

Russia's Orthodox Soft Power

Nicolai N. Petro¹

For many analysts the term *Russky mir*, or Russian World, epitomizes an expansionist and messianic Russian foreign policy, the perverse intersection of the Russian state and Church interests.

It is little noted that the term actually means something quite different for each party. For the state it is a tool for expanding Russia's cultural and political influence, while for the Russian Orthodox Church it is a spiritual concept, a reminder that God, through the baptism of *Rus*, transformed these people and consecrated them to the task of building a *Holy Rus*. Moreover, over time, the Church's usage is proving to be the more enduring.

The close, *symphonic* relationship between the Orthodox Church and state in Russia today thus provides Russian foreign policy with a definable moral framework, one that, given its popularity, is likely to continue to shape the country's aspirations well into the future.

“For us the rebirth of Russia is inextricably tied, first of all with spiritual rebirth . . . and if Russia is the largest Orthodox power [pravoslavnaya derzhava], the Greece and Athos are its source.”

*Vladimir Putin during a state visit to the Mount Athos, September 2005.*²

Foreign policy is about interests and values. But while Russia's interests are widely debated, her values are often overlooked, or treated simplistically as the antithesis Western values.

In fact, however, as professor Andrei Tsygankov points out in his book *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin*, Russia's relations with the West go through cycles that reflect its notion of honor.³ By honor, he means the basic moral principles that are popularly cited within a culture as the reason for its existence, and that inform its purpose when interacting with other nations.

Over the past two centuries, Tsygankov notes that in pursuit of its honor Russia has cooperated with its European neighbors, when they have acknowledged it as part of the West; responded defensively, when they have excluded Russia; and assertively when they have been overtly hostile to Russia's sense of honor.

Sometimes a nation's sense of its honor overlaps with present day interests, but it cannot be reduced to the national interest alone, because political leaders must respond to existential ideals and aspirations that are culturally embedded. A nation's sense of honor, therefore, serves as a baseline for what might be called the *long term* national interest.

¹ Nicolai N. Petro is professor of politics at the University of Rhode Island. These remarks were prepared for the Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers (CIOR) seminar in Koenigswinter, Germany, February 15-18, 2015. CIOR is an independent advisory bodies to the Military Committee of NATO.

² “Vladimir Putin: Rossiya--pravoslavnaya derzhava,” *Pravaya.ru*, September 9, 2015. <http://pravaya.ru/news/4774>

³ Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

According to Tsygankov, in Russia's case the long term national interest revolves around three constants. First, sovereignty or "spiritual freedom;" second, a strong and socially protective state that is capable of defending that sovereignty; and third, cultural loyalty to those who share Russia's sense of honor, wherever they may be.⁴ I would note that all three of these involve, to a greater or lesser extent, the defense of Orthodox Christianity, of the Russian Orthodox Church, and of Orthodox Christians around the world.

Russian president Vladimir Putin succinctly encapsulated Russia's sense of honor during his state visit to Mount Athos in 2005 when he referred to Russia as a *pravoslavnyaya derzhava*, or simply, an Orthodox power.

Putin on the Moral Crisis of the West

Little noted at the time, in retrospect, the phrase seems to presage the turn toward Russian foreign policy assertiveness that Western analysts first noticed in his February 2007 remarks at the Munich Security Conference.⁵

Since then, Putin has often returned to the dangers posed by American unilateralism, and even challenged the cherished notion of American exceptionalism.⁶ But, until his speech at the 2013 Valdai Club meeting, he did not explicitly say what values Russia stood for, what its sense of honor demanded. It was at this meeting that Putin first laid out his vision of Russia's mission as an Orthodox power in the 21st century.

Putin began his speech by noting that the world has become a place where decency is in increasingly short supply. Countries must therefore do everything in their power to preserve their own identities and values for "without spiritual, cultural and national self-definition [самоопределение] . . . one cannot succeed globally."⁷

Without a doubt, the most important component of a country's success is the intellectual, spiritual, and moral quality of its people. Economic growth and geopolitical influence depend increasingly on whether a country's citizens feel they are one people sharing a common history, common values, and common traditions. All of these, Putin says, contribute to a nation's self-image, to its national ideal.

