

RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY AS A CONCEPT AND ITS DIMENSIONS IN RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Without a doubt, the breakup of the Soviet Union can be defined as a geo-political “earthquake” that changed the balance of power in the world. This scenario was not, however, a sign of the “end of history”, but the beginning of a new world order. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to some hostilities within Russia’s peripheral states ranging from minor border conflicts of outright war. It became the most serious foreign policy challenge to the Russian Federation. Russia inherited many difficulties, responsibilities and challenges after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In this situation, Russian Federation stood before a double challenge: defining its identity and formulating its vision of the new order. Both questions are closely connected because the choice of the representation for identity structure extensively impacts Russia’s image in the worldwide scenario. For this cause, religion is measured as a necessary factor of Russian national identity and it also acts as a factor in Russian views on foreign policy.

Regarding foreign affairs, Russia is suddenly facing a vacuum, so it has to develop its policies almost from the scratch. An entire choice of political, economic, and military relations became forged. The creation of systems complicated the fact that Russia was undergoing its economic catastrophe and national identity crisis after the sudden disintegration and also uncertainty over Russia’s identity, its new role in the post-Soviet space. Foreign policy strategies are designed not only for the external environment, but also for domestic political consumption. When the post-Soviet era began, several different options were considered how to define Russia and shape its future regarding national identity, geography, mission, self-perception, and economic and political direction. However, in the case of Russia, it was not always obvious which foreign policy choice would strengthen a politician’s political bargaining power, and decisions. Ideas mattered in making those decisions, and they helped in making those choices and contributed to the shaping of foreign policy agenda (Nicole 2003).

2. RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY, ROOTS OF RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY

Religious diplomacy authorizes a state to develop a certain aspect of religion and religious signs in global

relationships. The instrumentalization of religion for political aspirations has a tradition in Russia, which is demonstrated in the current Russian foreign policy. Religious diplomacy consists of components which provide a state to employ different characteristics of religion, such as concepts, slogans, signs and even faith-based organizations in global affairs. This instrumentalization of religion for political endeavors has a lengthy tradition in Russia (Curanovic 2013).

Historically, the concept of religious diplomacy started in Russia during the period of Peter the Great. As a consequence of the modification by Peter the Great, the priests got education at open universities and were rewarded salaries by the state, and worked as civil servants. In return, they were bound to provide Russia. The clergy pledged the “oath of loyalty” to the Tsar and religious foundations. Their particular target was the cultural assimilation of conquered territories. It assisted the growth of Russian authority all over the region. The activities of the ROC beyond the Russian Empire promoted the formulation of a clear representation of Russia as well as lengthening its impact. Moreover, the clergy carried out diplomatic activities and became messengers for the head of the state in Moscow. Missionary centre became spaces that would reinforce the Russian existence in a particular area. The rulers would obtain accurately for the church and aid the endorsement of a constructive representation and generate the method of valuable links in states such as China, Japan, North America and the Middle East. It powerfully highlights that the religious aspects were the instrument exercised by Russian rulers for the realization of practically defined interests. An instance, of such activities, was the wars with Turkey, which was reorganized by the need to safe orthodoxy.

During the Soviet Period, despite conducting forceful atheisation inside the country, the Soviet Union moreover took advantage of the Russian practice of religious diplomacy. In 1946, the department of external affairs was recognized in the Patriarchate of Moscow. This division contributed to the expansion and professionalization of the Orthodox Church’s diplomacy. The Soviet Union utilized the Church for its propaganda functions, and as an extra familiar diplomatic channel as well as relations with other Orthodox countries, primarily with Greece and Middle Eastern Countries. The ROC’s assistance in global religious circles,

counting the world council of churches, were also very significant for the Soviet Union.

In the understanding of the state of “traditional religions”, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, both parties wanted mutual benefits. President Boris Yeltsin, who struggled by the State Duma's disagreement and wished to improve the representation and strengthen the legitimacy with the help of institutions, in the same way, traditional religions seek state aid as they faced the rising activity of non-traditional religious movements such as Pentecostals and Jehovah Witnesses.

During the post-Soviet period, Patriarch Alexy II visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2003; it is considered to be the beginning of the social partnership and one of the key moments in the improvement of Russia's contemporary religious diplomacy. The joint church and Foreign Affairs working groups were established after that meeting, and it sustains to meet regularly even today. Foreign Minister of Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov promotes increasing ties between the ROC and diplomacy, as well as for utilizing the Orthodox Church in Russian foreign policy (Ibid).

