



PARAHYANGAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE
DEPARTEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Superior Accredited

SK BAN – PT NO: 2579/SK/BAN-PT/AK-ISK/S/IV/2022

**The Russian Orthodox Church's Influence in Russia's
Affairs in the Region of Eastern Europe**

Undergraduate thesis

Submitted for the Undergraduate Examination for
the International Relations Study Program

By

Ryu M. Reinald

6091801199

Bandung

2022



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Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik
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Hereby state that this undergraduate thesis is the product of my own work and has not been previously proposed by any other party(ies) to attain an academic degree. Any work or opinion from other parties are cited and will be written with a valid writing method.

This statement is made with full responsibility and I am fully willing to accept the consequences should this statement is proven to be untrue in the future.

Bandung, 14 Juni 2022



Ryu M. Reinald

Abstract

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Title : The Russian Orthodox Church's Influence in Russia's
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The presence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe and its strong ties with the Kremlin does raise a question, how does the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church shape the foreign policy of Russia in Eastern Europe? To answer this question, this thesis utilizes soft power theory to examine the role and influence of the Russian Orthodox Church towards Russia's soft power among the Eastern European countries. This thesis will use interpretive approach to better understand the context and meaning behind the activities of both the Russian state and church. The analysis shed light towards the significance of the Russian Orthodox Church in societal and state affairs of Russia, and how it influences the Russian policies in regards to Eastern Europe. This influence resulted in the Russian goal of implementing the *Russkaya Doktrina* in a *Russkiy Mir* which have a strong historical and cultural significance.

Keywords: Russia, Eastern Europe, Russian Orthodox Church, soft power, *Russkaya Doktrina*

Abstrak

Nama : *Ryu M. Reinald*

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Judul : *Pengaruh Gereja Ortodoks Rusia terhadap Urusan
Rusia di Kawasan Eropa Timur*

Presensi Gereja Ortodoks Rusia di Eropa Timur dan juga hubungannya yang kuat dengan Kremlin membuahakan pertanyaan, bagaimana pengaruh Gereja Ortodoks Rusia membentuk kebijakan luar negeri Rusia di Eropa Timur? Untuk menjawab pertanyaan ini, skripsi ini akan menggunakan teori soft power untuk membedah peran dan pengaruh Gereja Ortodoks Rusia terhadap soft power yang dimiliki Rusia diantara negara-negara Eropa Timur. Skripsi ini juga akan menggunakan interpretative approach untuk memperdalam pengetahuan terhadap konteks dan arti dibalik kegiatan baik negara dan gereja Rusia tersebut. Analisa memaparkan pentingnya Gereja Ortodoks Rusia dalam urusan kemasyarakatan dan negara, dan bagaimana hal tersebut mempengaruhi kebijakan Rusia mengenai Eropa Timur. Pengaruh ini membuahakan sebuah tujuan untuk mengimplementasikan Russkaya Doktrina di dalam sebuah Russkiy Mir yang memiliki makna yang dalam secara historis dan kultural

Kata Kunci: Rusia, Eropa Timur, Gereja Ortodoks Rusia, soft power, Russkaya Doktrina

Preface

With God's and the Theotokos gracious blessing I am able to finish this thesis. This research will explain the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church towards Russian foreign policy as well as its worldview. This research also observes the pattern from past phenomenon in Russia's history and its correlation with the present case. The author sincerely hope that the result of this research could contribute to the study of international politics and the study of religion in international relations.

This undergraduate thesis purpose is to serve as a requirement to acquire a Bachelor's degree of International Relations, from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences in the Parahyangan Catholic University. The process of this thesis is an arduous one, but with the help of various parties that helped in guiding the author, this thesis could be concluded. It is worthy to note that this research is not perfect and it still has its flaws. In that regard, the author expects and appreciate any and every input and or correction in order to improve the quality of this research.

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in the future, На Здравье!

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1. Background

Religion is an integral part of human's history and a crucial aspect that helped shape society as we know it today. Although its prominence has declined over the centuries, particularly in Western countries, many in the East still cling to religion as a source of their life that govern all matters, and that includes international politics. Russia is one such case, with 145 million citizens making it the 9th most populous country in the world.¹ Predominantly Christian of the Orthodox denomination with roughly 70% of the population claims to be part of the Orthodox faith,² Russia boasts a large religious population in its territory. That being said, the Federation claims to be a secular state as written under the Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 14 (1-2)³:

1. The Russian Federation is a secular state. No religion may be established as a state or obligatory one.
2. Religious associations shall be separated from the State and shall be equal before the law.

