

CHARLES UNIVERSITY



UNIVERZITA KARLOVA

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies

Department of Political Science

Bachelor's Thesis

2023

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**Comparative Analysis of Russian Religious Soft Power in
Georgia and Ukraine Throughout the Past 15 Years**

Bachelor's Thesis

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Year of the defence: 2023

Declaration:

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 03.05.2023

Elene Kobakhidze

Bibliographic note

Kobakhidze, Elene. "Comparative Analysis of Russian Religious Soft Power in Georgia and Ukraine Throughout the Past 15 Years". [Unpublished Bachelor's Thesis]. Charles University. 2023.

Length of the Thesis: 91,443 characters

Abstract

This research analyses Russia's religious soft power strategy in Ukraine and Georgia, focusing on differences in the presence and exercise of soft power within the two states. The study employs a comparative approach and uses Joseph Nye's concept of soft power as the main analytical framework. The primary instruments of Russia's religious soft power are identified as the Russian Orthodox Church, its ties with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), and the Georgian Orthodox Church in respective countries, as well as organisations financed by or affiliated with Russia. The research finds that despite the similarity between Russia's approaches in both countries, at present Georgia is more susceptible to Russia's religious soft power.

Keywords

Soft power, religion, Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Orthodoxy, Church, comparative analysis

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Adrian Briksu, Ph.D., for his guidance, support and expertise throughout the process of my research. His feedback and constructive criticism have been a crucial factor for improving the quality of my work and he was always ready to help. I am very grateful for his patience and encouragement.

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Abbreviations

CSO- Civil Society Organisations

NGO- Non-governmental organisations

NATO- North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

UN- United Nations

EU- the European Union

U.S.- the United States of America

RF- the Russian Federation

UOC MP- Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)

UOC KP- Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate)

UCU- Orthodox Church of Ukraine

GOC- Georgian Orthodox Church

ROC- Russian Orthodox Church

FRM- Russkiy Mir Foundation

EI- Eurasian Institute

EC- Eurasian Choice

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The thesis aims to analyse how Russia conducts its religious soft power strategy in Ukraine and Georgia and focus on the differences that arise in the presence and exercise of soft power within the two states. To identify the differences, a comparative approach with fixed variables has been used. The goal of the research is to analyse modern trends and developments, therefore, the approximate timeframe of the thesis is taken as 15 years (as of 2023). The concept of soft power developed by Joseph Nye has been used as the main analytical framework of the research. The primary instruments of Russia's religious soft power are identified as the Russian Orthodox Church, its ties with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and the Georgian Orthodox Church in respective countries, as well as organisations financed by or affiliated with Russia.

The use of the concept of soft power is most often attributed to the Western world, especially to the United States and the European Union. The power to attract and spread cultural influence across the world is seen as a tool for increasing the attractiveness of one's perception globally. However, the use of such co-optive tactics is not exclusive to the West. Russia, one of the largest global players and a clear opponent of the West, has followed suit in employing a similar foreign policy strategy. As the colour revolutions began, Russia found itself bereft of willing allies. The Westwards direction was especially visible in Georgia and Ukraine. Therefore, apart from the hard power which Russia has been exercising in these two countries, soft power has been established as a crucial tool for gaining power and striving towards internal dominance. Russian soft power can be seen in various manifestations, including religion, and Orthodoxy in particular. Russia's usage of Orthodoxy as soft power is not exclusive to Georgia and Ukraine and can be extended to other countries such as the

Balkans, Moldova, Greece, etc. Nonetheless, the geopolitical status quo highlights the importance of discussing Russia's influence in Georgia and Ukraine within a single framework. Despite the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the 2014 Crimean Crisis, Russia still seeks active measures of attraction to shift neighbouring interests in its direction. The thesis argues that the extent of Russia's soft power in Georgia and Ukraine varies according to country-specific factors and shows that although Russia has employed similar approaches in both countries, Georgia is currently more susceptible to Russia's soft power.

The first chapter of the thesis contains the introduction to the research, a review of the existing literature on the topic and presents the research objectives. The second chapter focuses on the methodological framework of the research, describing the qualitative and comparative methods, choice of the timeframe, sources, limitations and ethical considerations. The third chapter describes the analytical framework of the research, presenting the concept of soft power by Joseph Nye as the primary source and continuing with alternative approaches provided by his critics. Further, the Russian conception of soft power is discussed, after which the author identifies the main instruments of Russia's religious soft power strategy in Orthodox states. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the research. The findings on both Ukraine and Georgia are preceded by brief historical backgrounds on Orthodoxy and Russian presence in both countries. The findings discuss the activities of the ROC and respective Churches, and the activities of organisations, and separately focus on Russia's usage of Orthodoxy for increasing attractiveness during times of military conflict. The fifth chapter synthesises the findings and discusses the different factors influencing Russia's utilisation of a common Orthodox identity, as well as the differentiation of instruments and intensity of involvement.

1.2 Literature Review and Research Objectives

The available literature on the topic of Russia's use of religion as a soft power instrument in Ukraine and Georgia produces sufficient data for forming a base for additional research. The research primarily focuses separately on the two countries. Serhiy Zdioruk and Haran and Olexiy Haran in their research "The Russian Orthodox Church as an Instrument of Russia's Foreign Policy towards Ukraine" (2012) provide a deep overview of the Church and religious organisations as instruments of foreign policy in Ukraine, discussing both the historical background and the modern developments. Further literature examines the ROC's soft power during the 2022 war in Ukraine (Klip and Pankhurst, 2022). In the case of Georgia, Salome Minesashvili in her article "Common Faith in Scrutiny: Orthodoxy as soft power in Russia-Georgia Relations" (2017), discusses Russia's use of culture and religion as a way of targeting the highly religious society of Georgia. Minesashvili points out how the GOC connects liberal values to political actors such as the West in a negative context. The West is viewed as an "other", aiming at diminishing traditional Georgian values. The fundamentalist segment of the Church carries positive attitudes towards the Russian Orthodox Church, regarding it as the spiritual patron. Minesashvili contends that the GOC may be used as a soft power tool by Russia. Further literature extends the role of the Georgian Dream ruling party in increasing Georgia's vulnerability to Russia's soft power, including religious and ideological (Shanidze, 2021). Victoria Hudson in her research "The Georgian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate: Tools of Russian Soft Power?" (2019) suggests that referring to the GOC and the UOC MP as 'tools' may be problematic due to the deeply nuanced nature of the issue. Although Hudson finds that the Churches may often promote the same narrative as the Russian Federation, she argues that labelling them as tools would be simplifying the issue, as tools carry an institutional connotation, whereas Russian influence on the Churches, more so in Georgia

than in Ukraine, is of co-optive nature. Nonetheless, Hudson posits that the credibility of the Church as a national institution offers the pro-Russian actors within the Church to act as enforcers of the narrative of the Russian Federation. George Soroka in the article “International Relations by Proxy? The Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church” (2022) argues that despite the cooperation in the promotion of Orthodoxy and traditional values, the Church possesses its agenda, which does not always coincide with the interests of the Russian state. The influence of the ROC on the Russian foreign policy in Ukraine and Georgia is discussed by Rev. Fr. Dr. Daniel P. Payne (2015).

Sufficient literature has been dedicated to describing the development and the primary goals of Russia’s religious soft power in the countries of the near-abroad. Emphasising the increase in the ROC’s significance after Putin’s arrival to power, Martin Solik and Vladimir Baar in the article “Religious Component in a State’s Foreign Policy. A Case Study of the Russian Orthodox Church” (2020) argue that the ROC and the Russian Federation established as two complementary institutions that had the same sphere of interest- the “near abroad”. The positioning of Russia as a moral axis for its neighbours meant the promotion of the traditional, conservative values, for which the Church stood for. Therefore, ultimately the rhetoric of the ROC and RF merged into a single, anti-Western stream. The ROC, as well as other organisations and structures created over the past several decades, serve as tools of soft power and diplomacy. Their main agenda is the prevention of the integration of Western values in the regional sphere of influence. Several other authors further extend on other instruments Russia has used in its ideological soft power strategy, namely NGOs and State-funded organisations such as the Russkiy Mir Foundation (Meister, 2016; Sergunin and Karabeshkin, 2015; Bogomolov, 2012). Tengiz Pkhaladze in the publication “Autocracy, the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church –“How Much is Opium of the People?” (2012), discusses the development of religion as a foreign policy tool throughout Russian history. It

is stated that the basis for the implementation of religion by Russia as a security-oriented institute was made by Peter I, later developed by Stalin during the USSR, preserved by Yeltsin and continued by Putin, with the promotion of the idea of the *Russkiy Mir*.

Despite a sizeable amount of literature available on not only religious and cultural soft power, but also the application of the concept to Georgia and Ukraine, an extensive discussion of the two cases within a single framework is missing. The literature identifies various sources, tools, effects and the extent of the Russian influence, however, the aforementioned are not analysed from a comparative perspective. The only comprehensive comparative study of Russia's use of Orthodoxy in Ukraine and Georgia is the one produced by Victoria Hudson, nonetheless, Hudson focuses her research on the role of the Churches and does not extend to other relevant actors (Hudson, 2019). Moreover, the research was produced in 2018, therefore, does not include significant development such as the establishment of an autocephalous Ukrainian Church and the 2022 Russian aggression in Ukraine. These factors will be considered in this study.

Using the comparative framework in the context of Russia's religious soft power in Georgia and Ukraine is useful due to the similar context of the two countries. Both countries are majority Orthodox nations within the sphere of Russia's interest. This interest has been pursued not only through the means of soft power, which will be discussed in this research but also through hard power (military aggression). Since both countries have been on an explicitly pro-European path, thus distancing from Russia, the analysis of Russia's use of religious and cultural attraction within the two countries will yield results regarding Russia's ability to increase or maintain some hold on Georgia and Ukraine. Comparing the cases of Georgia and Ukraine will aid the research of several issues, such as the analysis of the role of religion in shaping Russia's foreign policy and the factors that determine the effectiveness of religious soft power. The research also offers an analysis of how context can influence the

outcomes and the strategies themselves. Further, the research may be useful for policymakers, both within Georgia and Ukraine, to gain a deeper understanding of country-specific nuances of Russia's approach and take the information into account when developing relevant policies.

