

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH: BUILDING A DOCTRINAL NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE BEGINNING OF THE 1990S

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Abstract. The building of a national identity for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) at the beginning of the 1990s can best be understood by examining what are roughly the early years, from 1991 to 1994, when the foundations for the identity building were established. During these years, which were a time of chaos and reconstruction for the Russian nation, the ROC started to develop its understanding of national identity. This development took place in reaction to different kinds of crises, conflicts and problems, which the ROC faced due to a changed societal situation and which needed an answer, although the inner rebuilding of the ROC was still unfinished. The aim of this paper is to analyse the doctrinal argumentation on national identity that took place during those tumultuous times, when the ROC found itself situated within new national borders. My specific questions are: Were religious doctrinal arguments about a nation completely unthinkable in the chaotic situations at the beginning of the 1990s? Does a doctrine lose its religious nature and motivation when the ROC uses it as a means of co-operation with the state and politics? Did the ROC's doctrinal interpretations generate a nation of peace or conflict in the 1990s?

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church; national identity; doctrinal reasoning; 1990s

The building of a national identity for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) at the beginning of the 1990s can best be understood by examining what are roughly the early years, from 1991 to 1994, when the foundations for the identity building were established. During these years, which were a time of chaos and reconstruction for the Russian nation, the ROC started to develop its understanding of national identity. This development took place in reaction to different kinds of crises, conflicts and problems, which the ROC faced due to a changed societal situation and which needed an answer, although the inner rebuilding of the ROC was still unfinished. These reactions and doctrinal reasoning the ROC has described in its announcements and correspondence with other churches. The sources of this presentation are the World Council of Churches' (WCC) material from the ROC during those years.¹⁾

The aim of this paper is to analyse the doctrinal argumentation on national identity that took place during those tumultuous times, when the ROC found itself situated within new national borders. My specific questions are: Were religious doctrinal arguments about a nation completely unthinkable in the chaotic situations at the beginning of the 1990s? Does a doctrine lose its religious nature and motivation when the ROC uses it as a means of co-operation with the state and politics? Did the ROC's doctrinal interpretations generate a nation of peace or conflict in the 1990s?

The situations in which the ROC developed its doctrinal argumentation and to which the ROC took a stand can be divided into two groups. Into the first group belong those events that took place within the Russian Federation's borders, and to the second group those that took place outside the Russian Federation's borders. The situation in which the ROC was present in different countries was completely new for the ROC, as it had been a church within the borders of one empire, Russian or Soviet, before.

First years of the 1990s, the ROC and conflicts within the Russian borders Separating from the communist past during the coup d'état in August 1991

The start of the 1990s was a time of turbulence in the Soviet Union and what would become its successor states. Different kinds and grades of conflicts, realignments of power and wars took place in different corners of the former Soviet Union, which finally came to its end in December 1991. The picture of the ROC, which the ROC drew of itself in correspondence and bulletins to other churches during those years, shows that the ROC looked for legal state power, tried to take different national quarters into account and also to speak for its own right to exist.

The ROC took part in the development of the Soviet Union and its successors, especially as an observer of the accompanying political actions, but sometimes also as an active participant. The first political conflict of the 1990s, on which the ROC took a stand, was the Soviet coup d'état attempt by members of the Communist ruling party in August 1991.

During the situation, the ROC demanded that President Mikhail Gorbachev be allowed to speak, because, regardless of the unfolding situation, he was nonetheless the legal sovereign of the USSR (The ROC, undated). Additionally, the ROC expressed the opinion that in the situation, in which the president's abductors demanded the right for themselves to have a determining influence on the USSR's affairs and ongoing negotiations within the USSR, they would have such a right only if the abductors would have the support of the people from all the Republics (The ROC, August 1991). At first glance, it might seem that the argumentations did not include theological aspects, but especially for the first one, allowing Gorbachev to speak because he was the legal sovereign of the USSR can be seen as representing the need to co-operate with the official state leader. Though the relationship and willingness to co-operate cannot be regarded as significant in such a way that the church would be heard in the state's decisions, the co-operation was seen to guarantee that the church's perspectives would not be forgotten or abused. Although, under the Soviet Union, the relationship between the church and the state had been difficult

and discriminatory from the perspective of the church, the two bodies had established a way of co-operation, in which the church was able to maintain its significant structures and activities on some level (Stöeckl, 2014: 20 – 23; Beljakova, Bremer & Kunter, 2016: 123 – 126; Pospielovsky, 1998: 355 – 356).

