Estonian church conflict, similarly high-profile places – the Nevsky cathedral and Pühtitsa monastery – were subject to lengthy negotiations and creative solutions.

We have been here before: The case of conflict in Estonia

The conflict in Ukraine is not the first time Moscow and Constantinople have broken off relations during disagreements over the post-Soviet space. The same happened in Estonia in 1996, which saw the peak of what was to become a decade-long stand-off (1993-2002).

The Orthodox church of the pre-war Estonian Republic had been subordinate to Constantinople, but the Moscow Patriarchate took over in 1945. So when Estonia regained its independence in the early 1990s, there were two claimants for the title of successor Orthodox church: the church that was subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church of Estonia that had – in small numbers, but *de jure* – survived the Soviet period in exile.

For the Estonian state at the time, restitution was the name of the game: it had legally restored its pre-war statehood (as opposed to declaring itself "newly independent"); it gave citizenship to descendants of pre-war citizens (asking others to naturalise); and it returned all nationalised property to its pre-war owners. Hence, the government was open to the claims of the exiled church and its supporters in Estonia. The attempts by the Moscow Patriarchate to declare itself the descendant of the pre-war church were frustrated, as were Patriarch Alexy's suggestions to establish an autocephalous church in Estonia that would be under neither Moscow nor Constantinople. Though legally the whole process was reduced to property reform, it is reasonable to assume that the state's suspicion that the church might serve as Russia's foreign policy tool did not help the Moscow Patriarchate.

In February 1996, the Constantinople Patriarch announced the revalidation of *tomos* from 1923 that established the Estonian Orthodox church as autonomous. Moscow's response was to break off relations. However, this did not last long – by April the same year the representatives of the two patriarchates had agreed that Estonia could have two Orthodox churches. Painstaking negotiations ensued in which political, clerical, and legal issues intertwined for several years more. In 2002 Estonia formally received two Orthodox churches: the Orthodox Church of Estonia and the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. Congregations were free to choose which church to stay with; for those that did not find unanimity, church property remained open to both groups of believers. The two most high-profile institutions – the Aleksander Nevsky Cathedral and the Pühtitsa Monastery – eventually gained stavropegial status, meaning that they answer directly to the patriarch in Moscow; but they still work in property.

The conflict in Ukraine makes Estonians uneasy. Believers fear that the Estonian schism – which had started to heal – could be reopened now that the Moscow Patriarchate is forbidding its believers to visit Constantinople churches. State officials, in turn, fear that the tensions over Ukraine could inspire the Moscow Patriarchate church – now headed by a new leader who was briefly active in post-annexation Crimea – to return to its former approach of regularly issuing complaints and threats.

The Estonian case is unlikely to offer guidance to Ukraine, which is a much bigger country, with more believers, a different political history, and different church history. Overall, Ukraine is a much more important a country for both the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church. In the Estonian context, the agreement between the two patriarchates was instrumental in resolving the stand-off; this may provide a glimmer of hope to those wishing to see a resolution of the issue in Ukraine. But it remains to be seen if such an approach would also work here, where the stakes are higher and relations between the patriarchs significantly worse.

Indeed, the church issue remains a landmine in Russian-Ukrainian relations that could yet explode if the Kremlin so wishes. Supporters of the Russian Orthodox Church – or provocateurs planted among their ranks – may try to prevent parishes from switching allegiance, or may get involved in other disputes. And the risk of clashes will remain. In a heated atmosphere, it does not take much to create trouble.

More broadly, it remains unclear how many other Orthodox churches will recognise the new church. Most are still biding their time. Some are divided internally over the matter, and none is in a hurry to choose between Moscow and Constantinople. But their room for manoeuvre seems limited. Since most other churches received their autocephaly from Constantinople, they cannot go too far in questioning Constantinople's right to issue the status. One Greek metropolitan has argued that: "rejecting the way the Patriarchate issued the Tomos of Autocephaly of Ukraine will call into question the autocephaly statuses of the eight current Autocephalous Churches, including the Autocephalous Church of Greece, since they were granted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate." Consequently, no matter how much time it takes, the process of recognition is unavoidable, since autocephaly cannot be revoked. It took 20 years and 50 years respectively for the Romanian and Bulgarian autocephalous churches win recognition. It is likely that the process will be faster for the Ukrainian church.