The research focuses on the differences that may exist between Georgia and Ukraine in regards to the modern Russian Orthodox soft power, more specifically approximately 15 years (as of 2023). Further, the research will entail the potential differences in the ends of Russia's means, the varying measures which are taken by the ROC towards the two countries, and the effectiveness of said measures.

1.3 Research Questions and Hypothesis

The thesis aims to answer the following research question:

To what extent does Russia exercise soft power through religion in the cases of Ukraine and Georgia, and how similar is the soft power in said countries?

The thesis hypothesises that the practice of Russia's religious soft power in Ukraine and Georgia yields various country-specific differences.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Qualitative approach

The presented research undertakes a qualitative approach, meaning that it aims at explaining social phenomena which cannot be expressed numerically. This method provides the researcher with an opportunity to analyse the issue deeply and requires an interpretive approach to the collected non-numerical data. By studying target groups or places, the

qualitative method aims at grasping the social life of the subjects (Haradhan, 2018, 2). The units of analysis of this research are Ukraine and Georgia in the context of Russia's foreign policy. The qualitative analysis of the data includes the identification of key ideas and emerging themes that relate to the research objective formulated by the author (ibid., 16). The qualitative method highlights the provides unique research opportunities such as intense immersion of the researcher into the issue, the ability to obtain unexpected insights, and increased creativity and flexibility of the research (ibid., 18).

2.2 Comparative method

The research uses the comparative method to compare the strategies of Russia's religious soft power in Ukraine and Georgia and detect differences in the approach to the two states. The comparative method is used for analysing two or more cases and finding similarities or differences (Esser, 2017, 2). The comparative method is not used for measurement, but for determining empirical relationships between variables (Lijphart, 1971, 683). The determination of said relationships among key variables requires the introduction of controlled variables, meaning variables that are held constant throughout the research (ibid., 683). Moreover, the analysis of all cases must be subject to the same theoretical framework and a common dimension of comparison must be developed (Esser, 2017, 3). In the analysis of Russia's religious soft power the use of the Orthodox Church and common identity as a means of exerting influence and promoting Russian interests in both countries can be established as the constant variable. The aim of the comparative analysis will be the identification of differentiating elements in the two cases. Both cases will be analysed through the framework of soft power and will be subject to the same research structure, i.e. in-depth research of actors respective to country. The selection of the cases was determined by how similarly they have been affected by Russia's foreign policy in the timeframe of the

research and the shared country-specific factors that incentivise Russia to use religion as an instrument of soft power in the two states. The analysis is done by collecting primary and secondary sources, as well as conducting open-ended interviews with specialists on the issue, applying the analytical framework to the retrieved data and conducting an original synthesising analysis.

2.3 Selection of time period

The selection of the timeframe of the research was determined by the key uniting variables of the Ukrainian and Georgian cases. The author of the research aimed at conducting a study of fairly recent developments of Russia's use of Orthodoxy as a soft power instrument, nonetheless, to maintain the consistency of relevant factors across cases, the research had to cover Russia's military aggression in both countries. Therefore, an approximation of fifteen years as the timeframe of the research was selected to include the 2008 Russo-Georgian war.

2.4 Sources

The majority of the research was conducted by exploring secondary sources such as articles, collections of articles, research papers, case studies and books. When dealing with secondary sources, the author controlled the credibility, authority, relevance and objectivity of the data to maintain a high quality of the research. Apart from scientific research, the data has also been gathered from various news websites and information portals. Such secondary sources were used for the factual content. The opinions expressed in non-scientific sources have not been used for this research. The sources of primary research were official documents, research reports, statements, recorded interviews and personal writings of relevant actors. For assisting the research with the data on public attitudes and tendencies,

reports from various research centres were used, e.g. data from the reports by the International Republican Institute. Further research was conducted through open-ended interviews with professionals and relevant figures. The interviews entailed communication with five people, out of which two academics and one cleric represented the Georgian case, and two academics spoke about the Ukrainian case. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions and during the conversation, additional themes and issues were brought up and discussed by both the author of the research and the interviewees. Complementary data gathered from the interviews have been included in the research.

2.5 Ethical considerations

Since the research process involved the direct participation of individuals, the author has followed the principles of the consensual participation of the interviewees, explaining the terms of the interview, granting requests for confidentiality and accurately representing the data gathered from the interviews.

2.6 Limitations

There are several limitations of the research. First of all, due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, several Russian websites have stopped functioning inside the EU. The author was only able to obtain material from Russian websites during the period spent outside of the EU. Moreover, due to the distress of the Ukrainian population, the author faced difficulty finding Ukrainian respondents willing to participate in interviews regarding the topic. Further, despite language proficiency in Russian and Georgian, the author was limited in the exploration of Ukrainian content as a large part of it was written in Ukrainian. As a result, the author had access to a highly asymmetric amount of information in regard to the two cases.

Chapter 3: Analytical Framework

3.1 Concept of Soft Power:

The concept of soft power was popularised by Joseph Nye in his book “Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power” (1990). The concept bases itself on the power of attraction, when the state can co-opt, in contrast with the known coercive measures, such as military power. Nye identifies three resources a state must possess to effectively use soft power: attractive culture, political values and their fulfilment, and foreign policies that are perceived as legitimate and morally authoritative (Nye, 2004, 11). As the world is becoming more globalised and interdependence is increasing, soft power is growing in importance and effectiveness, especially as wielding military (hard) power has become a relatively unpopular way of achieving one’s foreign policy interests (ibid., 30). Importantly, Nye emphasises that soft power is a “staple of daily democratic politics” (ibid., 6) and that, in general, “it is easier to attract people to democracy than to coerce them to be democratic” (ibid., 17). Nye further posits that the effectiveness of a state’s soft power depends on its legitimacy and credibility, as well as on generating transnational networks and alliances. Essentially, the world of politics transforms into a battle for attractiveness, and those who have better communication channels and align closer with accepted norms, prevail (ibid., 31). Nye highlights the necessity of public and multilateral diplomacy, as well as cultural and educational exchanges as a means of aiding states’ soft power capabilities.

Mattern (2005) critically evaluates Nye's soft power concept by abandoning the idea that soft power should be contrasted with hard power. On the contrary, he argues that soft power should be viewed as merely a continuation of hard power and introduces the idea of 'representational force'. Mattern pursues a constructivist approach and argues that Nye's conceptualisation of soft power dismisses the socially produced nature of attractiveness. He argues that attraction in global politics is produced through “verbal fighting” (Mattern, 2005,

596). According to Mattern, verbal fighting is a communication strategy which bullies the audience into an agreement with the author's construction of reality by closing off the audience's options by constructing a threat. He refers to such an approach as "representational force" (ibid., 586). Therefore, ultimately Mattern denies the basis for Nye's distinction of soft and hard power through coercion and argues that attraction can be conceived through coercive measures, resulting in soft power ceasing to be as 'soft' (ibid., 612).

Initially, the concept of soft power had been discussed from the perspective of large, Western states. Nye himself placed the main emphasis on the U.S. soft power. They were viewed as the primary utilisers of such power in the international arena. However, the research on the usage of soft power by other states, and the subsequent variation in the methods and objectives of soft power progressively increased. Lee (2011) extends Nye's concept and highlights the problems that arise when trying to define soft power. Lee specifically critiques Nye's overemphasis on soft power as "the superpower's means to success in world politics" and explores how soft power is not always aimed at global attractiveness but rather may find its niche of attractiveness (Lee, 2011, 16). Further, through the case studies of East-Asian states, Lee explores how non-state actors can exercise soft power. Whereas hard power is exercised exclusively by states, soft power can be used by non-state actors such as NGOs, private individuals, civil society, etc. The public diplomacy that is essential for soft power cannot be reliant solely on a nation's cultural attractiveness (ibid., 28). Nye also extends on non-state actors' ability to exercise soft power (Nye, 2004, 90-97), nonetheless, Lee critiques Nye's overall government-centric approach to the concept.

Vuving (2009) extends the issue of measuring soft power by discussing the dilemma of power as resources. He introduces 'power currencies'- properties that induce attraction, thus yield power (Vuving, 2009, p. 5). Vuving identifies three currencies- benignity,

brilliance and beauty. Benignity creates soft power through the production of gratitude and sympathy, encouraging multilateralism, cooperation and reciprocity. Brilliance generates soft power through exemplary performance, resulting in admiration, which can translate into either the myth of invincibility or imitation by the audience. Beauty generates soft power through a compelling representation of the values, culture and ideals of the audience, which can translate into legitimacy, and at times, even moral authority (ibid., 7-8). Vuving further lists several tools of soft power employed by states, for example, promoting the culture and values of the state that can promote positive images and propagate myths (ibid., 10).

3.2 Russian Soft Power and its Religious Dimension

By the end of the 20th century, the international order was closer than ever to a unipolar model headed by the United States. Russia's influence on the post-Soviet space was waning, especially in the light of the Colour Revolutions in Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004 and Kyrgyzstan in 2005. Such trends incentivised Russia to take measures to recoup the ideological pull in the Westward-oriented post-Soviet region and turn towards adopting a civilisational soft power strategy (Sergunin and Karabeshkin, 2015, 349). Russia's soft power strategy developed as a micro-dimensional counter-measure against the U.S. and European soft power, meaning that Russia targeted not a global audience, but carefully selected auditory that would be most responsive to its narratives (Laruelle, 2021, 15-16).

When it comes to Russia's soft power in the region, Makarychev (2013) identifies two most important dimensions: ideational and institutional. The ideational dimension encompasses building an attractive vision of the future in the region. The institutional dimension focuses on the soft power engagement mechanisms that Russia utilises. Although it is often stated that Russia misinterprets the very idea of soft power and reverts to habitual propagandistic practices as its quasi-soft power, Makarychev suggests that Russia does rely

on normative arguments. It is the normative arguments that shape the nature of Russia's soft power not as regional, but as civilisational (Makarychev, 2013, 40-43). The main challenge of Russia's civilisational soft power is "globalisation" and "Westernisation", which creates the need for the existence of Russia's own cultural and traditional space that will not be penetrated and influenced by external forces (Curanovic, 2012, 6). Essentially, Russia bases its soft power ideology on opposing the West- morally, traditionally, culturally, and politically.