The influence of perestroika and aftermaths of the celebrations of the thousandth anniversary of the Kievan baptism had produced an environment in which the ROC was not ready to give up in front of the abductors, whose aim was to resist the reforms made in response to glasnost and perestroika and to make the Soviet Union a federation of independent republics (Marples, 2004: 77 – 81). Thus, aspects of the ROC's decision were defensible both theologically and politically. The ROC's demand for majority support for the abductors in order to gain a determining influence on the Federation's affairs cannot be so clearly connected to theological reasonings stemming from the symphonic relationship. On the one hand, it does support the idea of a symphony, through which the legitimate sovereign is supported by the citizens, but on the other hand, it is somehow against the symphonic principle, which emphasises the Patriarch's and the worldly ruler's power to make decisions about the nation's destiny. In this case the majority could confirm the sovereignty of an earthly leader in a communal way, which hints at the old Russian Orthodox idea of *sobornost*. *Sobornost* describes how every person's opinions are united together in a spiritual community. The *sobornost* principle was explicitly used by the hierarchs of the ROC during the coup. Hierarchs emphasized the synodal decision of the bishops with this concept.

Perhaps more plausible is to take the view that such a reaction is a more or less non-theological reflection, whereby the church wanted to strengthen the positive development of the society.

During this ongoing situation, the ROC's hierarchy expressed his relief that the structures of totalitarianism were in a process of being dismantled. According to the ROC's hierarchy, in the difficult situation, different practical approaches were considered for a new political contract for the entity that was emerging from the formerly united states of the Soviet Union. Among the crucial questions that were raised at the time was, what would happen to those citizens who would be left outside their new nation states but still remained within the borders of the former Soviet Union (The ROC, August 1991)? The ROC's hierarchy invoked the need to rely on a system of majority democracy in order to find a new sovereignty and brought up the question of the position of ethnic Russians outside Russian borders – which would subsequently become a political hot potato in the country's foreign policy at the end of the 1990s (Birgerson, 2002: 68 – 70). At this point, the whole range of the phenomenon was taken into consideration – also the position of former Soviet citizens within the Russian borders. The ROC's self-reflective approach is visible. The ROC's hierarchy was very aware that whatever form the future structure of the formerly united states of the Soviet Union would take, it would have an effect not only on the citizens, but also on the ROC. Thus arose the question: What would the structure of the ROC look like in the future?

The ROC's theological reasoning for its political actions and position was somewhat difficult to formulate and, most obviously, was not deeply reflected because of the rapidly changing political situations; for the first time in 70 years, the ROC had a real chance to act based solely on its own principles. Interestingly, the ROC's spiritual reasoning was most accurate regarding the newly established Russia during the attempted coups. The failure of the coup d'état by communists in August 1991 was explained as occurring because it threatened everything sacred to the Fatherland, plus it commenced on the day when the Church celebrated the great feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord (The ROC, 23rd August 1991). The ROC announced the disappearance of communist ideology from Russia and stated that 'communism made an attempt to violently thrust itself on people again, but it was turned down by people themselves without violence' (The ROC, 23rd August 1991). The ROC underlined that the hardest part of the work of reconstruction is not the outward work, but rather the inner work, which means cleansing people's hearts from evil and suspicions. The ROC also holds the opinion that the Russian people's forefathers sinned gravely and many of them died having rejected the salutary grace of repentance (The ROC, 23rd August 1991). The people were encouraged now to forget their bitterness and free themselves from a totalitarian model of consciousness, which made millions of people participate in unlawful actions, both voluntarily and involuntarily (The ROC 30th August 1991).