Russia needs to cultivate the best examples from the past and filtered through its rich diversity of cultural, spiritual, and political perspectives. Diversity of perspectives is crucial for Russia because it was born a multinational and multiconfessional state, and remains so today.⁸

⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵ Vladimir Putin Выступление и дискуссия на Мюнхенской конференции по вопросам политики безопасности 2007/02/10. <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2007/02/118109.shtml>.

⁶ Vladimir Putin "A Plea for Caution, New York Times, September 11, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

⁷ Vladimir Putin, "Zasedanie mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba 'Valda,'" Kremlin.Ru (September 19, 2013). Available online at: <<http://kremlin.ru/news/19243>> (accessed 9/23/2013).

⁸ Vladimir Putin, "Zasedanie."

Indeed, pluriculturalism is potentially one of Russia's main contributions to global development. "We have amassed a unique experience of interacting with, mutually enriching, and mutually respecting diverse cultures," he told his audience. "Polyculturalism and poly-ethnicity are in our consciousness, our spirit, our historical DNA."⁹

Polyculturalism is also one of the driving factors behind the Eurasian Union, a project initiated by the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, but that Putin has wholeheartedly embraced.

Designed to move Eurasia from the periphery of global development to its center, it can only be successful, Putin says, if each nation retains its historical identity and develops it alongside the identity of the Eurasian region as a whole. Creating a culture of unity in diversity within this region, says Putin, would contribute greatly to both pluralism and stability in world affairs.

But, in a jab at the West, Putin notes that some aspects of pluriculturalism are no longer well received in the West. The values of traditional Christianity that once formed the very basis of Western civilization have come under fire there, and in their place Western leaders are promoting a unipolar and monolithic worldview. This, he says, is "a rejection . . . of the natural diversity of the world granted by God. . . . Without the values of Christianity and other world religions, without the norms of morality and ethics formed over the course of thousands of year, people inevitably lose their human dignity."¹⁰

The abandonment of traditional Christian values has led to a moral crisis in the West. Russia, Putin says, intends to counter this trend by defending Christian moral principles both at home and abroad.

*

*

*

Putin's call for greater respect for traditional cultural and religious identities was either missed or ignored in the West. One reason, I suspect, is that it was couched in a language that Western elites no longer use.

For most of the twentieth century, Western social science has insisted that modernization would render traditional cultural and religious values irrelevant. The modern alternative, which pioneer political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba labelled the "civic culture," gravitates toward cultural homogeneity and secularism. These lead to political stability and economic

⁹ In his speech Putin uses the terms "pluriculturalism" and "polyculturalism" interchangeably, distinguishing them from "multiculturalism." Multiculturalism is the idea that societies should foster multiple identities but give no preference to any one culture. It is dismissive of culture as a unifying concept. Pluriculturalism is the idea that all cultural identities have value and help to foster social cohesion. Polyculturalism refers to the idea that diverse cultures all share some overarching common value. Cultural identities are therefore valuable not only within a particular society, but overlap with the cultural values of other societies, and forge international cultural bonds.

¹⁰ Vladimir Putin, "Zasedanie."

progress. The pattern is exemplified by Anglo-American societies which, they conclude, form the optimal model for a modern society.¹¹

Half a century later, with the rise of China and the collapse of the Soviet Union, it no longer seems so obvious that secularism and modernity are the only paths to national success. Scholars increasingly speak of multiple paths to modernity, and even a resurgence of religion.¹²

Another reason why Putin's message was overlooked is that he is calling upon the West to reconnect with its Byzantine heritage, a heritage that it has often dismissed as non-western. In Putin's mind, reincorporating Eastern Christianity into Western civilization reveals Russia as a vital part of Western civilization, and forces Europe to provide Russia with a seat at any discussion of Western values.