Regional reverberations

Autocephaly in Ukraine has implications for several other countries with contested church politics.

Moldova: There are two main Orthodox churches in Moldova. The dominant one is the Moldovan Orthodox Church of the Russian Orthodox Church, which claims around 90 percent of church parishes in Moldova. The second is the Bessarabian Metropolis of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which claims approximately 10 percent of church parishes in Romania. The Bessarabian Metropolis was refused registration by state bodies until 2002, when the European Court of Human Rights intervened to demand the authorities legally register it. There is no serious move towards autocephaly in Moldova, as those who oppose Moscow's influence on the church tend to join the Bessarabian Metropolis rather than strive for autocephaly.

North Macedonia and Montenegro

Like its Russian counterpart, the Serbian Orthodox Church is also at risk of losing territory. The Orthodox churches in North Macedonia and Montenegro also aspire to autocephalous status; and the North Macedonian case has an even longer history than that of Ukraine.

Towards the end of the Ottoman rule in the late 19th century, the majority of the Orthodox population on the territory of modern North Macedonia joined the Bulgarian Exarchate, which was established in 1870 but remained unrecognised by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. After the Balkans wars and the first world war, the territory of what is now North Macedonia fell under the Serbian Orthodox Church, which was recognised by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In 1958 the establishment of the Macedonian Orthodox Church was announced, and its autonomous status was recognised by the patriarch in Belgrade in 1959. In 1967 the Macedonian Orthodox Church unilaterally declared autocephaly, but this decision was not endorsed either by Serbia nor by any other Orthodox church. Relationships deteriorated further after the break-up of Yugoslavia. In 2002 the Macedonian and Serbian churches reached an agreement, but this was eventually rejected by the Macedonian side, as the Serbian church was not ready to grant full autocephaly. In May 2018, following the Ukrainian example, the Macedonian church also asked the Ecumenical Patriarchate to affirm its autocephalous status. Currently, the unrecognised Macedonian Orthodox Church–Ohrid Archbishopric controls the territory of North Macedonia almost entirely, although the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric nominally continues to exist as an autonomous church within the Serbian Orthodox Church.

In 1993 the creation of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church was announced. The new church claimed autocephalous status but was not recognised by other churches. Its influence remains limited in Montenegro, where the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral of the Serbian Orthodox

Church remains stronger.

Patriarch Bartholomew strongly rejects parallels between Ukraine and Macedonia or Montenegro. He recently declared: “Many hierarchs of the Serbian Church keep their distance from Ukraine, fearing that what has been done there will be repeated in Montenegro and Ohrid. But we assure you that things are not like that. The Church of Serbia had specific geographical boundaries. The Ecumenical Patriarchate handed over these lands with a Tomos, something that did not happen with the Church of Russia … The difference, therefore, with Ukraine, both in a canonical and ecclesiological way, is that Russia entered and occupied the Metropolis of Kiev without ever having been granted it, while Serbia has gained everything that belongs to it in a canonical and ecclesiological manner. This means that the Ecumenical Patriarchate will not alter the status of the Church of Serbia and its boundaries without any consultation and cooperation.” As a result of developments in Ukraine, however, May 2019 the Serbian church announced its readiness to renew negotiations with the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

In Russia, the nature of the Orthodox church itself may now change: its global influence could decline, and this will have domestic implications. The decision to challenge Constantinople has left it isolated: it is noteworthy that even the churches that boycotted the Pan-Orthodox Council together with the Russian church did not follow Moscow in breaking off relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In future, Moscow may continue to support the anti-Western elements and voices that exist in all Orthodox churches. But isolation reduces its soft power. This makes the church less useful for the Russian state, but at the same time more dependent on it too. Some thinkers in Moscow see the longer-term consequences in fairly gloomy colours: "Now the Russian Orthodox church will lose its last claim to internationality; it will now become Russia-centric and even closer to the state than it was – which [in the longer term could] result in a violent anti-clerical backlash", says one liberal-leaning analyst.[16] Putin's popularity has been declining of late, just as it did at the start of the decade, before the conservative turn. The church could decline along with him.