¹ „Russian Federation 2020,” Population Pyramid, <https://www.populationpyramid.net/russian-federation/2020/>

² „Countries with the Most Orthodox Christians,” World Atlas, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/countries-with-the-most-orthodox-christians.html>

³ „The Constitution of the Russian Federation,” Chapter 1: Article 14 (1-2), <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>

It is further elaborated within Article 28 of the Constitution:

*Everyone shall be guaranteed the freedom of conscience, the freedom of religion, including the right to profess individuality or together with other any religion or to profess no religion at all, to freely choose, possess and disseminate religious and other views and act according to them.*⁴

Secularism in the Russian Federation is vital in keeping the integrity of its multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious society. Russia itself does not have a „state religion,” because if there is, then there would be discrimination and favoritism among the religious communities in Russia, which is not the case (excluding non-traditional religions). Although secularism is a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of Russia, it has become one of the key points of the Federation in its political and social progress within the 21st century. It kept an uneasy peace between the religious communities in Russia serving as a counterbalance to the growing threat of radicalism and religiously driven acts of terrorism which the Federation fears due to its proximity to some of the world’s most infamous terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda to name a few.

⁴ „The Constitution of the Russian Federation,” Chapter 2: Article 28, <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>

1.2. Problem Identification

During the Soviet era, religion was under heavy scrutiny by the state apparatus, as well as some public organization within its borders; the ROC was one of the religions hit by the anti-religion sentiments of the Marxist-Leninists in the USSR,⁵ that being said however, it retains its presence in the lives of many Soviet citizens.⁶ As the Soviet Union fell, religion in Russia rose back into society, albeit slowly and gradually. Religion thus becomes an important factor in Russia's political space once again.⁷ The ROC and the Kremlin have a mutually beneficial relationship; the ROC would provide legitimacy, as well as becomes an extension of the Russian government within domestic and international matters, while the Kremlin gave the ROC privileges such as exemption from tax and return of lands that were taken away from the Church during the Soviet era, official donations from the government, and the funding of the building or restorations of churches across Russia.⁸

⁵ Oleg Yegorov, „How did the Russian Orthodox Church Survive 70 Years of Atheism in the USSR,” *Russia Beyond*, 22nd of October 2018, <https://www.rbth.com/history/329361-russian-orthodox-church-ussr-communism>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ This refers to the presence of the ROC or religions as a whole within the Russian Empire up until 1917 with the collapse of the monarchy and the rise of the Bolsheviks and the Soviet Union.

⁸ Anna Kuchma, „Where does the Russian Orthodox Church get Its Money From?,” *Russia Beyond*, 09.03.2016, https://www.rbth.com/business/2016/03/09/where-does-the-russian-orthodox-church-get-its-money-from_574079

Although it claims to be a secular state that views all religious associations equal before the law, it does not appear to be the case. „On freedom of consciousness and on religious associations,” a law passed in 1997 by then president Boris Yeltsin alongside the State Duma defined the relationship between religion and the state.⁹ It gave the so called „Traditional Religions” of Russia privileges above their counterparts which poses a threat to the integrity of the Russian culture and people as a whole.¹⁰ This law proves the influence that the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has on the country is astounding. Not only that, the cooperation between government bodies alongside church bodies creates an environment of mutual symbiosis between the two organization, the church gains privileges as well endorsement by the state whilst the church provides legitimacy and unyielding support towards the state.¹¹ This does not reflect the secularism which the Constitution guaranteed.

In 2007 an accord called the Act of Canonical Communion was signed by the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) to welcome back the Russian Orthodox diaspora that fled in 1917 into the hands of the ROC.¹² It is a triumph both for the ROC and the government as

⁹ Dmitry A. Tumanov, „On Secularism in Russia and Public Interests,” *Quaderni di Diritto e Politica Ecclesiastica*, (Bologna: 2018), pg. 99-101, <https://doi.org/10.1440/89928>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Marcel H. Van Herpen, „The Political Role of the Russian Orthodox Church,” 19.11.2019, *The National Interest*, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/political-role-russian-orthodox-church-97647>