Putin's speech in 2013 was an assertive and optimistic statement of Russian values, and the cultural and spiritual reasons why felt Russian influence in the world was bound to grow. By 2014, however, the world had changed. A major reason is the conflict within Ukraine, which many in the West define as a conflict over world order stemming from a profound values gap between Russia and the West.

Russia, by contrast, sees itself as defending not only vital strategic interests in Ukraine, but also its core values of honor, such of spiritual freedom, cultural loyalty to those who share its sense of honor, and pluralism. It may seem strange to many in the West, but Russia's attitude on the Ukrainian crisis is inflexible precisely because it sees itself as occupying the moral high ground in this dispute.¹³

A key reason why Western moral criticisms of Russian actions have so little traction among Russians, is that the Russia Orthodox Church has restored its traditional pre-eminence as the institution that defines the nation's moral vision and sense of honor. Looking beyond Russia's borders, that vision has come to be known as the *Russky mir* or Russian World.

The Russian World or the Communities of Historical Rus?¹⁴

It is important to distinguish between how this term is used by Russian state and how it is used by the Russian Orthodox Church.

The use of this term as a "community of Orthodox Christians living in unity of faith, traditions and customs," goes back to at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it was re-purposed as a political concept in the early 1990s by Pyotr Shedrovitsky, an influential political consultant interested in the role that cultural symbols could play in politics. He believed that a

¹¹ Harry Eckstein, "Social Science As Cultural Science, Rational Choice As Metaphysics," in *Culture Matters: Essays in Honor of Aaron Wildavsky*, eds. Richard J. Ellis and Michael Thompson (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 30-31.

¹² Shmuel Eisenstadt, ed. *Multiple Modernities*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2002.

¹³ In a memorable phrase used by Sergei Ivanov at the 2014 Valdai discussion, Russia intends to "bring Ukraine closer to itself" сближать Украину саму собой.

¹⁴ Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, "Doklad Patriarkha Moskovskogo i vseya Rusi Kirilla na eparkhialnom sobranii goroda Moskvyy," December 20, 2013. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3453393.html>.

creating a network of mutually reinforcing social structures in the former Soviet states, among people who continue to think and speak in Russian--the “Russky mir”--could be politically advantageous to Russia.¹⁵

This notion resonated within the Yeltsin administration which, in the mid-1990s was already searching for a “Russian Idea” around which to consolidate the nation and promote a new democratic consensus.¹⁶ Its practical foreign policy appeal stemmed from the fact that, by claiming to speak on behalf of nearly 300 million Russian speakers, a weakened Russia would instantly become a key regional player, as well as an influential political force within the countries of the former Soviet Union.

Members of the Institute of Philosophy at the Russian Academy of Sciences were tasked to research this concept, but although it influenced sections of Russia’s first foreign policy doctrine in 1996, it ultimately ran out of steam. As those involved in this project later explained to me, there were simply too many disparate “Russian Ideas” to choose from, and no consensus within the presidential administration or the Institute of Philosophy on which version to support.

More than a decade would pass before the term was used by the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill. In 2009, speaking to the Third Assembly of the Russian World, Kirill spoke of how the *Russky mir*, or *Holy Rus* as he also called it, should respond to the challenges of globalization.¹⁷

The Church, he said, emphasizes the importance of spiritual bonds over the divisions of national borders. The Church, therefore, uses the term *russky* not as a geographical, or ethnic concept, but as a spiritual identity that refers to the cradle civilization of the Eastern Slavs--Kievan Rus.

This common identity was forged when Kievan Rus adopted Christianity from Constantinople in 988. At that moment the Eastern Slavs were consecrated into a single civilization and given the task of constructing Holy Rus. That mission persisted through the Muscovite and Imperial eras. It survived the persecutions of the Soviet era, and continues today in democratic Russia.¹⁸ The core of this community today resides in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus (at other times, he has added Moldova and Kazakhstan), but actually refers to anyone who shares the Orthodox faith, a reliance on Russian language, a common historical memory, and a common view of social development.¹⁹

¹⁵ Pyotr Shchedrovitsky, Русский мир. Возможные цели самоопределения, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, February 14, 2000. http://www.archipelag.ru/authors/shedrovicky_petr/?library=2015. Other names mentioned are Sergei Gradovsky and Efim Ostrovsky. See Kirill Govorun, Интерпретируя “русский мир,” *Russky zhurnal*, February 10, 2015. <http://www.russ.ru/Mirovaya-povestka/Interpretiruya-russkij-mir>.