Korejba (2015) identifies four key aims of the soft power politics employed by Russia: informing the population, forming the Russian image, reforming the media space and transforming the mental and cultural identity. The strategies of informing the population target the overwhelming access to Western or Western-oriented information by inserting an alternative, Russian perspective, which, as a consequence, is expected to be legitimised and internalised by the audiences. The formation of the Russian image follows the establishment of communication with its neighbours. The goal is to establish a positive idea of Russia as an ally. It presents a peaceful and friendly version of itself to those who view it positively and a tough and formidable version to potential enemies. Media is a large component of the aforementioned efforts, as it counters Western "disinformation" as a short-term goal and inserts the Russian "true" narrative as a long-term goal. Finally, the largest pull is generated by developing an ideological and cultural affiliation with its neighbours. The creation of the positive idea of Russia is primarily pursued by creating a negative perception of the novel alternative power (the West) and the bolstering and re-establishment of the existing ties and commonalities (Korejba, 2015, 105-109). All of these goals can be achieved through utilising a common religious denominator with the near abroad- Orthodoxy. As voiced by Vladimir Putin: "Today, we no longer have labour collectives, party units and organisations we used to have during the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, there are no educators or mentors.

This means that no one but religion can convey universal values to people” (Pkhaldze, 2012, 4).

Historically, Russia has had the ambition to act as the defender of the Orthodox faith. In the second half of the 18th century, Russia was declared the defender of all eastern Christians according to the Kuchuck-Kainarji peace treaty. The treaty solidified Russia's ambitions of transforming into the centre of the Christian East and the successor to the Byzantine Empire. Russia was given the function of defender and spreader of the Orthodox Christian faith, and the defence of the faith became an essential aspect of Russian imperialism. Therefore, the territorial expansion was viewed as messiahship and the protection of Orthodoxy (Kokrashvili, 2015, p. 63). Although Russia is essentially a secular country with a relatively low religious population, its perception as an Orthodox power can attract other Orthodox states, thus suggesting that the securitisation of Orthodox identity is intended as a part of foreign policy¹.

3.3 Sources of Russian Religious Soft Power: the ROC and the Russkiy Mir

In 2012, in his article “Global security can be achieved only together with Russia”, Putin defined soft power as “tools and methods of reaching foreign policy objectives without using weapons, through informational and other sources of influence”. He continued to write that soft power is, “unfortunately”, often used for “the manipulation of public consciousness and direct involvement into the internal politics of sovereign states.” He especially condemned the financing and utilisation of organisations and other structures by “foreign forces”, followed by strictly denying Russia’s usage of such tactics².

¹ James Sherr, interview by author, March 21 2023.

² Putin, “Russia will not become a reason for new discrimination against the Church”.

In Russia, the Orthodox Church has always been an arm of the state. The only exception was the so-called 'time of troubles' when state authority in Muscovy briefly collapsed and the Church effectively became the authority after that period ended. Later on, Peter the Great abolished the Patriarchate in Moscow altogether and transformed it into a Department of State. During the Soviet period, the Church was heavily controlled and penetrated by the KGB, and the current Patriarch Kirill is known to have been recruited by the KGB. Notably, in 1992, when Kirill was still a Metropolitan, he gave a speech to an assembly of 5000 Russian soldiers on matters of state, politics, history and culture. His narrative was quite similar to what we associate today with Putin³. Therefore, the close relationship between Patriarch Kirill and Vladimir Putin is not surprising. Putin and ROC's cooperation had solidified in the aftermath of the provocative performance by the punk rock band Pussy Riot that insulted the Church and Putin. The members were put on trial and given sentences. Following the arrests, the Duma passed a law criminalising offending religious institutions. Since this precedent, the Duma has passed several laws of anti-liberal nature, further solidifying itself as the protector of the ROC (Stoeckl, 2017, 273). Consequently, the ROC has been allowed to propagate a severely conservative ideology. Such ideology, based on the Orthodox faith, is promoted by Russia throughout its civilisational space (Solik and Baar, 2020, 186).

The Russkiy Mir or the Russian World concept is rooted in the civilisational approach of soft power outlined by Makarychev (2013). The concept of Russkiy Mir had been defined as a "community of Orthodox Christians living in the unity of faith, traditions and customs" and existed as early as the beginning of the 19th century, however, it was reformulated by political technologist Pyotr Shchedrovitsky and later on permeated the official narrative of the ROC and the Russian state. Particularly, in 2009, Patriarch Kirill spoke about how the

³ Sherr, interview.

Russkiy Mir should counter globalisation, emphasising spirituality over national or ethnic divisions (Petro, 2015). Putin primarily viewed the concept as a way of increasing influence in neighbouring states and consolidating Russia's power globally through a political understanding of the concept, going on to establish the Russkiy Mir Fund in 2007. However, he soon adopted the ROC's religious perspective of the concept- promoting traditional values (particularly opposing Western moral domination) and being present in the territories of interest of both the state and the Church. Although a specific territorial delimitation has not been made, the scope of Russkiy Mir's targets includes Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, as well as other Orthodox nations such as Georgia, Greece, and Bulgaria, which also fall under Russia's civilisational approach (Payne, 2015, 67). The term "compatriots", which is often used when defining the Russkiy Mir, refers to the people living within sovereign countries who, in one way or another, belong to the Russian Civilisation. Therefore, the target audience of the Russkiy Mir concept is not only ethnic Russians living abroad or Russian-speaking populations, but rather a much larger, undefined segment of people ⁴.

The Russkiy Mir Foundation's main goals are popularising the Russian language and culture and supporting programs for the study of Russian abroad. The official website lists 40 countries in which the foundation operates. The Foundation is financed by the Russian Federation and public donations. As per the official website of the foundation, the target audience is not only Russian citizens or ethnic Russians but also Russian speakers and those who would like to engage with Russian history and culture. The activities that the foundation carries out support these objectives. The platform the foundation uses Russian centres that allow a country-specific approach. The Russian Orthodox Church is an active supporter of the foundation and cooperates regularly ⁵. After the establishment of the Russkiy Mir Foundation in 2007, "Rossotrudnichestvo" (Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of

⁴ Sherr, interview.

⁵ Rondeli Foundation, "Russkiy Mir Foundation".

Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation) was also established. Its activities are often confusing for partners in foreign countries due to the lack of division of responsibilities with the Russkiy Mir Foundation (Sergunin and Karabeshkin, 2015, 355). The agency's goals are cultural diplomacy, improving humanitarian influence and assisting compatriots (Masiyenko et al., 2022, 7). The agency also uses religious narratives and cooperates with religious entities, although not to the same extent as the Russkiy Mir Foundation. Both entities aim at casting a cultural influence in target countries to relativise Russian aggression (Masiyenko et al., 2022, 50-54).

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.1 The Case of Georgia

4.1.1 Historical Background on Georgia

The formation of the Georgian autocephalous Church took place in the second half of the fifth century, somewhere between 467-488. With the official declaration of Christianity, Georgia's Western orientation had been made clear (Tkeshelashvili, 2012, 27-30). As Orthodoxy was established as an essential part of Georgian identity, the protection of religion became crucial. Georgia faced an especially challenging period after the 15th century (ibid., 147), as the united Georgian kingdom was disintegrated into small formations that were ruled by Ottomans and Persians (Morkva, 2021, 161). Due to the constant fight against Islamic subordination, Russia's use of the "co-religious" factor was attractive to Georgia (Kokrashvili, 2015, 64). Consequently, King Erekle II, the ruler of the Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti requested Russian protectorate and signed the Treaty of Georgievsk, which entailed the loss of some rights of the sovereign Georgian state in exchange for Russia's protection against enemies (Morkva, 2021, 162). The terms of the treaty were broken and in 1801 Russia

annexed the Georgian kingdoms. Following the annexation, Erekle II's son, Patriarch Anton II was targeted by the Russian imperial and religious authorities and was severely persecuted, followed by the termination of the autocephaly of the Georgian Church. Shortly after, Russia started the Russification process through appointing exarchs as rulers of the Georgian Church (Tkeshelashvili, 2012, 173-187). The Georgian Church remained as an exarch of the Russian Church for 106 years, during which the situation in the Georgian Churches significantly deteriorated- Churches were robbed, all traces of Georgia were erased, the clergy was persecuted, etc. (ibid., 192). Despite Russia's efforts, the Georgians did not come to terms with the loss of autocephaly and continued to oppose Tsarist policies. During the 1907-1905 revolution, the issue of restoring autocephaly was raised, which was quenched by Russia but was supported by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (Bubulashvili, 2020, 11-13). As a result, the autocephaly of Georgia was restored in 1917, without the recognition of the Russian Orthodox Church which took place in 1943 (Tkeshelashvili, 2012, 226-235).

Despite the Soviet Union's atheism and opposition to the Church, the Georgian Church did not cease to exist, however, was believed to be infiltrated by Soviet-recruited clergy. Due to the supposed infiltration of the Church by the KGB, many believe that such forces are still present in the modern GOC ⁶. After internal political crises and conflicts supported by Russia in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region, Georgia experienced a deep economic crisis. As a consequence, trust in state institutions plummeted and the dissolution of the Soviet Union left Georgia with an ideological vacuum. That vacuum was filled by the Orthodox faith and the Church (Sulkhanishvili, 2012, 138) and the GOC transformed into a unifying entity for the nation, aiding national self-identification. A direct relationship between Georgianness and Orthodoxy was established: being Orthodox does not mean being Georgian, however, being Georgian translates into being Orthodox. The Church compensated

⁶ Gabriel Tanie, interview by author, 7 April 2023.

for the diminished trust in state institutions (Ladaria, 2012, 108), thus Georgia developed as a deeply religious country. According to the NDI data in 2020, 87% of Georgians identified as Orthodox ⁷. whereas the support of the Patriarchate of Georgia reached 72% ⁸. Consequently, despite the Georgian Orthodox Church holding an official position of a politically neutral entity, it has a strong hold on Georgian society and the domestic and foreign policy of the country. This is amplified by the “special” status of a legal entity of public law constitutionally granted to the GOC by the state in 2002 (the Concordat). Notably, this special status recognises the Georgian Orthodox Church as a victim of the Soviet period and demands annual compensatory payments from the state (Gegenava, 2020, 173).