¹² Daniel P. Payne, „Spiritual Security, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Foreign Ministry: Collaboration or Cooptation?,” *Journal of Church and State*, (Oxford: 2010), <https://www.academia.edu/603701>

it sees both positions strengthened within the international stage and gives way for both to expand the idea of *Russkiy Mir* or the Russian World.¹³ This event aligns with both the ROC's and the government's agenda in protecting its people wherever they are. The large Russian diaspora across the post-Soviet countries provides Russia the basis to protect the interest of their people outside of Russia proper.¹⁴

The synonymy of Russian civilization and Orthodox civilization serves as a key point in the ROC's influence within Russia. It is also well known that the ROC has close links to the Russian military, as seen with the building of the Main Cathedral of the Armed Forces which was consecrated in 2020.¹⁵ This shows the world of a Russian spiritual Renaissance that binds both the ROC and the Kremlin. It also symbolizes the hope for future generations to carry on the spiritual baton of the Russian ancestors and save the Fatherland from enemies both internal and external that could be interpreted in many ways.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ New Defence Order Strategy, „Main Cathedral of Russian Armed Forces Consecrated,” 15.06.2020, <https://dfnc.ru/en/russia-news/main-cathedral-of-russian-armed-forces/>

¹⁶ Lena Surzhko Harned, „Holy Wars: How a Cathedral of Guns and Glory Symbolizes Putin's Russia,” 02.03.2022, <https://theconversation.com/holy-wars-how-a-cathedral-of-guns-and-glory-symbolizes-putins-russia-176786>

1.3. Problem Limitation

This research would focus on the involvement of the ROC and its influence within Russia's foreign policy within Eastern Europe which comprises of the Baltics and the Balkans. It will further focus on the Russian-Ukrainian relations both between its states and its churches due to the historical, cultural, and geo-political significance of Ukraine to Russia.

1.4. Problem Formulation

Conflict that arose due to Russia's foreign policy as well as its actions within Eastern Europe is in no lacking of the influence of the ROC. This huge involvement of Church institution within government give rise to the question of „How does the Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church shape the Foreign Policy of Russia in Eastern Europe.”

1.5. Research Purpose

This research would aim to delve into the influence that religion has towards Russia's relations within the international stage, more specifically within Ukraine which Russia's interests have been seen intensely within the past decade.

1.6. Literature Review

Literatures used for this research will focus on the relationship between the ROC and the Russian government, the influence of religion in international politics, as well as Russian involvement within Eastern Europe. These literatures

are used alongside one another to view the correlation between the ‘temporal’ aspect of Russian foreign policies and its more ‘spiritual’ counterpart. The main focus of these literatures lies in the debate of whether religion truly plays a significant role within Russian foreign policy, or if it is just a superficial factor in its grand mechanism.

A literature written by Alicja Curanovič titled “*The Religious Factor in Russia’s Foreign Policy*” depicts the interdependence of religious institutions and the government of Russia. It mainly talks about the relations and connection between the predominant religion in Russia, the Russian Orthodox faith and its Church and how it became a significant factor in the foreign politics of Russia. This book also talks in great length about the significance of the concept of Russian and Orthodox civilization which is used synonymously with one another when talking about the Russian outlook in its foreign policy, but also the idea of *Russkiy Mir* which could be translated into „the Russian World” or its near-abroad.¹⁷ The concept of *Russkiy Mir* is to preserve the Russian cultural space which is jeopardized by Western expansion.¹⁸

The relationship between the ROC and the government could be seen in different ways, but most notably, the church provides legitimacy to the government, whilst the government provide benefits through policies to endorse the religious institution. This form of mutualistic symbiosis is what the author

¹⁷ Alicja Curanovič, „The Religious Factor in Russia’s Foreign Policy,” (Routledge: 2012), pg. 110

¹⁸ Ibid, pg. 227

tries to explain. The aforementioned *Russkiy Mir* is one of the vocal points in religious involvement in Russian foreign policy making. It provides the state a ground to put forth its agendas within its so called „backyard;” Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states, and Kazakhstan, or to put it more broadly, the former Soviet-states.¹⁹

Mehmet Ozkan on his journal “*How Religion Shapes Foreign Policy? An Explanatory Model for Non-Western States,*” talks about the fact that in non-Western countries the prominent presence of religion in the public sphere should be taken into consideration on how to interact with it.²⁰ It is by the simple fact that due to its significance; religion becomes one of the foundations for the various machinations of the state which in turn would influence the foreign policy-making.²¹ It is also emphasize that there has been many studies in regards to the relations of religion in international politics as it has been the source of many violent conflict and wars.²²