¹⁶ Cite my Rebirth book or RFP search “Russian idea” “russkaya ideya” and “rubtsov”

¹⁷ Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow. Выступление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на торжественном открытии III Ассамблеи Русского мира 2009/11/03. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/928446.html>.

¹⁸ (Ryabykh), Hegumen Philip. Заместитель председателя ОБЦС: «Русский мир — это цивилизационная общность, образованная общими ценностями и общим опытом общественного строительства» 2010/06/17, . Available from <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/26208.html>.

¹⁹ Ibid. “Ядром русского мира сегодня являются Россия, Украина, Белоруссия, и святой преподобный Лаврентий Черниговский выразил эту идею известной фразой: «Россия, Украина, Беларусь -- это и есть святая Русь». Именно это понимание Русского мира заложено в современном самоназвании нашей Церкви. Церковь называется Русской не по этническому признаку.”

In June 2007, president Putin established the Russky mir Fund, tasked with support of the Russian language and cultural inheritance throughout the world.²⁰ Much of this effort was clearly aimed at preserving the use of Russian in the former Soviet Union, and with it the popularization of Russia's image, but while there is clearly a great deal of overlap between the religious and political uses of this term, let me highlight what I see as the most significant differences.

As used by the state, *Russky mir* is typically a political or a cultural concept. In both senses it is used by groups working for the Russian government to strengthen the country's domestic stability, restore Russia's status as a world power, and increase her influence in neighboring states. From the state's perspective, the Russian Orthodox Church can be a useful tool for these purposes.

As used by the Church, *Russky mir* is a religious concept. It is essential for what Patriarch Kirill has termed the "second Christianization" of Rus--reversing the secularization of society throughout the former Soviet Union.²¹ The Russian Orthodox Church sees the Russian government, or for that matter, any government within its canonical territory, as tools for this purpose.

Public reaction to the Patriarch use of the phrase *Russky mir*, which was familiar mainly in its Yeltsin-era political context, was mixed, both inside and outside of Russia. It aroused the most controversy in Ukraine, where the Greek-Catholic church and the schismatic Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kievian Patriarchate dismissed it outright, while the autonomous Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which serves approximately two-thirds of all Christians in Ukraine, has been cautiously receptive.

In light of this controversy, Kirill returned to the topic again in 2010, to clarify his views of what the *Russky mir* meant specifically for Ukraine. He reiterated that the baptism of Kievan Rus was an instance of Divine Providence.²² The Russian Orthodox Church has defended the religious and cultural bonds established by this miraculous event for more than a thousand years, and will always continue to do so.²³

In practice, Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine are all equal successors to the inheritance of Kievan Rus, therefore all three should be coordinating centers in the development of the Russian World. To this end, Patriarch Kirill introduced the idea of "synodal capitals"--historical centers of Russian Orthodoxy which would regularly host meetings of the Holy Synod, the Church's decision making body. One of these capitals, obviously, would be Kiev. It is interesting to note that archpriest Evgeny (Maksimenko), a cleric of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow

²⁰ "Стенографический отчет о встрече с делегатами Всероссийской конференции преподавателей гуманитарных и общественных наук," *Kremlin.Ru*, June 21, 2007. <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/24359>

²¹ "Patriarch Kirill challenges Church to "reset" people's minds." *Interfax* (November 16, 2010), cited in Johnson's Russia List #2010-#215. Available online at <<http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/>> (accessed 11/23/2010).

²² Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow. Выступление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на открытии IV Ассамблеи Русского мира 2010/11/03. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1310952.html>.

²³ *Ibid*. Благодаря православной вере народ Руси перерос свою этническую ограниченность и смог создать вместе с другими народами единое цивилизационное пространство, в котором Русская Церковь совершает свои пастырские труды. . .