3. THE PERSPECTIVE OF RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY IN RUSSIA

The instrumentalization of religion for political cause is a universal phenomenon, and it is not unique to Russia. However, in Russia, the religious diplomacy deserves an exceptional recognition for three bases. Firstly, the rich Russian practice of utilizing religion to develop its image abroad; secondly, the widespread outlook of Russian diplomacy, third, the existence of religious foundations and its capability of organizing activities outside Russia. It is the reason, which aims the state's ability to execute religious diplomacy. The ROC's possibility in the trans-national area is critical. The canonical territory of the Church expands over the whole post-Soviet province, other than Georgia and Armenia; and the church has a continuation on all occupied continents.

However, it is the ROC that has the picture of being particular representatives of the Russian establishment, and it plays the major role in Russian diplomacy. The initial point of religious diplomacy is not faith, rather national interest. In Russia, the religious element is used for enlarging cultural independence and religious security. It is perceived as the capacity to sustain the cultural confrontation towards foreign control from the West and East or South. The religious element too plays a vital role when nominating a region of Russia's cultural authority, more and more frequently called “ruskiymir” (Curanovic 2013).

In the territory of CIS, religious diplomacy explores to reinforce Russian soft power through the advancement of a constructive image of Russia and its international identity. At the same time, Russia is highlighting an image that this

process is an incarnation of Russian civilization, which has been an illustration of peaceful co-existence among diverse religions for centuries. The picture manifests that Russia is the country that can obstruct the fulfillment of Samuel Huntington's vision concerning the clash of civilizations, as well as a country, which for centuries, has been maintaining and harmonizing the global order (Zevelev 2008).

Religious diplomacy is a useful tool of the Kremlin policy, especially in the post-Soviet region. It is in line with the notion of Russia's “near abroad” strengthening the Russian existence, for example through the continuing influence of Russian culture, lessening religious conflicts and combating religious extremism. The most important consideration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Orthodox Church is the unification of the Russian Diaspora and keeping them in contact with the homeland. The Ruskiy Mir Foundation, established in 2007, is the flagship scheme of the church and the state diplomacy. The groundwork supports those projects which promote Russian culture, “values and spiritual foundations”. ROC acts as a patron of all post-Soviet nations structuring a kind of “fellowship of suffering peoples”. In spite of religion being an instrument in Russian diplomacy, it does not signify that religious institutions are being enforced to co-operate with the state. “Traditional” Russian religions support the state as their requirement. This approach is active inside the Orthodox Church, whose attitudes are remarkably equivalent to Kremlin's consistent policy. Both the state and the church contribute to the same view of the post-Soviet arena, identity and Russia's role a separate civilization supporting dialogue among cultures in a popular international order and prospective strategic corporation. Support for the church by the Russian power does not change the fact that it is the state that is the dominant part in foreign policy. There are several phrases in which latest official policy of document specifies the influence of the Orthodox Church on Russian foreign policy discussion, which was published in 2013. The policy concept provides how the ROC contributes to its religious diplomacy. It states that the church can help assist dialogues and partnership between cultures, religions and civilizations and hold significant proposal (Robert. C. 2011).

In the situation of religious diplomacy, the most prominent phrase is “an actual unification of the attempts of the international community needs a set of standard values as a basis for combined accomplishment, general ethical representation, which chief world religions have constantly shared”. Thus, religion in current Russian politics is severely embedded in the history of Russian politics. Religion handles on the bottom of Russian policy, identity, security, strength, and progress. Considering its role in both Russian domestic and individual foreign affairs will help to understand the motivations and rationality behind Russian diplomacy that is very hard to interpret (Curanovic 2013, Illa 2011).

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY

Religious diplomacy is illustrated as State initiatives consisting of the application of the religious factor in foreign policy. The cooperation of the State with religious institutions is practically defined by state interests, for, e.g., the exercise of the international involvement of religious institutions, ideas, and religious signs properly understand for the realization of existing political aims and so on.

The Kremlin and the ROC influence each other. The relationship between the two is mutual (albeit far from equal) power and co-dependency. Currently, the political elites of the Russian Federation are trying to reconstruct the country's distinct geopolitical and historical identity and thereby strengthen Russia's positions in the globalized world. In this condition, ROC's tradition is considered as an extraordinary asset, which can be necessary for purposes of forming the identity, legitimization, and international image and so on. The specialty of the factor arises from the fact that it is, at the same time, a component of cultural legacy. In this scenario, it is necessary to regulate the behavior of policymakers. The religious factor's role in foreign policy is thus situated somewhere between "reasons for actions" and assets instrumentalised for specific purposes.