Both religion and culture are formative in shaping boundaries for people on how to act, think, and generally on how to live life.²³ This would naturally incorporate international politics more prominently in countries that do not implement the Western form of secularism. In foreign policy, religion’s influence

¹⁹ Ibid, pg. 110

²⁰ Mehmet Ozkan, „How Religion Shapes Foreign Policy? An Explanatory Model for Non-Western States,” *Religions* 12: 617, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080617>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

could be segmented into three different categories; regional, continental, and imperial. This segmentation is based on the general outlook of these religions as seen throughout their history, Islam and Christianity having a more imperial outlook²⁴, while Hinduism has a more regional worldview.

Marcel H. Van Herpen wrote “*Putin’s Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*” to explain Russia’s propaganda, which intensified greatly after the annexation of Crimea in 2014.²⁵ This book delves deep into the role of the ROC and to some extent the ROCOR in aiding Putin and his propaganda.²⁶ The emphasis on spiritual security is also brought up, as it is one of the main topics to discuss when studying the relations between church and state in Russia. Cooperation between governmental bodies alongside the church is one of the defining factors of Russia’s security doctrine; to promote traditional values and integrity of the Russian cultural and societal sphere within the boundaries of the *Russkiy Mir* and beyond, which would then create a GONGO (government-organized nongovernmental organization).²⁷

This book also elaborated further on Putin’s propaganda machine in cooperation with the ROC further the discrimination and persecution of non-traditional religions in Russia. Using bogus laws and ridiculous allegations, the state and the church repressed these non-traditional religions as a foreign threat

²⁴ Due to the active act of proselytization.

²⁵ Marcel H. Van Herpen, „*Putin’s Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*,” (Rowman & Littlefield: 2016)

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

to the Russian state and society.²⁸ This reinforces the idea that the ROC is the de facto state religion of Russia. This of course aids in Putin's so-called neo-imperialist agenda to promote Russia and to gain as much soft power as possible, both at home and abroad through the efforts of ROCOR under the Patriarchate of Moscow.²⁹

“Religion as the Instrument of Russian Foreign Policy Towards Neighboring Countries: Georgia, Latvia, Ukraine” written by authors Tengiz Pkhaladze, Tornike Sharashenidze, Andis Kudors, Olexiy Haran, and Serhiy Zdioruk gave an insight of the instrumentalization of religion in Russia.³⁰ It mainly talks of the deep-rooted history of religion as an instrument for Russian governments from the time of the Tsars up until the time of modern Russia. It delves on the significance of religion for Russia and how it also shapes Russia's outlook on its neighbors. It elaborated on the Russian Orthodox Church's affairs as well as Russia's foreign policies within the countries of Georgia, Latvia, and Ukraine, but putting a heavy emphasis on the Ukrainian situation.³¹

Within the topic of religion and its influence towards Russian foreign policy as well as its vital instrumentalization, there are no debates in regards to the matter. There is however an effort to explain this instrumentalization by Alicja Curanovič in the book *“The Religious Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy”*

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Tengiz Pkhaladze, et al. „Religion as the Instrument of Russian Foreign Policy Towards Neighboring Countries: Georgia, Latvia, Ukraine,” (Mtatsmindeli Publishing House: 2012)

³¹ Ibid, pg. 54-100

and how it could affect the Russian government and the Church in the future.³² As such, this thesis would provide a stand point within this topic by stating that “religion is important to humanity, whatever creed is confessed. However, within the modern age, religion has no place within public and political sphere. It should be of personal matters, and personal matters only, and true secularism should be implemented to reduce conflicts that originates from religious ones.”

1.7. Theoretical Framework

Within International Relations there exists the concept of hard power and soft power. Both concepts were proposed by Joseph Nye in the 1980s. Nye described hard power as the ability of a country to the implementation of sticks and carrots, or by means of threats and favors respectively.³³ In this case however, the focus lies on the other form of power or soft power. Soft power could be seen as the ability of a country to make other countries do what it wants through less provocative ways.³⁴ In a sense, soft power rest on the state’s attraction and its subsequent favorable outlook from its counterparts. This soft power can come in many different forms; culture, political values, and policies. These main sources of soft power are intertwined with one another that would foster an image of favorability among other countries.