Patriarchate, has called upon the Patriarch to take the next logical step and move the seat of the Patriarchate of Rus from Moscow back to Kiev.²⁴

Christianity, says the Patriarch, far from seeking to destroy that which is unique in each nation, motivates local cultures toward a greater appreciation of Christianity's metacivilizational goals. In the past the ideal Orthodox society was the pluricultural Byzantine Empire.²⁵ Today, in the context of national sovereignty, however, Orthodoxy proposes itself a spiritual complement to national sovereignty, and resource in a globalizing world.²⁶ Kirill has said that this same principle can be found in the European Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States.²⁷

But while the Church respects state sovereignty, it takes no position on its merits. Nation-states are neither good nor bad, but merely the current framework within which God intends the Church to use to accomplish the restoration of Holy Rus. It is therefore the Church's duty to make each nation, at least in part, "a carrier of Orthodox civilization."²⁸

Over the course of the past decade, the purely pragmatic, secular version of the Russky mir has yielded to the growing influence of the Church in Russia's political life. Among the many examples, let me highlight just one--President Putin's address in Kiev on the occasion of the 1025th baptism of Rus in 2013.²⁹ This was also Putin's most recent visit to Ukraine.

His remarks at the time reflected every one of the motifs of the *Russky mir* in its religious context, including: the decisive spiritual and cultural significance of the baptism of Rus; the uniqueness of Orthodox values in the modern world; deference to Kiev's historical significance (before the revolution it was known as "the second cultural and intellectual capital after St. Petersburg" he says, ahead of Moscow[!]); and public recognition of Ukraine's right to make any political choice it wishes which, however, "in no way erases our common historical past."³⁰

Conclusions and Prognosis

²⁴ Over 80% of Ukrainians Do Not Know About Doctrine of Russian World. 2013/04/26.

http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/social_questioning/52142/. патриарх РПЦ должен в первую очередь быть Киевским, а Московским – только во вторую. И кафедра его должна находиться в Киеве. It was Peter, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Rus, who moved his see to Moscow in 1325. The official title of the see what not changed to Moscow until 1448.

²⁵ *Ibid.* Это высший, всечеловеческий, уровень общественного бытия, который возможен в рамках грешного мира. Он может быть порожден только вселенской верой, которой и является Святое Православие. . .

²⁶ *Ibid.* осознали наше общее ценностное достояние не как угрозу своей самостоятельности, а как свой бесценный ресурс в глобальном мире. . . .

²⁷ *Ibid.* наличие суверенитета может помочь нам более ответственно подходить к сохранению собственной самобытности и строить новые формы общежития на основе равноправия и взаимного уважения.

[q] Современным европейским странам суверенитет не мешает строить самые тесные отношения между собой, будучи членами Европейского Союза. У стран же исторической Руси есть более веские основания для развития интеграционных процессов -- они принадлежат к одному уникальному цивилизационному пространству.» Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow. Выступление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на торжественном открытии III Ассамблеи Русского мира 2009/11/03. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/928446.html>.

²⁸ "Mitropolit Kirill otvetil na voprosy frantsuzskogog zhurnala 'Diplomatie'," Pravoslavie.Ru (October 4, 2005).

²⁹ <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/18961>

³⁰ Конференция «Православно-славянские ценности – основа цивилизационного выбора Украины» 27 июля 2013 года, 17:30 Киев

Having drawn a distinction between the objectives of the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church in promoting the *Russky mir*, it is important to stress that these two institutions are not in conflict, at least not in the near future.³¹ The classical formulation for Church-State relations in Eastern Orthodox Christianity was and remains *symphonia*, or harmony between Church and State, not the Protestant Western ideal of separation. Indeed, I believe that the establishment of broadly harmonious and mutually supportive relations between Church and State in Russia for the first time in more than a century, has significant implications for Russian politics.