4.1.2 The GOC and the ROC in Post-Soviet Georgia

As Orthodoxy emerged as a unifying factor transformative years of post-Soviet Georgia, the nationalist narrative also started to transform. During the first decade of independence, Georgia clearly outlined its pro-Western, pro-European aspirations and began actively multilateral cooperation. In 1992, Georgia became part of the United Nations. From this point on, Georgia began its efforts at integration into Western institutions such as the Council of Europe, which it applied to be a member of in 1996 and was granted membership in 1999, WTO, a member of which Georgia became in 2000 and Georgia pursued cooperation with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to resolve the Georgia-Osettian conflict that had unfolded in 1992 ⁹. Moreover, the European Community, which had yet to develop into the European Union, would often send humanitarian aid and assistance to struggling Georgians, which, due to a lack of information,

⁷ NDI, “Public Attitudes in Georgia”.

⁸ IRI, "National Public Opinion Survey of Residents of Georgia, March 2023."

⁹ ICCN, "Message of the ICCN concerning the Latest Developments in Ukraine,".

would invite curiosity and questions among the population regarding the reason why people going around with blue flags and yellow stars were helping them ¹⁰.

Undoubted support and benefits that flowed from Western cooperation were partially met with scepticism, which was further ignited through the renewed narrative of the Church. Post-Soviet Georgians associated development and modernisation with Westward integration, however at the turn of the millennium, the Church emerged as the primary carrier of the anti-Western rhetoric. This development was paradoxical since GOC suffered terribly at the hands of the Soviets (Ladaria, 2012, 111). It must be kept in mind that the stance of the Church held significant importance in the formation of public opinion on any emerging socio-political issue. During this period, Georgia's Patriarch Ilia II wrote: "The West is a world where everything is permitted and where violence reigns. It is materially strong, but spiritually poor because money has become an idol there. Earthly prosperity should not attract us." ¹¹. The Patriarchate initiated meetings where participants said that "Americans would perform Satanic rituals in front of the icons, or that the grace of God would leave Georgia together with the icons." (Chitanava, 2015, 44), directly repeating Russia's anti-Western narrative. Although the attitudes within the GOC and its followers are not necessarily pro-Russian, they express strong anti-Western, anti-liberal preferences. The primary values of the Church are Orthodox, traditional family values. The path to European integration is often viewed as a threat, as modern liberalism is perceived by many as the promotion of homosexuality and the degradation of tradition (Kakachia, 2014, pg.4)¹². This common ideological footing is attractive for Moscow since Georgia does not fall within the Slavic civilisation that Russia primarily targets ¹³. As stated in the interview conducted by Minesashvili, explicitly pro-

¹⁰ Bujiashvili "How does the European Union assist Georgia and why should it join?"

¹¹ Patriarch Ilia II, "Christmas Epistle".

¹² Ivane Chkhikvadze, interview by author, March 3 2023

¹³ *ibid*

Russian stances can be observed among the more fundamentalist GOC representatives, who believe that Orthodoxy is severely threatened and that Russia can act as the protector (Minesashvili, 2017, 49). The pro-Russian attitudes among the clergy can be further attributed to Russian theological education since Russia's resources heavily outnumber those of Georgia. The deliberate insertion of Russian Orthodox literature into Georgia can also be viewed as a part of a larger soft power strategy ¹⁴.

The GOC has continuously supported the ROC throughout the years. Apart from direct relations with Moscow, Ilia II has also established relations with the UOC MP ¹⁵. Most notably, in 2019, the GOC abstained from recognising the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, declared by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and has not recognised its autocephaly till this day. Moreover, Georgia continues to support ROC's canonical rights in Estonia and Moldova (Minesashvili, 2017, 50). Throughout the 2022 war in Ukraine, the GOC has followed popular opinion and has expressed support for Ukrainian territorial integrity, although it took an entire month for the Patriarch to refer to Russia as an aggressor officially ¹⁶. Nonetheless, the relationship between the Churches has not been affected by Russia's political processes, as Ilia II, in a warm letter, wished Patriarch Kirill peace between Russia and Ukraine on his birthday ¹⁷. Most recently, following the events that unfolded surrounding the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, Ilia II wrote a letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and asked to ease tensions regarding the situation in the monastery and the UOC MP ¹⁸. Gestures of this nature further demonstrate the close relationship and support the GOC expresses towards the ROC. Although indirectly, the GOC as a moral authority may shift the Georgian society's attitudes towards when Orthodoxy is concerned.

¹⁴ Tanie, interview.

¹⁵ Skakodub "Metropolitan Vladimir and Patriarch of All Georgia Ilya II."

¹⁶ Formula "Russia's military actions continue in Ukraine"

¹⁷ Jam News, Ilia II congratulates Russian Patriarch.

¹⁸ Gazeta.ua. "Russian special services 'pull' Georgia into the Russian world: protests begin in the country".

4.1.3 GOC and Georgian Politics

In parallel to increasing Georgia's Westwards integration, the role of GOC gained prominence. Because the underdeveloped institutions lacked people's trust, the Church had established itself as an inalienable part of the political game, with no major political party being able to eradicate the protection of GOC from its agenda. Consequently, the Church did not shy away from using its ability to significantly influence attitudes on ideological and political issues, and Georgian political elites used religion as a tool for voter mobilisation (Kakachia, 2014, 3). Such practice continues in the present day (Ladaria, 2012, 108)¹⁹. The direct involvement in the election processes by the GOC could be observed during the 2012 elections, when the Georgian Dream party, led by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a Georgian oligarch frequently associated with Russia, was elected. The GOC disobeyed the resolution made by the Holy Synod to maintain political neutrality, they held a protest rally, attended pre-election demonstrations and publicly urged voters to not vote for the United National Movement party which had been the ruling party for the past decade. During the election campaign of the Georgian Dream, the supportive rhetoric of the GOC largely included Islamophobic messages referring to a large Muslim population residing in Georgia, especially the Adjarian region (Chitanava, 2015, 48).

Apart from the involvement in the local politics of Georgia, the Church is also involved in the discussions of Georgia's international cooperation. Despite the ideological differences, the official position of the GOC, as voiced by the Patriarch, sways in support of Georgia's European integration. In 2014, during a meeting with EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, the Patriarch stated that he wanted "to say that incorrect information is disseminated in some countries as if the Georgian Church hinders this process", further assuring "that the Georgian Church will do everything to realise

¹⁹ Gvazdabia "Why do parties try to "protect" the Church from each other"

this idea,”²⁰. The GOC appears to be acting strategically since the large majority of the Georgian population supports Georgia’s accession to the EU and the Church wants to maintain its popularity by not interfering with the political preferences of its supporters (Minesashvili, 2017, 50).

The importance of the GOC as political leverage should not come as a surprise, since 91% of Georgians place Ilia II as the most favourable person in the country²¹. Meanwhile, in 2016, Aleksandr Gelyevich Dugin, a notorious Russian strategist known for developing neo-Eurasianism, noted that the Georgian Patriarch Ilia II is single-handedly preserving Georgia’s traditions and identity and is responsible for preventing the Georgian decline into liberalism. As he put it,

*Patriarch Ilia is the most important figure in modern Georgia. He is the bearer of Georgian identity. In the situation when the Georgian elite is hopelessly lost in liberalism, has rebelled against traditions and renounced its Orthodox roots, it is Patriarch Ilia who remains the "restraint" in modern Georgia...By separating from Orthodox Russia, from the Russian continent, Georgia cannot turn into an island or a ship...Russia will remain. It is always near. It is deep in Georgia. And Georgia is inseparably connected with Russia. This is fate. And he [Ilia II] understands what the survival of Georgia is and where is its real place*²².

The reproduction of Russia’s narrative by the most favourable figure in Georgia indicates Moscow’s significant capability of promoting its interests in a manner. The relationship between Patriarch Ilia II and Patriarch Kirill as the two primary representatives of the respective Churches may shed light on the ties between the Churches themselves. Patriarch Ilia has maintained a close relationship with Patriarch Kirill. Throughout the years, both Patriarchs have annually congratulated each other on their birthdays, sending kind

²⁰ Civil Georgia, "Patriarch: 'Church will Do Everything to Make Georgia EU Member'".

²¹ IRI, "National Public Opinion Survey of Residents of Georgia, March 2023".

²² Tabula, "Dugin- Ilia II is the only restraint, the elite is lost in liberalism".

wishes and words of respect and admiration. Just three years after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, Patriarch Ilia II even visited Moscow to celebrate Patriarch Kirill's 65th birthday. The Georgian Patriarch was also greeted by then-President Dmitry Medvedev. During the meeting, the two Patriarchs spoke of the relationship between Russia and Georgia, on which Patriarch Kirill commented that "the best fruit of the relationship between our Churches will be the raising of the level of the relationship between our countries and peoples. Because two like-minded, neighbouring peoples have been living together for hundreds of years... We believe that no external vicissitudes can destroy the foundation of these relations, because the foundation is belonging to one holy Orthodox Church." ²³. The visits of Ilia II continued over the years, even meeting Vladimir Putin several times. During the last visit in 2020, Patriarch Ilia II met with Patriarch Kirill and Putin, once again discussing Russo-Georgian relations. Following the visit, the Patriarch stated that "Putin will do everything to maintain the brotherly relationship between Russia and Georgia", labelling Georgia's occupation as a "mistake" ²⁴.