³² Alicja Curanovič, „The Religious Factor in Russia’s Foreign Policy,” (Routledge: 2012),

³³ Joseph S. Nye, „Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics,” (United States: Perseus Book Group, 2004), pg. 5

³⁴ Ibid, pg. 5-10

Gaining such image could be done in many ways. It could be done through the arts, it could be done through winning international events, but most importantly it could be done through gaining the hearts and minds of the people of different countries.³⁵ This could be achieved by radio broadcast in their own respective language as was done by the BBC in the first half of the 20th century,³⁶ or create an institution to promote the country's culture and language abroad such in the case of Germany with Goethe Institut, or France with Alliance Francais, etc.³⁷ Although there are some cases in which countries try to gain positive images through blatant propaganda, it is clear that within the modern era, people could see through these propagandas.

Joseph Nye argued that countries would try to accumulate soft power to help in its own self-preservation through the means of creating a positive image in its counterparts. Religion is also a part of soft power, a kind of double-edged blade such as the case that Joseph Nye took in the book about Wahhabism and the Saudi government.³⁸ Instead of benefiting the Saudis, it gave the Al-Qaeda soft power which rallied the populous who have similar views as Bin Laden to topple the corrupt and West-aligned Saudi royal family which resulted in a terrorist attack in Riyadh back in 2003.³⁹ It is further explained by Nye that within

³⁵ Ibid, pg. 100-104

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

the information age, it seems that advertising one's state in a positive light has been dramatically transformed.

Public diplomacy in the modern era, with the hyper-speed exchange of information shapes how country's gain and projects its soft power. Nye argued that there are three dimensions of public diplomacy: daily communications where government officials would ponder on relaying to the press about the decisions they have made, both domestic press as well as international ones,⁴⁰ strategic communication where there are simple themes that is developed akin to electoral campaigns that have its overall theme,⁴¹ and developing lasting relations with key individuals over the course of years or even decades through various education and cultural exchanges.⁴² This points back to his earlier point in where it helps the country conducting these three dimensions positive image within the recipient country.

1.8. Research Method

This thesis is done based on a qualitative research method. This research strategy emphasizes words and an inductive approach to see correlation between the theory used and the research.⁴³ The research method used in this thesis would

⁴⁰ Ibid, pg. 107-108

⁴¹ Ibid, pg. 108-109

⁴² Ibid, pg. 109-110

⁴³ Alan Bryman, „Social Research Methods,” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

be developed further using the Interpretive Approach which utilized contextualization and analysis of meaning to further enhances the analysis.⁴⁴

As this thesis uses a qualitative research method, data collection relies on non-numeric data to acquire better understanding regarding the phenomena.⁴⁵ All data in this thesis is secondary data that are acquired from literature and documents. This thesis collects data from various sources, such as state-released official documents, private official documents, mass media outputs especially news, and virtual documents including online journals and books.⁴⁶ The acquired data takes form as words and numeric information that will serve to give context to the phenomena.⁴⁷

The usage of Interpretive Approach would help in better understanding the data gathered within the context and lived experience of the actors within the case study. The objective of interpretive research is to make sense of meaning and meaning-making practices of contextually situated social actors. In this approach, the writer shall concentrate on meanings and see it as constitutive of action, in explaining political action. This approach includes Abduction, that it does not test theory brought to local environment, instead it is focused on a

⁴⁴ Xymena Kurowska, Berit Bliesemann de Guevara, „Interpretive Approaches in Political Science and International Relations,” *The Sage Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations Volume 2*, pg. 1211

⁴⁵ Umar Suryadi Bakry, „Metode Penelitian Hubungan Internasional,” (Pustaka Pelajar: Yogyakarta, 2016)

⁴⁶ Alan Bryman, „Social Research Methods,” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

⁴⁷ Umar Suryadi Bakry, „Metode Penelitian Hubungan Internasional,” (Pustaka Pelajar: Yogyakarta, 2016)

continuous iterative recursiveness between parameters of socio-politics and institution, and the lived experience of the situational members.⁴⁸ It makes sense of present perplexity by looking back into past experiences and making analogies from cases to probe concepts in new situations. It focuses on locally meaningful concept that captures the actors understanding and choices within the local setting.⁴⁹ This interpretive approach has three main strategies to collect data; fieldwork based, document-analytical strategies, and art-based one. This thesis would utilize the second which is the document-analytical strategy.

⁴⁸ Xymena Kurowska, Berit Bliesemann de Guevara, „Interpretive Approaches in Political Science and International Relations,” *The Sage Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations Volume 2*, pg. 1217

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 1218.