The first is that Vladimir Putin's high popularity ratings are neither transient nor personal. They reflect the popularity of his social and political agenda, which are popular precisely because they have the blessing of the Russian Orthodox Church. A few years ago, then president Medvedev aptly referred to the Church as "the largest and most authoritative social institution in contemporary Russia,"³² an assessment reinforced by more recent surveys showing that Patriarch Kirill is more often identified as the "spiritual leader [and] moral mentor" of the entire Russian nation, than he is as the head of a religious confession.³³

The success of the Putin Plan, the Putin Model, or Putinism, is thus simple to explain. This Russian government understands that it derives enormous social capital from its public embrace of the Russian Orthodox Church. So long as Russia remains a broadly representative (not to be confused liberal) democracy, there is no reason for this to change.

Some analysts, however, suggest that this embrace may lead to conflict between the state and other confessions. The potential for such conflict is widely recognized, and led to the creation in 1998 of the Interreligious Council of Russia. Its purpose is two-fold. First, to defuse conflicts among the various religious communities. Second, to present a united religious agenda to politicians. It has been quite successful on both fronts, and its activities now cover not just Russia, but the entire CIS.³⁴

If my assessment of the importance of the religious underpinnings for the current regime's popularity are correct, then it follows that attempts to undermine the unity of the *Russky mir*, will be widely viewed an attack on core values, not just in Russia but throughout the Russian World. Economic, political, cultural and other sanctions will intensify this effect in the short term, and sharply undermine intellectual and emotional sympathies for the West within this community. While this may not be permanent, I suspect that the current generation of Russian leaders no longer believes in the possibility of a reliable partnership with the West.

Moreover, the Russian Orthodox Church will continue to shape Russia's foreign policy agenda in several ways.

³¹ I discuss their potential for conflict in "The Role of the Orthodox Church in a Changing Russia," *ISPI Analysis #121* (Institute for the Study of International Politics, Milan, Italy), June 2012.

³² Alex Anishyuk, "Russian Orthodox Church allowed to enter politics," *Reuters* (February 3, 2011), cited in Johnson's Russia List #2011-#20. <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/>.

³³ Имя предстоятеля РПЦ не знают более трети жителей России. *NewsRu.com*, November 20, 2012. <http://txt.newsru.com/religy/20nov2012/umfrage.html>; «Патриарх Кирилл: четыре года церковного служения». *VCOIM.ru*, February 6, 2013. <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=515&uid=113626>.

³⁴ <http://interreligious.ru/>

First, it will use the influence of the state to advocate for the concerns of Orthodox Christians throughout the world, even if they are not Russian citizens. This is in keeping with the pluricultural and transnational character of the ROC.

Second, it will promote Christian moral and social values in international fora, either by itself or in conjunction with other religions (close ties have been forged with the Roman Catholic Church, and with Islamic communities in Egypt and Iran) . Where it does not have direct access to these, it will turn to the Russian media, and, increasingly, to popular international outlets like RT and Sputnik to promote this agenda.

Third, wherever Russian state and civic organizations promotes Russian culture and language abroad, the Church will seek to tack on its religious agenda. As the state promotes the national interests of the Russian Federation, the Russian Orthodox Church will promote the larger cultural identity it sees itself as having inherited from Kievan Rus. Thus, the Church sees the conflict in Ukraine as a civil war within the Russian World.

From this perspective, the crisis cannot be resolved by splitting up this community and isolating Ukraine from Russia, or by permitting the forcible Ukrainianization of the predominantly Orthodox and Russian speaking Ukrainian regions, which would result in the destruction of the *Russky mir* within Ukraine. The only acceptable solution is for the current Ukrainian government to admit the pluricultural nature of Ukrainian society and, in effect, recognize Ukraine as part of the *Russky mir*. From the Church's perspective, this is the only way to achieve reconciliation among the Ukrainian people, and restore harmony within the *Russky mir*.

Oddly enough, many moderate Ukrainian nationalists also ascribe to the notion that some sort of symbiotic cultural connection exists between Russia and Ukraine. The typical pro-Maidan Ukrainian intellectual (people like Vladimir Fesenko, Andrei Okara, Vadim Karasyov) believes that Putin is out to undermine Ukrainian democracy first and foremost because he fears it spreading to Russia. They predict the inevitable resumption of fraternal ties with Russia, but only *after* the freedom loving, pro-European values of the Maidan succeed in overturning Putin's authoritarian regime in Russia.³⁵ It is hard not to see the similarity between their aspirations for unity and those of Patriarch Kirill, only under a completely different set of unifying cultural assumptions.