Despite the controversially close relationship between Ilia II and Kirill, the Georgian population has abstained from criticising their spiritual leader. The critique has been voiced by the Georgian CSOs as well as separate individuals, nonetheless, any action of the Patriarch is deemed acceptable by the population due to the high degree of religiosity and trust in religious institutions, especially the Patriarch ²⁵. Moscow's use of the Patriarch's social status greatly advances its ability to exert soft power in Georgia by using the GOC and the Patriarch as conduits of its foreign policy strategy. The leverage the ROC possesses, in this case, may also be connected to the GOC's relatively neutral and inactive responses to the crises in Ukraine, during which the Georgian public was supportive of Ukraine.

²³ Tsuladze, "Orthodox Dialogue with Russia".

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Tanie, interview.

4.1.4 Russia's Soft Power during the Russian-Georgian War of 2008

In 2008, when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Georgia, the position of the Church did not correspond with the nation's crisis. Although it has been established that the ROC mirrors the Kremlin's agenda, and acts as an extension of its foreign policy, the GOC, in cooperation with the ROC, offered relief to civilians during the war. The Georgian Patriarch Ilia II visited the conflict zone and brought food and aid to the already occupied territory with the assistance of GOC's connections to the Russian Patriarchate (Kakachia, 2014, 5). Despite the diplomatic ties being cut, the two Churches maintained a cordial relationship and called for peace. In November of the same year, a delegation from the GOC met with Russia's then Deputy Foreign Minister, Grigory Karasin, in Moscow. Shortly after, Ilia II met with President Dmitri Medvedev and made assurances that Georgia and Russia were "brethren countries" and their relationship would not be sabotaged by politicians, appealing to God's graces for support (Chitanava, 2015, 48).

After the war, when the Kremlin recognised the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, the ROC decided not to give recognition of canonical independence to these territories (Minesashvili, 2017, 50). Although, on the surface, such actions clashed with the Kremlin, the ROC's decision justified the cooperation between the two Churches and allowed the common Orthodox identity of the two countries to play a positive role in the public consciousness. Nonetheless, the war Russia has waged in Georgia diminishes the possibility of framing Russia positively for a wider Georgian audience, therefore, the anti-Western narrative is the only approach that seems to effectively influence Georgia's "civilisational" positioning. The scope of Russia's soft power could be even greater if not for the exercise of its hard power. However, ultimately, Russia's aim is not to

position itself as attractive, but rather as the lesser of two evils in contrast with the morally corrupt West^{26 27}.

4.1.5 Other Soft Power Mechanisms in Georgia

According to the research on the activities of the Russkiy Mir Foundation in 2019, the foundation does not have Russian Centres in Georgia and operates through partnering with different organisations and individuals. The activities of the Foundation's partners are primarily aimed at promoting and organising projects following Kremlin's political agenda and implementing educational and cultural events (Pataridze, 2019, 4). The political projects are small in scope and organise events such as the annual march of the "Immortal Regiment" on the 9th of May as a celebration of the Soviet Victory Day in 2019 (ibid., 9). The educational projects encompass literary and cultural events and language-promoting programs. Some of the primary organisations identified as parties of the foundations openly express anti-Western attitudes and promote traditional values (ibid., 24-28). Mentions of Georgia on the official website of the foundation are rare, nonetheless, are found when explicitly pro-Russian events occur in Georgia. Most recently, in March of 2023, the website reported on a rally that was held in Tbilisi in support of the UOC MP regarding the situation in Kyiv-Pecherska Lavra²⁸.

The foundation is also the partner of two primary institutions that represent Russian interests in Georgian society: the Eurasian Institute (EI) and the Eurasian Choice (EC). These organisations actively pursue the reconciliation of the relationship between Russia and Georgia. The primary narrative of these organisations is promoting an anti-Euro-Atlantic

²⁶ Chkhikvadze, interview.

²⁷ Tengiz Pkhaladze, interview by author, March 15 2023

²⁸ Russkiy Mir "Citizens of Tbilisi rally in support of the UOC MP".

narrative, often supported with appeals to Orthodoxy. The EI has promoted the idea that Westward integration necessitates the abandonment of traditional family values and the adoption of a perverted culture (Markozashvili and Dvalishvili, 2018, 183-185). The EI has various partner organisations as well as associated organisations which serve the same purpose of reconciling Russo-Georgian relationships and heavily promoting an anti-Western narrative (Dzvelishvili and Kupreishvili, 2015, 3). The pro-Russian non-commercial legal entity “People’s Orthodox Movement”, established in 2010, directly founds its ideology on the preservation of Orthodox and traditional values (ibid., 27). The “Society of Erekle the Second” is a member organisation of the EC. Its ideology revolves around Orthodox ideas and was one of the organisers of a homophobic rally in Tbilisi in 2015. In 2014, the representative of the society stated that he could not shoot his “genetically fraternal Russian Orthodox People.” (ibid., 35-36). Generally, the vast majority of organisations associated with the Russkiy Mir Foundation, EI and EC promote pro-Russian sentiments, partially or entirely based on cultural and religious affiliation. The majority of the anti-Western organisation developed after 2009 and their activity has significantly increased since 2013.

Nonetheless, openly pro-Russian organisations are not popular in Georgia. The anti-Western sentiments generated through the appeal to Orthodox traditional values are more widely propagated by explicitly nationalist groups who do not directly declare sympathy towards Russia, as openly pro-Russian narratives remain highly controversial ²⁹. Such groups include the "Georgian March", a nationalist conservative political party, Alt-info, a conservative TV company and political party, POS-TV, an anti-Liberal, traditionalist media platform with a large following of 140,000 on Facebook, etc. Members and supporters of such parties are known to organise anti-LGBT and anti-EU protest rallies, without declaring

²⁹ Pkhaladze, interview

support for Moscow³⁰. The protests have often been supported by the GOC's clergy, with some even participating³¹. In 2021 representatives of multiple conservative groups organised an anti-Pride Day, during which they tore down the EU flag that was hung in front of the Parliament in Tbilisi and erected a large steel cross instead as a symbol of rejecting European values and protecting the existing Orthodox values. The cross was supposed to be removed by the government shortly after, however, is still erected (as of 2023)³². Although conservative protests of such nature have mostly been limited in size, the most recent protest gathered thousands of people. On March 29th, 2023, an openly anti-U.S. protest concert was held in the centre of Tbilisi, its main slogan was "Georgia Comes First"³³. It was endorsed by government representatives and the messages were clearly reflective of the anti-Western narrative induced by Russia, as the main focus was on condemning homosexuality, preserving Georgian traditions and Orthodox identity and, most importantly, entering Europe only on Georgian terms and with dignity, a condition which the Georgian Dream has been recently propagating. Overall, various institutions are working at actively diminishing the attractiveness of Western countries and politically neutralising Georgia, inevitably in favour of Georgia's Eastern neighbour. Such trends have been especially visible over the past several years. It may be that as Russia is losing grip on Ukraine, it has found a target towards which it has redirected its soft power efforts³⁴.

³⁰ Pkhaladze, interview.

³¹ Roth, "Georgia LGBTQ activists cancel Tbilisi pride march after violence".

³² Radio Liberty "City Hall: the cross erected on the 5th of July will remain until new project".

³³ Civil Georgia "Ultra-conservative movement voiced demands on April 30".

³⁴ Pkhaladze, interview.

4.2 The Case of Ukraine

4.2.1 Historical Background on Ukraine

The christening of Kievan Rus was implemented by Volodymyr the Great (980-1015), who, unlike the traditional focus of acquiring territories, focused on securing his borders and turned his attention to the West, with the goal of increasing ties with Constantinople. His political choices guided him to convert Kiev to Christianity as fast as possible, which resulted in the unification of the population and the establishment of a Byzantine-like Church system of Caesaropapism, that provided ideological support to its rulers (Subtelny, 2009, 31-33). The Kievan Rus remained under the canonical territory of Constantinople until the late 17th century when the Orthodox Church of Kiev was transferred to Moscow by the Ottomans (Zdioruk and Haran, 2012, 54).

The Russian Orthodox Church emerged in the 14th century. A century later, through the expansionist approach of Ivan the Great, the 15th century saw the rapid growth of Moscow (Sherr and Kullamaa, 2019, 2). With its expanding power emerged the concept of the “Third Rome”, positing that Moscow would develop as an eternal empire, inheriting all of the lands that belonged to the Kievan Rus (Subtelny, 2009, 74, 77-80). The idea of the “Third Rome” was put into practice in 1589, when Moscow declared itself as the Patriarchate of Moscow and All Rus’. Although Constantinople first refused to give the right to appoint the Metropolitan of Kyiv to Moscow, it was eventually forced to do so in 1686 (Sherr and Kullamaa, 2019, 3). In 1721, Peter the Great abolished the Moscow Patriarchate and established the Holy Synod, which had been transformed into a state department. Following these developments, Ukrainians experienced suppression by Russians, as they tried to erase the Ukrainian image and enforce Russian models (Subtelny, 2009, 194). Peter the Great used the Church as an instrument to support his expansionism, this was further amplified by

Catherine II, preparing the ground for what would develop as Russia's 'civilisational' approach (Sherr and Kullamaa, 2019, 3).

From the late 18th century to the early 20th, Ukrainians were divided among the Russians and Habsburg empires, with the vast majority being under the rule of the former. Under Catherine II, the idea of Ukraine as a separate nation was being diminished, referring to Ukrainians as "Little Russians" (ibid., 203). The national identity only started to develop in the 19th century, largely due to the efforts of Ukrainian intelligentsia, who attempted to revive Ukrainian nationalism through the popularisation of history and culture and the development of a language (ibid., 279).

In 1921, before Ukraine was integrated into the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian Orthodox Autocephalous Church (UAOC) was founded. Despite the emergence, it was severely suppressed by Stalin. It was only after gaining independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate emerged, which was joined by part of the UAOC (Zdioruk and Haran, 2012, 54). The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate also in 1990 and was empowered to form its own Synod and appoint bishops without requiring formal approval from Moscow. However, the Patriarch of Moscow must still approve the result of the election of the Metropolitan of Kyiv, which serves as the UOC-MP's first hierarchy. Consequently, some UOC-MP hierarchies have gained a measure of independence from the Patriarch of Moscow (ibid., 58). Although the UOC MP was powerful institutionally and was larger in terms of communities across Ukraine, the UOC KP enjoyed significantly higher support among the population. By 2009, the poll by the "Ukrainian Democratic Circle" Center showed that 39% of respondents supported the formation of a united Orthodox Church in Ukraine on the basis of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, whereas 24% supported the basis of the Moscow Patriarchate (ibid., 59).