Determining that the communist societal order was impossible for Russia – although the Soviet Union and Gorbachev were at the time still the existing reality – the ROC separated itself from the state. It also set the orthodox belief against communism and condemned the illegal actions of the Soviet Union. By combining the concepts of 'fatherland' and 'sacred', the ROC indicates that the concept of orthodoxy holds great value for the state – whatever the state in the area should be. On the one hand, this position seemed to be a continuation of the ROC's more visible role in the society after the thousandth anniversary in 1988 of the Kievan Baptism. The festivities gave the ROC a more visible role in the Soviet Union, and the orthodox religion became one of the tools of the state to strengthen the national cohesion (Lupinin, 2010: 31 – 32). On the other hand, the ROC seems to have been willing to take the position of maintaining the mythical core of the 'fatherland'.

By appealing to the people, the ROC emphasised its demand for inner cleansing. This is to be understood as being an orthodox emphasis within the light of Christian mercy: real mercy is that which is given within the church and which reconciles people with God. Therefore, the evil that took place during the Soviet Union is explained by a lack of Christian mercy on the citizens' level. The ROC set demands also for the new sovereign, for which It will not be enough to use power legally – a legal government has to follow not only the letter of the law but also the spirit of the law. Regardless of that, the ROC did not directly condemn the earlier sovereignty's actions, but rather invoked the citizens' sins, as having caused the earlier violence. Although the ROC at the same time sought for legal sovereignty, it was not ready to give any sovereign either the

role of the guilty party or hero. It seems that the highest hierarchs of the church and of the state were left outside the process of repentance, whereas the ROC understood the church as the place of national and societal healing during that time.

Developing theological reasoning by the ROC in 1992

Relations between the ROC and the formation of independent states during the disintegrative process of the Soviet Union were taken into theological consideration by the ROC during the following year, 1992. The ROC stated that it suspected that the development of an increasing number of the nation states in the area of the former Soviet Union would lead to new domestic and international conflicts. At the same time, the ROC's hierarchy reported that it was not against the new state models and was not itself an 'imperial structure', as the opponents of the ROC, according to the ROC, had claimed. The ROC's hierarchy emphasised the spiritual union of the ROC, which cannot be threatened by any borders. The reason for this is that the church is the mystical Body of Christ, and, as such, the Church of Christ is undivided and will stay like that until the end of days. The church crosses the boundaries of the state in the hearts of the people and is strengthened by the great variety of its people. The church serves nations and the whole of humankind and helps the states to strengthen peace and mutual understanding of the ethical-moral order (The ROC 4th April, 1992).

The ROC described the basic mission of the church as being to serve God so that people could be saved and to preach the Gospel among the people. The church's mission will not change and it is the ground for participation in societal life, where Christ is preached through words and deeds. Based on this, the task of the church to take care that a nation's life is fulfilled in peace, love and justice. The ROC's statement declares also that the church is not on the side of any social or political model; rather, based on its independence, the church can be in discussion with every political bloc (The ROC 4th April 1992).

One can notice how the ROC emphasises its spiritual nature over the institutional. This emphasis upon the spiritual nature guarantees that the ROC has the right to act among all the people across the former Soviet Union. The theological argumentation also validates the actions of the ROC in the political sphere – the church's spiritual nature has to become visible in actions, i.e. in the societal life (Kenworthy, 2008: 24–27). This reasoning confirms the assumption that the actions of the church in the society have a theological meaning, and that there is often a theological reasoning behind the actions. At least, according to this view, the ROC's actions can be evaluated from the theological perspective.