In this context, the state has a dominant position in relations to the church (or wider religious institutions). The Kremlin views Russian Orthodoxy as an element for constructing Russia's mission. The authorities consider the ROC and Muftiates as loyal institutions eager to work for the good of the state. Therefore, the Kremlin finds that it is reasonable to support its players and thereby develop its assets. It is not a topic of belief but rather a political estimate that inspires the decision makers to reinforce the possible of the ROC and Muftiates as transnational subjects. The state and the Church are almost always in harmony regarding the actions of the latter in the international arena. The personal aspect of religious factor identification of decision makers with, Orthodox Christianity can play a role in Russia's "religious diplomacy". Considering the Russian foreign policy in general, it is necessarily one of the reasons determining the use of religion in an international activity of the state (Karina 2014).

Russia has a long tradition of using religion as a part of foreign policy. The present "religious diplomacy" of the Russian Federation forced the requirement of guaranteeing "spiritual security." It is understood as the shield of Russia's identity, tradition and culture. The "spiritual security", considered as a constituent of national security, is directly linked with cultural sovereignty not whole sovereignty from outside authority, which is impractical to attain in the face of globalization, but rather the capacity to oppose civilizational force. It is in Russia's interest to carry out a cultural policy that is an alternative to "westernism" and in which "religious

diplomacy" is a crucial element. It is managed by the foreign affairs ministry, which works in close co-operation with the presidential office. It envisioned the goals and activities of religious institutions beyond Russia's borders.

The top priorities of the Moscow Patriarchate are the unification and strengthening of Russian influence in the "near abroad", notably through the cultivation of cultural ties with Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine. It is considered as an essential element of maintaining the Russian cultural space in Eurasia. The nearly 20 million active Diaspora on the post-Soviet territory was distinguished by above average religiosity (and with a decidedly greater attendance at religious practices than in Russia) and show great attachment to the ROC, which is treated as a substitute institution for the homeland. The Orthodox Churches exist outside the structures of the Moscow Patriarchate in these countries. The sense of belonging to the ROC is also a manifestation of patriotism. The church's activity, which includes the ties of sootchestvenniks with the homeland, influences inter-state relations. For instance, it fits into the so-called Medvedev Doctrine which recognizes Russia's right to protect its citizens who live beyond its borders in the post-Soviet region. The unique role of the Church in the "near abroad" is by the presence of clergymen, and they contribute to the state organs activities in the post-Soviet space. For, e.g., Bishop Mark of Yegoryevsk took part in deliberations in the Duma on the topic of integration in the Commonwealth of Independent States territory (Petrenko 2012).

The collaboration of the vision and interest of the Russian state with those of religious institutions is indicated in the concept of "Orthodox civilization", and motivates both sides to co-operate beyond Russia's borders. Russian religious organizations take on Para-state functions, while the state, in turn, supports them in the international arena and shapes the future of its religious institutions as trans-national subjects of political relations.

It is crucial to conceptualize the "inter-religious dialogue" without the involvement of religious organizations. Russia supports the ROC and the Muftiates in the international arena as institutions. However, Russia's tradition of tolerance suited well in the inter-civilizational contacts. In Moscow's opinion the ROC, as the "most conciliatory Christian church", should be the mediator between Christianity and Islam while Muftiates are the vanguard of "European moderated Islam." The Russian State supports the goals of religious institutions and supports their international activity. These organizations played a considerable role in produce a new image of Orthodox civilization, integrating the russkiymir. The extensive contacts of Russiky Mir widen the network of connections of Russian diplomacy. When the need arises, representatives of religious institutions cooperate with the functioning of professional diplomats, and even provide professional

diplomats, and help for the Foreign Affairs Ministry in “politically awkward” situations. In Russia's foreign policy, the religious factor mostly functions in identity formation, the vision of the global order, community building, legitimization and also an instrument of cultural expansions and diplomacy.