There currently appears to be little sign that Moscow elites are rallying to the flag in the wake of the Ukrainian breakaway. There is no sympathy for Kirill and his loss of the Ukrainian flock. "He has himself to blame", one prominent foreign policy analyst argues. "If our aim is to save souls, we should just let them go", says another figure, well connected among the higher echelons of political as well as religious Moscow. "De facto they are gone already. They have even stopped being interested in the gossip of the court of the Moscow Patriarch!"[17] As Oscar Wilde said, the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about. When the gossip moves on, you know the power has moved on.

So what, in the end, will the Kremlin actually choose to do? Despite thunderous statements from it and the patriarch, Moscow has not yet decided how to act – and it could keep weighing up its options for the best part of 2019, studying post-election events in Ukraine and examining the opportunities that might arise in this turbulent context. The Moscow Patriarchate has confined its recent official statements to canonical commentary on the situation. This is not out of any reluctance to involve itself in politics, but because a wait-and-see approach is the current order of the day in the Russian capital.

The wider geopolitical context will retain its influence on the Russian government's decisions. It has become frustrated with the Normandy format for regulating the Donbas conflict: the Minsk agreements that were Moscow's big diplomatic victory have proven hard to translate into real gains; but Moscow is not yet ready to admit that Donbas was a misguided political investment that it should simply ditch, making use of any way out that will allow it to save face. If Moscow decides that the new political constellation emerging in Ukraine offers it some openings, it will try to use them – and it may well put the church issue to one side in favour of wider geopolitical gains. In such a situation, the chances of resolving the matter peacefully would grow, perhaps along the lines of the church conflict in Estonia: one could imagine Moscow accepting its partial loss and reaching out to Constantinople, and maybe even Kyiv, to work out the terms for the continued existence of a diminished Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine. In this scenario, the Ukrainian church would come into existence but – as before and in other countries – be not the only church present in the country.

However, if Moscow sees only continued deadlock in political relations with Kyiv, it may look for options to escalate tension between them. Here, it could easily bring the church issue into play. Feelings are running high and revenge has, for now, effectively been suspended. The Russian Orthodox Church is not simply a plaything that the Kremlin can control as it wishes. But a long history of cooperation, overlapping sets of values, and shared rancour at the loss – political and ecclesiastical – of Ukraine means there is more than enough opportunity for them to combine in a wider effort to make life difficult for church and state there. As one Kremlin adviser admitted to the authors of this paper: "The church question is very painful for us. Consequences? They might still come … later."[18]

And yet the single most important consequence has taken place already: Ukraine's split from Russia has deepened further. It started with political, military, and economic matters, and has now extended to religious affairs. Ukraine's autocephalous church is here to stay, and it is one of the results of the war in Donbas. The church's consolidation domestically and internationally will be neither painless nor quick. But in this it will resemble all other autocephalous Orthodox churches, whose emergence was painful, and often came as a result of other wars that first changed political borders – and then transformed ecclesiastical realities.

Chronology of the main steps leading to Ukrainian autocephaly

June 1686: Ecumenical Patriarch Dionysius IV signs a Patriarchal Act for the partial transfer of jurisdiction over the Orthodox Church of Kiev to the Moscow Patriarchate. The act states that every new Metropolitan of Kiev should be elected by the local church, while the Moscow Patriarch received the right to ordain the elected metropolitan. The metropolitan is obliged to commemorate the name of the Ecumenical Patriarch, recognising him as the head of the church.

28 October 1990: The Moscow Patriarchate grants the Ukrainian Exarchate the status of a self-governing church under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. This leads to the establishment of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate.

25-26 June 1992: A Church Council in Kyiv leads to the establishment of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate. The newly established church is proclaimed schismatic by the Moscow Patriarchate and has remained unrecognised by any other Orthodox church.

19-26 June 2016: The Pan-Orthodox Council takes place in Crete, convened by the Ecumenical Patriarch. All Orthodox churches were present, with the exception of those of Russia, Antioch (Syria), Bulgaria, and Georgia.

April 2018: The Ukrainian president and parliament send appeals to Patriarch Bartholomew requesting autocephaly for the Orthodox church in Ukraine. The request was supported by two of the three Orthodox churches in Ukraine, but not by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate.

31 August 2018: Patriarch Kirill makes a visit to Istanbul from Moscow and meets Ecumenical Bartholomew in an unsuccessful last-ditch attempt to prevent autocephaly.