Considering the ROC's position from the perspective of the Orthodox Church's structure, it is evident that the question of emerging nation states was significant for the ROC. Historically, the Orthodox Churches are structured territorially under different Patriarchates and bishoprics. The canonical territory is ecclesiastical and political category used to denote the space of domination. From political perspective, it reflected in most cases political borders and imperial spheres of influence (Agandjanian & Rousselet,

2005: 39 – 46). From ecclesiastical perspective the practice is theologically based upon the ecclesiastical idea of a faithful people gathering to enjoy a common sharing of the Eucharist at the local level under one bishop. Taking one step further, it is not impossible to state that the idea has connection to Eucharistic ecclesiology. In the Eucharist, people are in communion with other Orthodox faithful in the Body of Christ, which is both the shared bread as the body of Christ in the Eucharist and communion it creates among every member of the one Body of Christ at locations all over the world, i.e. within the whole Orthodox Church. The Eucharist becomes the element that constitutes the Church from which the whole church structure grows out (Shishkov, 2017: 190 – 191). Thus it can be seen as the basis for church political interpretation of canonical territory as well.

The very theological reasoning of one Body of Christ and its special interpretation of the bishop's territorial office of oversight, is combined with the post-modern interpretation (Papkova, 2011: 72 – 73) of a symphony, whereby only one Patriarch can take care of one nation together as its sovereign leader. This explains why the territoriality of the Orthodox Churches is not just a question of earthly structures. It is also a question of theologically reasoned power in the church. Who will create connections between the church and state in the new nation states? What kind of model does the ROC need in order to keep the Moscow Patriarch's position as the only one, who has spiritual impact in the new countries?

One can notice how the ROC stressed its multinational character during the change in the societal situation. The ROC wanted both to strengthen its position across state borders and to be open for different discussions. Removing the church from any position as a political actor at the beginning of the 1990s is evidence both of the ROC's willingness to safeguard itself from political abuse and a real withdrawal from the political sphere in which the ROC was somewhat forced to take part during the Soviet times in the form of international peace politics (Beljakova & Bremer & Kunter: 2016, 127 – 129). Compared to speeches from the time of the 1991 coup d'état attempt, the church is more of a sovereign actor, the primary aim of which is spiritual. The structures of states and nations are not seen to be engaged with the church structures in any way, which could harm the church. The ground for such an interpretation is the church's basic spiritual task, the character of which is multinational by nature.

Neutrality of the ROC during the coup d'état in October 1993

The argument of the ROC strengthened and absorbed new ways of thinking through the statements given during the coup d'état of October 1993. At this time, Patriarch Alexy II offered the possibility of conciliation between the different sides (Coup d'état, 1994: 16). Priests sent by Patriarch Alexy served both sides – those inside and outside the Russian White House. The biggest fear of Patriarch Alexy was that the tension would lead to bloodshed (Coup d'état, 1994: 15). The Patriarch condemned all kinds of violence. The Patriarch's other fear was that the attempted coups would lead to the disintegration of the Russian Federation (Coup d'état, 1994: 15 – 16).

The ROC's own understanding of its neutral position was recognised during the events and the recognition was based on the fact that all sorts of political perspectives were present under the umbrella of the ROC (Golz, 1994: 3 – 5). At that time, the ROC saw itself as a neutral communion. It recognised the political actions of some of its priests, but also condemned those actions (The ROC, undated; The ROC 3rd November 1993, 5 – 6). A neutral standpoint seemed to be important for the ROC's self-understanding and enabled it to keep the church open for the different opinions of its members as well as for different political ideas in the societal discussions. The theological reasoning for the church's position was based on the nature of the church, which is primarily spiritual and, stemming from that, the task of building peace is also among its basic duties. From the point of view of the building of the national identity, it is interesting that the ROC's concern over the integrity of the Soviet Union turned to concern over the integrity of the Russian Federation, while at the same time it emphasised its own nature, which extends beyond the borders of the states. The ROC's national identity seemed to cherish a multinational identity, but it also searched for governmental structures. The argumentation can be understood as the first step of the bipolar national and ecclesiastical identity. Regarding national identity, this concept does not play a role for the ROC in a spiritual sense, because the ROC's spirituality unites different nations. The argumentation is, however, for the unity of certain territorial spaces – whereas the new national structures of the post-Soviet space did not allow considering the former territory of the Soviet Union as one entity, the Russian Federation took the place of the heart of the Orthodoxy represented by the ROC. Such an arrangement required new kinds of arguments to prove the validity and authority of the ROC outside the borders of the Russian Federation. Answers to the new kind of multinational character seemed to be either for greater autonomy of the territories outside the Russian borders and focusing mainly on the Russian Federation's territory or developing the multinational identity, where the heart of the ROC was Russia, but the influence reached outside the national borders.