In conclusion, what impact will the rise of the *Russky mir* have on Russia's relations with other nations? I anticipate three responses. In countries where the concept of Holy Rus has no historical context, the tendency will be to fall back on the context they are most familiar with, as US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton did when she warned of efforts to "re-Sovietize the region." "It's going to be called customs union, it will be called Eurasian Union and all of that,

³⁵ A revealing twist on this theme are the comments by former president of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili, who now serves as an advisor to Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko, that "given the necessary knowledge, training and weapons they [the Ukrainian army] could seize all of Russia." http://24tv.ua/news/showNews.do?ukrayinska_armiya_zmozhe_zahopiti_vsyu_rosiyu_saakashvili&objectId=540711 [at minute 18:00 in the interview] February 7, 2015, 24TV.ua.

but let's make no mistake about it. We know what the goal is and we are trying to figure out effective ways to slow down or prevent it.”³⁶

Among Russia’s immediate neighbors, the response will be mixed. While there are still many who view the Soviet era with nostalgia, and regard the break of the USSR as more harmful than beneficial (by more than 2:1 margins in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and Russia),³⁷ it is not at all clear that the Orthodox Church’s conservative social vision appeals to them. In Ukraine the term has been a rallying cry for both sides during this civil war, and is now so hopelessly politicized that its religious and spiritual content have become entirely eclipsed.

Further abroad, the popularity of the *Russky mir* will likely depend on whether Russia emerges as a global defender of traditional Christian and conservative values. The values gaps that some in the West cite as justification for punishing and containing Russia does exist, but it is not the whole picture. The same values gap has always existed within the West itself. Only recently, however, has Russia realized that, while its conservative agenda distances itself from some European, it brings it much closer to others. The list of *Putinversteher* probably now contains more politicians from the right end of the political spectrum, than it does from the left.

Even in the United States, commentators have begun to take note of these shared values. Not long ago, American political commentator, Nixon aide, and former Republican presidential candidate, Patrick Buchanan, argued to his fellow political conservatives that there is much in Putin’s rhetoric that makes him “one of us.”

“While much of American and Western media dismiss him as an authoritarian and reactionary, a throwback, Putin may be seeing the future with more clarity than Americans still caught up in a Cold War paradigm. As the decisive struggle in the second half of the 20th century was vertical, East vs. West, the 21st century struggle may be horizontal, with conservatives and traditionalists in every country arrayed against the militant secularism of a multicultural and transnational elite.”³⁸

The role of the Russian Orthodox Church in this contest is crucial, because it calls for creation of just such a common framework of European values. The Russian state, meanwhile, is only too happy to support these calls because it is only within the context of a shared cultural and religious identity (“shared values”) that Russia can become a full-fledged political part of the West. Intentionally or not, therefore, the Russian Orthodox Church and its *Russky mir* has emerged as the missing spiritual and intellectual component of Russian soft power.

Someday it may even become like US human rights policy, an uncomfortable, but nevertheless defining aspect of national identity that the government will apply selectively, but never be able to get rid of entirely.

³⁶ Bradley Klapper, "Clinton fears efforts to 're-Sovietize' in Europe." Associated Press (December 6, 2012). <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5ikCSVjy7h3ksmvpbqrMYZePvSdKQ?docId=06bc71ef2209439>.

³⁷ Neli Esipova and Julie Ray. "Former Soviet Countries See More Harm From Breakup." Gallup.com (December 19, 2013). <http://www.gallup.com/poll/166538/former-soviet-countries-harm-breakup.aspx?version=print>.

³⁸ Patrick J. Buchanan, "Putin’s Paleoconservative Moment." The American Conservative, December 17, 2013. <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/putins-paleoconservative-moment/>.