In 2018, the Patriarchate of Constantinople recognised the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as autocephalous, which resulted in the union of the two Churches operating in Ukraine, the UAOC and the UOC-KP into the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The Moscow Patriarchate did not recognise Constantinople's decision. Although the UOC MP continues to operate as an “independent” entity, experts believe that the UOC (MP) can be considered a branch of the ROC and, together with the ROC, is seen as a powerful tool in the Kremlin's hybrid warfare against Ukraine. This can be seen in documents, such as the current Statute on the Administration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which explicitly states that the UOC (MP) is connected to other Local Orthodox Churches through the Russian Orthodox Church (Kobuta and Hurak, 2021, 37-39).

Ukraine's autocephaly is of key importance for the formation of a national identity independent from Russia. Although it is believed that religion did not play a significant role in the national identity of Ukraine after the fall of the Soviet Union, it certainly has emerged as a crucial factor now (Shevchuk, 2022, 202).

4.2.2 UOC MP in Ukrainian Politics

At the beginning of the 2000s, Ukraine's European ties were deepening, therefore the Russian Federation increased the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in its ideological battle in Ukraine. Before the events of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, the UOC MP, under the command of the ROC, heavily endorsed the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich. In accord with the geopolitical risks, the threat to the ROC was also clear- a strong European direction could pave the way for the autocephaly of the UOC KP. The degree of religiosity among Ukrainians was leveraged by the Russian forces to sway voters towards their candidate. While the ROC Patriarch Alexy II and the UOC KP's former Metropolitan Vladimir showed strong support for Yanukovich, even organising Church parades that ended

with services for the "election of an Orthodox president" (Yurash, 2005, in Solik and Baar, 2017, 46), the representatives of the UOC KP such as Filaret, stood by Yushenko (ibid., 45). Church emerged as an active player in the political arena, aiming at casting influence on public opinion, and ultimately, affecting the election outcomes. The subsequent victory of Yushenko and the defeat of ROC's interests in Ukraine harmed the relationship among the Churches. It is precisely the clergy's rhetoric which may be viewed as a soft power tool used by Russia in Ukraine (Hudson, 2019, 184).

4.2.3 The UOC MP and the ROC in Post-Soviet Ukraine

The direct influence of Moscow on the UOC MP has always been visible. In 2004, Vladimir Putin, during his meeting with the hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchy, called the UOC-MP "The Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine", directly rejecting any basis for recognising the UOC MP as an independently functioning entity (Zdioruk and Haran, 2012, 75). By the end of 2022, almost a year into the Russo-Ukrainian war, tensions increased around the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, a monastery of symbolic importance under the possession of the UOC MP that has been described by UNESCO as "one of the most important Christian pilgrimage centres in the world"³⁵. Since the beginning of the war, more than thirty Ukrainian priests representing the UOC MP have been arrested by Ukrainian law enforcement with accusations of gathering intelligence on behalf of Moscow. In November, the Kyiv-Pechersk Caves were raided with the suspicions of the priests possessing weapons and anti-Ukrainian propaganda³⁶. The threat that these clerics present is not only ideological (spreading pro-Russian sentiments), but physical, with priests directly aiding Moscow with the war. An example of this was the abbot of the UOC MP

³⁵ UNESCO. "Historic Centre of Lviv".

³⁶ Eckel "Holy Eviction: What's Going On With The Standoff At Kyiv's Famous Monastery Of The Caves?".

Andriy Pavlenko, who sent assassination orders and was convicted as a spy in December of 2022³⁷. The true intentions of the priests of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra could be observed since the Euromaidan. In 2014, one of the cave's sacristans said that he and four others were sent to an FSB detachment that fought in Slovyansk by the Moscow Patriarchate. This was confirmed by the former Moscow- appointed Defence Minister of the 'Donetsk People's Republic' Igor Girkin, further adding that "his own security detail was 'exclusively composed of sons of father confessors, monks and celibate priests'" (Sherr and Kullamaa, 2019, 15). Nonetheless, the UOC MP is not heterogenous and voices opposing the dominant narrative have been heard. Metropolitan Oleksandr has directly opposed the Russian World narrative of the UOC MP and expressed his condemnation of Russian Neo-imperialism and support for European integration (Hudson, 2019, 185).

The promises of the Orange Revolution did not hold, and in the light of the economic crisis of 2008-2009, Yanukovich managed to gain support through a "populist opposition niche" and emerged as the next Ukrainian president (Haran, 2011, 96). Unlike other presidents, he expressed a strong preference for one specific Church- the UOC MP, even receiving a blessing from the Patriarch of the MP Kirill (Ibid., 100). Despite the mainstream support being allocated to the UOC KP, the UOC MP possessed significant power, especially during Yanukovich's rule. This is evident not only through the extent of communities and eparchies which outnumber any other Church but also through the direct economic support from the Ukrainian government. Yanukovych, Russia's instrument in Ukraine, funded UOC MP and its interests a large number of times, including 11 million UAH allocated for constructing the UOC-MP Holy Resurrection Cathedral; 20 million UAH allocated for the reconstruction of Kyiv Pechersk Lavra; free construction of monasteries, transfers of lands and historically/culturally significant objects (Zdioruk and Haran, 2012, 61)³⁸. Throughout

³⁷ Kramer, "Clergymen or Spies? Churches Become Tools of War in Ukraine".

³⁸ Michal Wawrzonek, interview by author, April 13 2023.

the following years, the strategy of maintaining positive attitudes rooted in a shared cultural and religious identity continued. In 2009, at the third opening assembly of the Russian World Foundation, Patriarch Kirill commented:

*The core of the Russian world today is Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. It is this understanding of the Russian world that is embedded in the modern self-name of our Church. The Church is called Russian not on an ethnic basis. This name indicates that the Russian Orthodox Church performs a pastoral mission among peoples who accept the Russian spiritual and cultural tradition as the basis of their national identity, or at least as an essential part of it*³⁹.

Kirill visited Ukraine seven times only in 2009, compared to the previous Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow, who only visited Ukraine four times throughout almost 30 years of his reign (Hurak and Kobuta, 2021, 38). In 2011, the ROC commemorated the victims of the Holodomor, a famine genocide that killed millions of Ukrainians in 1932-1933, nonetheless, it found an angle that would soften the negative Russian association among the public and framed the event as a collective suffering of the entire Soviet Union during those years (Curanovic, 2012, 21).

4.2.4 Other Soft Power Mechanisms in Ukraine

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the West had a high interest in developing their sizeable Eastern neighbour, Ukraine, into a democratic market economy. Thus, the process of integration began through the introduction of educational exchanges, NGOs, various foundations, etc. Through Western support, the number of Ukrainian NGOs increased to over 70,000 in 2013. These NGOs started to attract donations from local donors, which intensified cooperation among themselves, as well as with neighbouring countries in Central and South Europe and the Caucasus. Many NGO activists were appointed to high-ranking

³⁹ Russian Orthodox Church. "Speech by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the Opening Ceremony of the Third Assembly of the Russian World".

government positions after the 2004 "Orange Revolution," similar to European practice and NGOs gained the ability to challenge corrupt practices and human rights violations (Polyakov, 2015, 122). Nonetheless, parallel to the development of the Western and democracy-oriented civil society sector, the conservative, religiously motivated wing also emerged. The development of the aforementioned organisations followed the Orange Revolution that ensued in Ukraine in 2004. Russia had realised that the "hard" methods it had been using thus far were not entirely sufficient and that the ideological vacuum had to be filled in its spheres of interest. Therefore, it invested in developing NGOs as a support system within states, including Ukraine. The ideological web that Russia had developed in Ukraine was not a reflection of the well-known Soviet propaganda but promoted a specifically designed narrative aimed at solidifying ideological support (Popescu, 2006, 3).

Some of the smaller but significant organisations associated with pro-Russian activities include The all-Ukraine Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriot Organisations, NGO Ukrainian Choice, (Dimitrova, 2017, table 1, 21) the Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods of Ukraine (SPBU), the Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Alexander Nevsky and the Social Union "Orthodox Choice". The primary aim of said organisations is to promote the idea of a united Holy Rus, best represented by the Orthodox Brotherhoods' slogan "Ukraine, Russia, Belarus - it is all the Holy Rus" (Zdioruk and Haran, 2012, 69). As the basic characteristic of Russia's soft power strategy, such organisations work not only in promoting Christian conservative values but also actively oppose Western influence and thus integration. In 2007, the Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Alexander Nevsky and the Social Union "Orthodox Choice" strongly opposed the appearance of the flag of the EU on the facade of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and urged to "Immediately remove the state symbol of a foreign state from the facade of the building..."⁴⁰. Further discontent

⁴⁰ News of Christian World "The Orthodox demand removal of EU flag from MOD".

included the calls by the SPBU toward protests against NATO integration of Ukraine: "...the duty of every Orthodox believer is to come to the protests against NATO. Moreover, an Orthodox Christian has a greater responsibility, he must explain to the non-believing people attending anti-NATO rallies both the truth of Orthodoxy and the spiritual meaning of what is happening, the struggle of Holy Rus', the Third Rome with forces striving to destroy them."

41.

Such actions have been rewarded by Russia,⁴² once again making clear the source of support and backing of such organisations and associations. The aforementioned NGO Ukrainian Choice, founded in 2012 and represented by Viktor Medvedchuk, a close friend of Putin's, posits its main goals as opposing Western influence and promoting Orthodox-Slavic values. In 2013, an international conference was held, during which Vladimir Putin himself spoke about the "civilisational choice of Ukraine, the choice of the entire Holy Rus" and the unity of Slavic nations despite their "formal" delimitations⁴³. In May of 2022, Medvedchuk was arrested for collaborating with Russia's special services⁴⁴. The "Ukrainian Choice" was also a part of anti-LGBT provocations in Ukraine during the period of the Maidan protests. A fake LGBT parade was staged as a means to stir ideological division among the protesters and position European, Western values as undesirable. A parliamentary investigation found that anti-LGBT provocations were organised by Russian agents with the cooperation of Viktor Yanukovich's forces⁴⁵. The anti-LGBT narrative was conveyed through religious messages such as "Euro-Sodom"⁴⁶.