The state was understood to guarantee the integrity of a nation. The ROC wanted to support such integrity and was therefore careful that it created contacts with the legal power and not with any separate political bloc. Theological argumentation seemed to go side by side with a more practical and nationally oriented argumentation.

The coup d'état in October 1993 was interpreted from a spiritual point of view as well. Patriarch Alexy II expressed his sorrow because people had sinned gravely and therefore the Lord had caused tragedy to dictate Russia's course. People had not heard the Church's call and had raised their hand against their neighbour (Coup d'état, 1994: 26). The politically difficult situation was interpreted as the consequence of people's obstinacy and the failure to turn back to God and the Church. The argumentation seems to be for a continuum of that arising from the first coup d'état in August 1991. During that time, the future was open for the people to make the repentance. The new coup d'état was interpreted as failure in this regards – the people had not been able to achieve spiritual renewal and thus brought down God's anger against them.

The Patriarch appealed to all by saying that everyone is buried under spiritual ruins. The only way out from such a debacle is through the spiritual renewal of the human person, which is also the way to heal the ills of the society (Coup d'état, 1994: 27 – 28). During this crisis the ROC interpreted the Orthodox Church as the only stable and even infallible institution, through which its members should practice repentance and pursue spiritual renewal. The ROC understands itself as a peace builder and mediator between God and mankind. The orthodox ecclesiastical self-understanding of the Orthodox Church as infallible seems to play a role in the sense that the ROC is not itself willing to re-evaluate its past, but demands repentance from its members. The ROC's understanding implicitly includes a view, according to which the ROC has survived as a true church through the Soviet times, but only now are the people able to enter into its protection – and entry is interpreted as being necessary. Such an understanding reflects a view of the church as an institution that has power over society – at least spiritually. This means that the church is indispensable in society, and its help is needed and it is even requirement in order for actions to be taken for a better society. This line of thought comes from the Orthodox theological idea of transfiguration, whereby a person's spiritual growth brings them closer towards God. This becomes visible in good actions towards other people. When such actions take place among many people in one society, the whole society will become better; it grows towards God's Kingdom and thus rises to a higher level than earlier (Hurskainen, 2013: 63 – 68; 148 – 150; Mylonas, 2003: 36). The Patriarch's reactions showed disappointment that the process hadn't taken place as imagined after the fall of communism, although the people flowed in to the churches.

Even though the ROC showed growing independence from the political powers during the first years of the 1990s within the Russian Federation's borders, at the same time it started to create the myth of a suffering Russian nation by its spiritual interpretations of the coup d'états. The first coup showed the spiritual strength of the nation whereas the second coup showed the nation's continuing fall, which invoked God's anger. The spiritual interpretations thus served the nation's self-understanding though it was unclear what the nation's next step forward would be. Theological reasoning, for its part, aimed at establishing a more independent role from the state, but only in the aspect that the church was able to take part in the societal activities as necessary and as an independent partner of the political actors. The ROC's disappointment concerning the spiritual condition of the nation living within the borders of the Russian Federation during the second coup challenged the theological ideal of transfiguration, but it served the spiritual and mythological image of the nation, where pilgrimage under God's guidance included not only success but also failures to live up to theological ideals.

The ROC and states outside the borders of the Russian Federation

The ROC was worried about possible bloodshed in the territory of the former Soviet Union. This fear was real and was realised in some of the crises when new states became

independent. The ROC informed the World Council of Churches about its activities in Ukraine, Moldova and Serbia and in Armenia and Azerbaijan before 1994.