11 October 2018: A synod meeting in Istanbul chaired by Bartholomew decides to proceed to the granting of autocephaly to the church of Ukraine. As a preliminary step, the synod resumed the jurisdiction of Constantinople over the territory of Ukraine, lifted the excommunication imposed on the leaders of the Kyivan Patriarchate church and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church by the Moscow Patriarchate, and restored their "hierarchical or priestly rank". This opened the way for a unification Church Council between the two churches and the granting of the autocephaly.

15 October 2018: The Moscow Patriarchate breaks off with the Ecumenical Patriarchate by formally announcing a schism. This means that clerics of the Moscow Patriarchate are forbidden from taking part in communion, liturgies, and any other sacrament in which a cleric of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is also taking part. The Ecumenical Patriarch is removed from the diptychs of the Moscow Patriarchate and his name is no longer mentioned in the liturgies served by Russian clerics. The Moscow Patriarchate also breaks off participation in any episcopal assemblies, theological discussions, multilateral commissions, and any other structures that are chaired or co-chaired by representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Lay members of the Russian Orthodox Church are advised to abstain from taking part in liturgies served by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, including refraining from visiting Mount Athos.

15 December 2018: The new Orthodox Church of Ukraine is established by a Church Council in Kyiv. The bulk of the Council's 192 delegates come from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyivan Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate does not officially take part, but two of its bishops attend. The 39-year-old Metropolitan Epiphanius is elected head of the new church with the title "Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine". Filaret, leader of the former unrecognised Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyivan Patriarchate, receives the title “Honorary Patriarch” in the newly established church. The position carries no real power.

5 January 2019: Bartholomew signs *tomos*, officially granting autocephaly to the freshly formed Orthodox Church of Ukraine. In its broader meaning, *tomos* is a decree of a head of an autocephalous Orthodox church on certain matters. In its narrow meaning, it is the document with which the mother church grants autocephalous or autonomous status to another church in its jurisdiction.

6 January 2019: Patriarch Epiphanius receives *tomos* and takes it to Kyiv, where autocephaly is celebrated with the liturgy.

3 February 2019: Epiphanius is enthroned as Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine. Traditional practice in the Orthodox world is that, after the enthronement, the new head of the church sends his irenic (peace) messages to the heads of the other Orthodox churches, which begins the process of recognition.

Who’s who in the story of Ukrainian autocephaly

Kirill (Gundyaev), Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus’

Born in 1946 in Leningrad, Kirill was tonsured as a monk in 1969 by Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov). In 1971 he was appointed as the representative of the Moscow Patriarchate to the World Council of Churches. Ordained as a bishop in 1976, he became Archbishop of Smolensk and Kaliningrad in 1988 and was appointed chair of the department for external relations of the Russian church in 1989. On 27 January 2009, he was elected as Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus’; on 1 February 2009, he was enthroned.

Hilarion (Alfeyev), Metropolitan of Volokolamsk and chair of the department for external relations of the Russian church

Born in 1966 in Moscow, Hilarion studied to be a classical musician and graduated from Moscow State Conservatoire in 1986. He was tonsured as a monk in 1987 and entered a monastery in Vilnius. After graduating from the Moscow Theological Seminary in 1989 and the Moscow Theological Academy in 1991, he joined the department for external relations of the Russian church. In 2002 he was ordained as a bishop. In 2009 he was appointed Bishop of Volokolamsk, minister to the Patriarch of Moscow, and chair of the department for external relations of the Russian church. In 2010 he was elevated to the position of Metropolitan.

Tikhon (Shevkunov), Metropolitan of Pskov and Porkhov

Born in 1958 in Moscow, Tikhon graduated from the screenwriting school of the Institute of Cinematography in Moscow. Tonsured as a monk in 1991, Tikhon was appointed *hegumen* (abbot) of the revived Sretensky Monastery in Moscow in 1995. He became famous for making the monastery one of the centres of revived church life in Moscow, organising the construction of the new Cathedral to New Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian Church, and creating the Sretensky Theological Seminary. In 2008 he released the film "Death of an Empire: The Lesson of Byzantium". In 2011 he published the book "Everyday Saints and Other Stories", which became a bestseller. In 2015 he was ordained as a bishop, appointed head of the Western Vicariate of the city of Moscow, and became chair of the Patriarchate Council for Culture. He was elevated to the rank of Metropolitan of Pskov and Porkhov in 2018.

Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch

Born in 1940 on the North Aegean island of Imbros (Gockceada in Turkish), Bartholomew graduated in theology from the Patriarchal Theological school/Halki Seminary in 1961 and later pursued his postgraduate studies at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome. Ordained as a priest in 1968, he was appointed as director of the newly established Patriarchal Office by Patriarch Demetrius in 1972. In 1973 he was ordained as a bishop and as Metropolitan of Philadelphia, and in 1990 he became Metropolitan of Chalcedon. Elected Ecumenical Patriarch in 1991, he became famous as the "green patriarch" for his active positions on the protection of the environment. A proponent of the ecumenical dialogue, he established good relations with the Roman pontiffs and leaders of Protestant denominations. In 2016 he convoked the Pan-Orthodox Council in Crete.

Filaret (Denysenko), Honorary Patriarch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyivan Patriarchate

Born in 1929 in the Donetsk region, Filaret graduated from the Moscow Theological Academy and was tonsured as a monk in 1950. He became a close associate of Moscow Patriarch Alexy I, was ordained as a bishop in 1962, and was elevated to the position of Archbishop of Kiev in 1966. This made him one of the most influential hierarchs in the Russian church. In 1979 Filaret was appointed as chair of the Council of the Russian Church for Christian Unity. Regarded as one of the serious candidates for the patriarchal throne in 1990, he lost out to Patriarch Alexy II. He was the leading figure in the establishment of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyivan Patriarchate in 1992. In July 1995 he was elected patriarch of that church. The Moscow Patriarchate did not recognise the church and Filaret was defrocked. At the unification Church Council on 15 December 2018, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyivan Patriarchate merged with the newly created Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which had received autocephalous status from Constantinople. At the same council, Filaret received the title "Honorary Patriarch" (or Patriarch Emeritus).

Epiphanius (Dumenko), Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine

Born in 1979, Epiphanius graduated from Kyiv Theological Seminary

Academy and from Kyiv Theological Academy. Tonsured as a monk in 2007, he was ordained as a bishop and elected bishop of Vyshhorod in 2009. He was promoted to archbishop in 2012, and to metropolitan in 2013. At the unification Church Council of the Ukrainian church, Epiphanius was elected Metropolitan of Kyiv and Primate of the newly established Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

Onufriy (Berezovsky), Metropolitan of Kyiv of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate

Born in 1944, Onufriy was tonsured as a monk in 1971. He graduated from Moscow Theological Academy in 1988, was ordained Bishop of Chernivtsi and Bukovyna in 1992, and was elevated to archbishop in 1994 and to metropolitan in 2000. In 2014 he was elected head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate, with the title Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine. As head of the church, Onufriy succeeded the popular Metropolitan Volodymyr.

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the people who were interviewed for this paper and who helped us to understand the different political and religious aspects of the situation. As many individuals talked confidentially, we have withheld the names, but you know who you are! Special thanks go to the All-Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Constantinople, Patriarch Filaret in Kyiv, and officials from the Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

We are also grateful to our ECFR colleagues: Adam Harrison for competent editing, and Joanna Hosa for logistical support.

As always, all errors belong the authors only.

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[1] ECFR interview with Alexey Levinson, Moscow, November 2018.

[2] ECFR interview, Moscow, March 2019.

[3] ECFR interview, Moscow, November 2018.

[4] Andrew Jack, Inside Putin's Russia: Can There Be Reform Without Democracy? Oxford University Press, 2006.

[5] ECFR interview with Ksenia Luchenko, Moscow, December 2018.

[6] ECFR interview, Moscow, March 2019.

[7] ECFR interview, Moscow, November 2018.

[8] ECFR interview, Moscow, November 2018.

[9] Meeting between ECFR and a high-ranking church official held under the Chatham House rule, Moscow, March 2019.

[10] ECFR interview with Andrei Kuraev, Moscow, December 2018.

[11] ECFR interview, Moscow, December 2018.

[12] ECFR interview with Patriarch Bartholomew, Istanbul, January 2019.

[13] Interview with ECFR, Moscow, December 2018.

[14] ECFR interview with Patriarch Bartholomew, Istanbul, January 2019.

[15] ECFR interview with Patriarch Filaret, Kyiv, October 2018.

[16] ECFR interview with a Russian analyst, Moscow, November 2018.

[17] Interviews with ECFR, Moscow, October 2018.

[18] Conversation with ECFR, Moscow, December 2018.

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