The Russkiy Mir Foundation started operating in Ukraine soon after its establishment in 2007 and has been actively promoting the perceptions of the UOC MP and the ROC

⁴¹ Frolov, "NATO- get out! Bzez- Shame!".

⁴² See Zdioruk and Haran, 2012, 73

⁴³ Putin, Vladimir. "Our spiritual values make us one nation".

⁴⁴ Lutsenko, "One of the leaders of Medvedchuk's party "Ukrainskij Vybor" that cooperated with Russian special forces was arrested in Kyiv"

⁴⁵ Globa, "Guest op-ed: How Russia exports homophobia into Ukraine".

⁴⁶ Gay Alliance Ukraine "Security Service of Ukraine was involved in organization of fake "gay parade" on Maidan".

through its website as well as supporting various events. In 2009, the foundation was involved with the international conference “Patriarchal visit to Ukraine: Responding to the challenges of the time” which was held in Kyiv with the blessing of Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Vladimir.

The foundation operated in Ukraine until 2014 when the Russian centres and the cabinets of the foundation were closed after the annexation of Crimea. The centres only continued to function in the occupied territories of Luhansk and Donetsk (Masiyenko et al., 2022, 35). Despite its limited scope of operation, the official website of the Foundation has been actively working on spreading messages in favour of the UOC MP and the ROC in Ukraine, particularly victimising the two since the beginning of the conflict in 2014. Since then, the messages of the foundation have remained of similar nature, with headlines such as “The body of a nun of the UOC of the Moscow Patriarchate with traces of torture was found in Kyiv”⁴⁷. In the events surrounding the Kyiv-Pecherska Lavra, the Russkiy Mir Foundation’s news section has expressed full support for the UOC MP. Since the beginning, the website has been updating the readers with information on the UOC MP and the Cave Monastery. The news describes the UOC MP as a victim of Kyiv’s regime and highlights any support that is being voiced by Russian or international actors.

Although Russia has invested in developing the anti-Western wing of organisations within Ukraine over the years, such endeavours seem to have peaked before 2014. Since Russia invaded Ukraine, the capabilities and the scope of activities of such organisations have significantly diminished. Nonetheless, Russia’s efforts continue.

⁴⁷ Russkiy Mir Foundation. “The body of a nun of the UOC of the Moscow Patriarchate with traces of torture was found in Kyiv”.

4.2.5 Russia's Soft Power during the War in Ukraine 2014-2023

After the 2014 Russian aggression in Ukraine, Moscow's appeal in society strongly declined. Therefore, the UOC MP and the shared Orthodox identity were viewed as a means to maintain at least some aspects of power. Throughout the conflict, the newly appointed head of the UOC MP Metropolitan Onufriy not once referred to the situation as Russian aggression. Rather, he continuously stressed the common identity of Ukrainians and Russians and called for peace (Hurak and Kobuta, 2021, 40). After the annexation of Crimea, the narrative of the Russian world also heavily diminished, as Ukraine began to rigorously investigate the nature of ties between the Russian Orthodox parishes and the Russian state. They unearthed not only financial ties but also directives of political coordination and ideological ⁴⁸ and the subsequent spread of anti-ROC sentiments resulted in the "disillusionment" of Ukrainians ⁴⁹. This led to the increased emphasis on peace and spiritual unity and the complete eradication of sharp political statements from the Churches (Pavlovich, 2017, 258). Nonetheless, throughout this period the ties between the ROC and the UOC MP could be clearly observed, as the UOC MP continued mimicking the actions of the ROC, e.g. ignoring the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation celebrated in Ukraine on a state level in 2015, but commemorating the 9th of May, reflecting ROC's actions (Hurak and Kobuta, 2021, 40).

After the deterioration of Russia's public image in Ukraine Russia's then Prime Minister and former President Dmitri Medvedev commented that throughout centuries, Ukraine and Russia were a single family and referred to the conflicts as "quarrels between relatives" (Polyakov, 2015, 134). The approach to public opinion during the 2014 conflict

⁴⁸ Sherr, interview.

⁴⁹ Wawrzonek, interview.

included the usage of media as a means to promote the ideas of an antagonistic, expansionist West and Russia as the natural cultural, ethnical and historical ally (Beggs, 2020).

The Revolution of Dignity, also known as the Euromaidan Revolution, deepened the societal divide regarding the Churches within Ukraine. As the UOC MP was pursuing an openly neutral stance, it was inevitably perceived as pro-Russian, since neutrality was perceived as “insufficiently patriotic” by Ukrainians (Hudson, 2019, 190). Meanwhile, the UOC KP actively supported the protests and maintained a pro-European stance (Soroka, 2018, 1). Subsequently changed the Ukrainian domestic policy, providing new perspectives on the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Church. In December 2018, the Unification Council was held, as a result of which the Orthodox Church of Ukraine was given a Tomos granting autocephaly by Patriarch Bartholomew in 2019 (Hurak and Kobuta, 2021, 42-43). The narrative of the Russian Orthodox Church during these processes was similar to what it had been prior. Russian Patriarch Kirill, in a debate with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, stated: “We have never abandoned the notion that we are one country and one people. It is impossible for us to separate Kyiv from our country, as this is where our history began. The Russian Orthodox Church preserves the national consciousness of both Russians and Ukrainians...” To the question of the Ecumenical Patriarch of whether Kirill is bothered by Ukrainian hostility, Kiril replied: “The Ukrainian political establishment which today enjoys 8% support is who is against me. The Orthodox people of Ukraine, however, pray for and support me.”⁵⁰.

Russia’s strategy used the common identity to condemn Ukraine as an inalienable part of the Russian civilisation, having no way to escape ⁵¹. The narrative of the “brotherhood” of Ukraine and Russia has continued throughout the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. In

⁵⁰ Orthodoxy.info. "Exclusive: The Dialogue Between the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Moscow During Their Meeting at the Phanar."

⁵¹ Wawrzonek, interview.

December 2022, Vladimir Putin commented that the war was not Russia's fault and that both Ukrainians and Russians were suffering. He said that Russia still views Ukraine as a "brotherly nation" and that the reason behind the war is the involvement of third countries in Russo-Ukrainian relations ⁵². Konstantin Malofeev, the founder of Tsargrad TV- a pro-Putin Russian television channel promoting Russian imperialism through the support of Orthodox Christianity, has referred to the war in Ukraine as a "holy war". His an interview with Sky News, he emphasised that Ukraine and Russia are one people, who were divided in 1991 similar to the divided East and West Germany. The channel recently expanded to Kherson, Ukraine ⁵³.

While Kremlin attempts to contain the destruction of Russia's image in the eyes of Ukrainians, it has continued to use religious tools for such ends. In the early days of January of 2023, Vladimir Putin, per the request of Russia's Patriarch Kirill, called for a 36-hour ceasefire in Ukraine on January 6th and 7th, when most Orthodox Churches celebrate Christmas so that the Orthodox believers could attend celebratory services ⁵⁴. Although it is believed that the ceasefire was announced for strategic reasons, the facade of Orthodox consideration indicates the Kremlin's attempts to appeal to the common religious identity.

In light of the direct support of the invasion by the Moscow Patriarchate, the UOC MP has been placed in a difficult position. Even before the scandalous developments in the Kyiv-Pechersk caves, the UOC MP was facing public pressure to break Russian ties. As a result of the pressure, on the 27th of May, the UOC MP Council declared "full independence" from Moscow, describing themselves as "independent and self-governed"⁵⁵. However, this declaration was only formal, as it did not bring any feasible change to the

⁵² Mackintosh, "Ukraine war: Russia not to blame for conflict - Putin".

⁵³ Sky News, "Ukraine War: Split in Russian Orthodox church".

⁵⁴ Vernon and Horti, "Ukraine war: Kyiv rejects Putin's Russian Orthodox Christmas truce".

⁵⁵ Fert, "Ukraine's largest Orthodox church accused of collaborating with Russia".

Church and only appeased public outrage ⁵⁶. Metropolitan Onufriy, the primate of the UOC MP, condemned directly Russian aggression in Ukraine in the early stages of the war, stating that “war between these [Ukrainian and Russian] peoples is a repetition of Cain’s sin...such a war has no justification for either God or man”⁵⁷. Although the message was strictly outlined, the narrative still included the “brotherly” connection between Russia and Ukraine which has been used as a tool for inciting sentiments. Further, the extent of the condemnation towards Moscow was limited, as Metropolitan Onufriy has avoided directly referring to Russia’s aggression since the initial comment. Despite the distancing efforts of the UOC MP, the statistics of the report conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, the UOC MP is rapidly losing grip on Ukrainians, with the percentage of believers identifying as followers of the UOC MP dropping from 18% to 4%, and per cent of believers identifying as followers of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine rising from 42% to 54% ⁵⁸. Although the UOC MP had a significantly higher number of parishes than OCU, since 2018, 1253 parishes were registered to have left the UOC MP for the OCU in the light of the war and the deteriorating image of the UOC MP ⁵⁹. Russia’s strategy of combining hard and soft power in Ukraine seems to have failed both ways, since with the backdrop of war, Russia’s soft power efforts seems to ignite further aggression and condemnation among Ukrainians⁶⁰.

Chapter 5: Russia’s Differentiated Soft Power

Russia’s strategy is exercised through its personal narrative, the narrative of the Churches and the activity of other religious/conservative Russia-affiliated organisations

⁵⁶ Sherr, interview.

⁵⁷ Luxmoore, “‘A repeat of Cain’s sin’: Orthodox leaders condemn Russian attack on Ukraine”.

⁵⁸ KIIS. “Dynamics of Religious Self-identification of the Population of Ukraine: Results of a telephone survey conducted on July 6-20, 2022”.