According to the ROC, it gives its blessing and support to the processes in those republics, where the ROC reaches and which used to be incorporated within the former Soviet Union, thereby contributing to building a way of life worthy of mankind for all their citizens and to ensure the civil rights, including the freedom of religion, for every person. The purpose of the ROC's actions in those countries – including Ukraine – was to seek to consolidate the spiritual basis of society and educate the church members for observing religious and moral values. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church was situated in Ukraine and was a canonical part of the Moscow Patriarchate, independent and self-reliant in its governance. The biggest obstacle for the ROC's actions and the human rights situation in Ukraine was the actions taken by the schismatic, former bishop of the ROC, Filaret (Denysenko), together with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The actions of these individuals and organisations as well as those of other players, who the ROC felt were arrayed against it, endangered the realisation of human rights in Ukraine, at least on the part of the ROC. The ROC saw the situation as being so bad, that it could even hinder the political process of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (SCSE) and asked for help from the World Council of Churches to normalise the situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – of which the ROC meant the church under the Moscow Patriarchate (The ROC's correspondence to the WCC, 9th September, 1992).

Concerning the Ukrainian situation, the ROC translated the problematic religious situation into the language of human rights and made it a political issue. It is possible to identify two different reasons for such a translation. Firstly, the SCSE process had been the political process through which the ROC had been willing to engage in ecumenical dialogues on socio-ethical questions during the Soviet times in the 1970s and 1980s (Hurskainen, 2013: 139 – 140, 180 – 182; Albers, 2014: 204). In its argumentation with the SCSE, the ROC earlier had emphasised the aspect of freedom of community instead of that of the freedom of individuals. In connection with the SCSE process, through its contacts with multilateral ecumenical organisations, the ROC had emphasised and defended the freedom of religion in the Soviet Union and its satellites – often also in a manner which downplayed the atheist state's violence against religion. Thus, when the ROC saw its position as threatened in Ukraine, its natural reaction was to seek support from the WCC, which had supported the ROC's position by appealing to human rights – mainly using quiet diplomacy – during the Soviet times (Beljakova & Bremer & Kunter, 2016: 197 – 198). The SCSE process was still, in the ROC's eyes, of such great importance at the beginning of the 1990s that connecting the Ukrainian situation to that process was a very natural thing for the ROC to do. Secondly, soon after the fall of the Soviet Union, a growing number of different protestant and free churches had started actions in Russia, which actions the ROC regarded as proselytising (Stöckl, 2014: 29; Illert, 2016: 69). In Russia, evangelisation created unprecedented challenges for the Moscow Patriarchate, immediate of which was defining the Church's role in the pluralistic religious environment

(Knox, 2004: 90). Evangelisation was understood almost as a violation against religious freedom, in the sense that it prevented people from learning about their orthodox heritage (Agadjanian & Rousselet, 2005: 42). The situation in Ukraine can thus be seen also as the ROC using the western language of human rights in order to speak with its western collaborators about the church's difficult situation. The situation was thus such that the human rights speech was more suitable from the ROC's side in the discussion with the WCC than pure talk about canonical borders. It is obvious that the theological side of the Ukrainian issue thus came under the threat of being ignored in the religious discussion, whereas the political-juridical aspect of the issue was emphasised. For future ecumenical discussions about human rights, the reactions from the west to the ROC's appeal for Ukraine might have played a role for the later increasingly negative attitude.

Unlike Ukrainian case, the ROC's activity in Moldova can be linked directly with the question of the canonical borders of the Orthodox Church. Apparently this was the first canonical conflict the ROC explicitly mentioned after the collapse of the Soviet Union, although the situation in Ukraine had similar characteristics. The ROC was concerned about the spiritual care of the Moldovian people in newly established Moldova, where both Romanian and Russian canonical orthodox churches were present. The actual controversy was about the appointment of the Bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the area, which the ROC regarded as traditionally coming under the ROC's canonical jurisdiction. In order to solve the Moldovan situation, the ROC was ready to turn to the Universal Orthodox Plenitude (The ROC 22nd December 1992).