5. RUSSIA'S NATIONAL INTEREST AND NATURE OF ITS RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY

Russia's religious diplomacy is the state which holds the initiative and backs up religious institutions as long as it is convinced that the loyalty and activities are beneficial to national interest. The Kremlin's trust in “traditional religions” is the cornerstone of their cooperation in the international arena. There is one more factor which reinforces State-Church contacts in the foreign policy and gives them solid grounds of common views on international relations. Both the Russian State and the ROC, consider the so-called “near abroad” (which almost perfectly corresponds to the ROC's canonical territory) as a sphere of Russia's existential interests. Therefore, they perceive the activity of non-Russian actors in this part of the world as a direct challenge (Rjabyh Yu 2001). Regarding national interest, the Kremlin identifies areas in which the international activity of “traditional religions” is necessary. The existential benefit of the state includes sovereignty, security, territorial integrity; identity connected with the close neighborhood of Russia. From the perspective of the usefulness of religious factor, the “near abroad” can be divided into three parts. The first one is the “Orthodox Core” (Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova), where the ROC is an influential actor. Two other regions, Central Asia and Caucasus are a stage of geopolitical rivalry, with the substantial presence of Islam and the ROC as a Church of a religious minority. In post-Soviet Eurasia, the Kremlin expects the ROC foremost to strengthen Russian Diaspora's ties with the homeland to preserve and reinforce the Russian culture sphere. As a preserver of historical memory, the ROC aspires to recreate an ethos common to the post-Soviet republics. Significantly, muftiates play a minor role in Russia's religious diplomacy in the CIS territory. It is mainly due to the aforementioned underdeveloped infrastructure, the lack of experience in diplomacy and-last but not least-the relatively weak position in the CIS resulting from intense competition from the Caucasus Muslim Council. Although the influence of the ROC is noticeably weaker outside its canonical territory and the CIS, the Church can still be useful in Russia's national interest, especially regarding Russia's soft power as an intermediary in building its international identity, image, and prestige. The first area where ROC can assume this role is Christian Orthodox countries. Referring to the common tradition, sympathies and good contacts between Churches helps Russia to create a cordial atmosphere; it uses the slogan of “Orthodox Brotherhood” to smoothen its image and present itself as a leader of the global Orthodox community. In this way, it legitimizes Russia's particular interest in the Balkans.

6. CONCLUSION

In the post-Soviet period, religion became a major factor in almost all sections of the society. It is important to discuss the religion's role in the public sphere, including secularism, and atheism. Russian Federation faced a crisis after the collapse of the Soviet Union and tried to formulate the national identity. Slowly, religion became one of the significant parts in the context, especially the traditional religions of Russia. Not only in the domestic affairs, but also in international affairs, religion became an essential element.

Regarding foreign affairs, Russia has suddenly faced a vacuum, so it has to develop its policies almost from the scratch. It is considered as a necessary element of national identity, and acts as a factor in Russian views on foreign policy. Religious diplomacy permits a situation to use a distinct aspect of religion and religious symbols in international affairs. The instrumentalization of religion for political aims has a rich tradition in Russia, which is indicated in Russian foreign policy today. It introduced a new concept called spiritual security to preserve the relation of Russian Diaspora and the Orthodox connection of the churches. Besides, the religious diplomacy played a significant role for Russia to attain the observer status in the OIC, and Muslim countries. To achieve a unique status in the international scenario, Russian is highlighting its cultural factor. It is also reinforcing its soft power for maintaining a balanced relation with the countries. The religious institution of Russia, for example, ROC and Muftiates are primarily involved in the diplomatic activity of Russia and enhanced its contribution. Moreover, Moscow's foreign policy exposes the mechanisms that facilitate the Kremlin to use the religion as a factor in the international forum. There is a joint State-Church institution which deals with the political issues between the countries through expert forums and regular meetings of clergy with decision makers. The effective use of soft power helps the Kremlin to strengthen the role of native religious institutions as trans-national subject. An example of such initiative is the involvement of the Moscow Patriarchate, supported by the Russian foreign affairs ministry. The strong existence and movement of the Moscow Patriarchate on its canonical territory makes the ROC the ‘standard partner’ of all the administration and thus favors the structure of a homogeneous space of association between the state and religious organizations in the CIS area (Curanovic 2011). It resulted from the formation of UNESCO group Peace and Dialogue of cultures - a consultative body in which the ROC plays the role of intermediary between Christianity and Islam. However, Russian Diplomacy efforts strengthen the ROC's arrangement in the universal Orthodox Church as well as the Near Abroad countries. The Religious Diplomacy of Russia extended its wings in the Muslim countries, East and South Asia and Israel too. It is using the traditional religion for maintaining the Religious Diplomacy, for instance, in Israel Judaism is playing a significant role in reviving the relation between the states. It is because of the

Russian Jewish presence in the country; mainly the Diaspora plays a vital role between Israel and Russia. Buddhism, Russian Muslim and ROC, all elements involve in the process of religious diplomacy.

At present, to achieve a status in an international arena, Russia is using its soft power as an instrument. In Russian diplomacy, the religious factor acts as a tool for creating a positive image of Russia, raising the prestige of the state, mobilizing the Russian society and legitimizing the Kremlin's activity abroad. Above all, a religious factor is a tool for Russian diplomacy, which uses native religious institutions for the realization of defined tasks. However, in certain circumstances, the religious element also became a reason for steps taken by Russia in the international arena

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