⁵⁹ Shandra, “More parishes leave Moscow-backed Ukrainian Orthodox Church amid growing pressure, anger, and chaos”.

⁶⁰ Sherr, interview.

within Ukraine and Georgia. The use of common Orthodox faith in Russia's soft power strategy depends on the context within the two countries. Although Russia attempts to exercise soft power in both Ukraine and Georgia, various country-specific obstacles and aiding elements contribute to the different approaches. Therefore, the comparative perspective of this research contrasts the two cases to identify the aforementioned elements.

The contrasting institutional structure of the Churches plays a role in differentiating the ability of the ROC to exercise soft power through the Churches. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Georgian Orthodox Church both promote an ideology supportive of the Russian Orthodox Church. Nonetheless, the institutional structure of the Churches generates differences in how freely the UOC MP and GOC can express this narrative. Because the UOC MP is under the canonical jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate and is thus institutionally subordinate, it faces prejudice among the Ukrainian population and is unable to present itself as an independently functioning religious entity. Its attempts to do so over the course of the war in Ukraine have not yielded any feasible change, as the distancing from the ROC has only been formally stated but not implemented on a practical level. Compared to the UOC MP, the GOC, as an autocephalous Church has a much larger opportunity to freely express narratives beneficial to Moscow without receiving backlash and accusations of acting according to the interests of the MP. Further, Russia can use the strategic interests of the GOC of maintaining Russia's recognition of its canonical jurisdiction over the occupied territories to its benefit, not only positioning itself as an ally but also possessing a leverage with the GOC.

From the structural factor stems the key difference in the ability of the ROC to use UOC MP and GOC as promoters of its narrative- the degree of trust in the religious institutions within the respective countries. The ability of the ROC to exercise its soft power is greater within states in which its conduits are granted more trust and are rarely criticised. In

Georgia, the GOC has extremely high credibility and approval. These factors have been intensively exploited in the political arena, as the approval of the GOC of the political processes within the country has become an essential part of Georgia's government's policies and general agenda. Despite certain compromises that the GOC has to make to retain its popularity such as recognition of the importance of European integration and support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, the general narrative has remained consistent with the interests of the ROC over the past decade. Patriarch Ilia II as the official voice of the GOC has positioned as a close ally of the ROC over the years, which, given the fact that his approval rating surpasses the approval of the Patriarchate, grants Russia the opportunity to increase positive attitudes within Georgia. Still, the ideological bond and cordiality do not seem to generate enough co-optation to shift Georgia's European path. Although, similarly to the GOC, the UOC MP has also been a participant in the political processes within Ukraine, e.g. showing support for pro-Russian candidates in elections, its role has been diminishing. Initially, it had the ability to influence public opinion, however, after Euromaidan and Russia's annexation of Crimea, the UOC MP has been forced to take a defensive position as a neutral, exclusively religious entity. Since then, the UOC MP has not been able to be involved in the political processes and shift public opinion for Moscow's benefit. Due to UOC MP's difficult position within Ukraine, the primary voice of the "Holy Rus" narrative regarding Ukraine has been the ROC and Moscow, whereas, in Georgia, the direct involvement of Russian institutions is rarely observed.

The issue of trust is amplified by the varying degrees of competition for positioning as the dominant Church within Georgia and Ukraine. The GOC is the dominant Church in Georgia and does not have competition within the country. As was stated, it is a highly regarded and trusted institution that frequently gets involved in both domestic and foreign affairs. Therefore, the GOC, through its monopolistic position presents itself as a potentially

effective conduit of soft power to Russia. The same is not true for the UOC MP, as its popularity has been diminishing in favour of the UOC KP and since 2019 the new autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The UOC MP's disadvantage stems from its direct connection with the Moscow Patriarchate, as well as the narrative it has pursued and promoted throughout the years of Ukrainian independence, especially up until 2014. The convergence of the interests of the UOC KP and the Ukrainian population manifests a desirable religious institution, stripping away significant authority from the UOC MP. The competitive framework within Ukraine over the past decades has further diminished national self-identification around a single Orthodox Church after gaining independence, therefore, no Church within Ukraine possessed the same type of moral authority as the GOC in Georgia, which played a pivotal role in forming the post-Soviet Georgian identity.

Russia utilises the Russkiy Mir narrative in both Ukraine and Georgia, however, Ukraine, together with Belarus, is the core of the Russian World, therefore, in Russia's narrative, as well as the narrative of the ROC, UOC MP and affiliated organisations, the concept of Russkiy Mir is emphasised with a far greater intensity than in the case of Georgia. This is because Russia's civilisational approach regards Slavic identity as one of the primary unifiers of Russkiy Mir's nations. Although Georgia, together with the rest of Russia's "near abroad" is an essential aspect of Russia's sphere of interest, Russia is only able to spread its attractiveness based on religious, thus moral grounds. Russia propagates the image of a morally corrupt West that is devoid of respect for culture and traditions to hinder Georgia's pro-Western course, whereas, in Ukraine, the "fraternity" of the two states is repeatedly highlighted and used as the pillar of Russia's public diplomacy in Ukraine. Such differentiation can be seen not only through the approach to the Churches but also through Russia-affiliated organisations. The Russkiy Mir Foundation has never had Russian centres within Georgia but had several in Ukraine until 2014. In Ukraine, the Russkiy Mir

Foundation cooperated with the UOC MP and undertook the promotion of Russian culture and language. Since the closure of its centres, the Foundation's website has been observed to spread defamatory messages regarding Ukraine. In Georgia, Russkiy Mir's focus was not cooperation with the GOC but anti-Western organisations, the emergence and activity of which coincided with the period of Russia's use of hard power, i.e. formation of most organisations took place in 2009, a year after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and the activities significantly intensified a year before the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Although Russia exercises soft power in both Georgia and Ukraine, its scope is limited due to its exercise of hard power. Russia's co-optive capabilities in the near abroad could yield much greater success in the absence of war between the two countries, especially since Ukraine has limited the primary vessels of Russia's religious and cultural soft power within the country since 2014. Although the steady and increasing pro-European trajectory of the Georgian population can be observed through the recent opinion polls, declaring the anti-Western narrative injected by various Russia-affiliated actors in Georgia as a failed mission would not be an objective interpretation considering the increase in the intensity of the said narrative. Although Russia's religious soft power strategy is not strong enough to alter the political course of either country, the Georgian case grants more cause for viewing Russia's religious soft power strategy as a relative success.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Although the concept of soft power has been widely discussed, religious soft power has not been as extensively explored. More specifically, Russia's use of religion as an element of soft power is rarely discussed through Nye's framework and is more focused on the instrumentalisation of the Russian Orthodox Church as a foreign policy tool. Although

Russia has pursued the means of hard power that indicate its direct opposition to the West, soft power is not as obvious and requires research and attention. By analysing the cases of Ukraine and Georgia, researchers may identify further non-military threats posed by Russia and develop subsequent measures.

This thesis has focused on Russia's Orthodox soft power strategy in Georgia and Ukraine. The primary scope of the research was the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and its influence on domestic Churches within the two states and the activities of other affiliated organisations. The thesis used various primary and secondary sources, as well as expert interviews to answer the research question and test the hypothesis. The objective of the research was the identification of differences between Georgia and Ukraine in terms of the extent and ability of Russia to use Orthodoxy as a source of increasing its attractiveness. Through examining factors such as institutional structures, trust in religious institutions, and competition in terms of the religious landscape, the research has presented religious soft power as a valid analytical framework for understanding Russia's strategies of foreign policy.

The thesis argues that Russia's ability to exercise soft power in Georgia and Ukraine varies according to several country-specific factors, resulting in different degrees of success. Russia's hard power measures diminish its ability to exercise soft power, especially in Ukraine, since it has physically limited the domestic sources of Russia's soft power. In the case of Georgia, Russia's military actions result in the absence of extensive pro-Russian narratives, relying on igniting exclusively anti-western attitudes. Nonetheless, Russia has not yet been able to shift the pro-EU path of either country.

The research on Russia's strategies of soft power from the cultural and religious perspective needs to be expanded. Instead of the classical understanding of the term, Russia's

soft power can be viewed as a continuation of hard power. As identified by Mattern (2005), Russia in its neighbouring countries, in this case, Georgia and Ukraine, constructs the West as a threat to their cultural and religious national identity, presenting itself as the only attractive option. The research needs to concentrate on the construction of the “Western threat” by Russia and the role of domestic actors within the targeted countries. Although it is important to discuss the cases of Ukraine and Georgia within a single framework, the research on Russia’s religious soft power exercise should not be limited to said countries. Rather, these cases should serve as a guide for analysing other states that might appear on Russia’s radar.

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Summary

The thesis investigates Russia's instrumentalisation of Orthodox soft power in Ukraine and Georgia, highlighting the role of religion as a foreign policy tool. The primary focus is placed on identifying differences between the two countries, subsequently evaluating the extent of Russia's soft power and country-specific factors contributing to the differentiation. As a background to modern developments, the research also provides short historical introductions into the political and religious landscape of Georgia and Ukraine and Russian involvement. The research shows that aspects like Russia's exercise of hard power in both countries, institutional structures of the Churches, trust in religious institutions, and competition in the religious sphere contribute to the varying levels of success Russia experiences in its soft power endeavours in Georgia and Ukraine. The research methodology combines primary and secondary sources along with expert interviews, providing valuable insights into Russia's soft power approaches and the obstacles faced by the units of analysis. The thesis highlights the significance of understanding soft power from diverse perspectives and looking outside of its Western conception. The research reveals that Russia's exercise of hard power, especially in Ukraine, significantly decreases its soft power capabilities, while in Georgia, the anti-Russian attitudes fuelled by the war require Russia to shift its focus on anti-Western narratives as opposed to pro-Russian ones. Although Russia has been unable to change the pro-EU direction of either nation so far, the study identifies Georgia as relatively more susceptible. The study concludes that religious soft power is a valid analytical lens for comprehending Russia's foreign policy strategies and emphasizes the need for further on Russia's construction of the "Western threat" and the involvement of domestic players in targeted countries. By investigating the cases of Ukraine and Georgia, researchers can identify non-military threats posed by Russia.