Both the Ukrainian and Moldovan controversies, despite their primarily religious, more precisely inter-orthodox, natures, arose in connection with the questions generated by the new state borders and secular power. The difference lies in the way the ROC wanted to solve the situations – the Ukrainian case was translated into human rights language, which made it more political, whereas the Moldovan case was explained more clearly as a religious issue, which should be resolved within the Orthodoxy.

The Moldovian case was a purely inner-Orthodox case of which the ROC wanted the WCC to be aware and on which the ROC asked the WCC's support (The ROC's correspondence to the WCC 8th January 1993). The ROC and the Romanian Orthodox Church were both members of the WCC. Thus, the WCC was seen to have the authority to express its opinion on the situation. Also in the case of Ukraine, the ROC asked the WCC's support for its own interpretation of the situation (The ROC's correspondence to the WCC, 9th September 1992). The case was, however, different from the Moldovian case, since the ROC did not recognise its opponents in Ukraine as churches or representatives of the church. It seems that from the ROC's perspective, it became impossible to discuss the Ukrainian issue among the Orthodox plenitude – since the other part of the conflict could not be part of that plenitude. This interpretation gave the ROC the possibility to talk about the issue as one of human rights violations. Looking at the case like this, from the ROC's point of view, the argumentation focusing on human rights becomes understandable.

Though the ROC was not part of the Yugoslavian war, it monitored the case of Serbia in 1993. The ROC was willing to support the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian nation during the Yugoslavian war. The ROC in particular wanted to support the Orthodox Church and the existence of the ancient Serbian nation by asking for help from the WCC concerning the inhuman situation and to find a resolution to the conflict in Yugoslavia as soon as possible (The ROC's correspondence to the WCC 5th February 1993). Such a support for another Orthodox Church can be understood in the context of connections the ROC have had with the Serbian Orthodox Church and as a felt closeness with other churches from the same church family. To be against brutality and war shows that the ROC understands itself as being a church building peace.

At the end of 1993, different religious leaders were moved to react to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The leaders of the ROC, Islam and Armenian Orthodox Church, asserted that the Nagorno-Karabakh War was not an interreligious war. In the view of these leaders, the conflict should have been solved in negotiations and enemy images should have not been established, since they only complicate the resolution of such a conflict (Common statement, 18th November 1993).

The last mentioned case differs from the three preceding cases in that it concerns the co-operation of religions whereas the three earlier mentioned cases are more or less inner Orthodox cases. Also, here the ROC's message is one of building peace, but this time not only for the sake of Orthodox communion, but for different religions. Historically interpreted, the co-operation was nothing new for the ROC. During the Soviet times many inter-religious conferences were arranged, where religious leaders from the Soviet Union and its satellites came together to defend peace (Overmeyer, 2005: 215 – 220). The basis for co-operation had been laid down during the Soviet times, although the connections were somewhat dictated by the civil authorities. At any rate, these existing connections helped the leaders to come together and declare the war as inhumane and not an interreligious war.

One may notice that one country, where the ROC faced inter-orthodox problems already at the beginning of the 1990s, is missing from the analysis. The WCC archives did not include any letter or information about the ROC and its position in Estonia. In Estonia the question of the Estonian Orthodox Church's jurisdiction caused tensions between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Constantinople Patriarchate in the early 1990s, because of the controversially interpreted Constantinople Patriarchate's position towards the ROC's right to administer to the Orthodox in Estonia from the 1970s (Richters, 2013). The only hint regarding this case in the WCC archives is one memorandum. In the memorandum it was stated that according to the 'gentlemen's agreement', inter-Orthodox conflicts should be solved internally within the Orthodox churches (Memorandum to the WCC, 23th December 1993). The total silence from the ROC's part on the issue showed how it did not want the issue to be internationally discussed and disputed. This is again one different approach to the problems that took place outside the Russian Federation's borders, compared to those in Ukraine and

Moldova, on both of which the ROC asked the WCC's support. In the Estonian case, the opposing side, the Constantinople Patriarchate, had a more influential place within the Orthodoxy as well as within the WCC. This might have stopped the ROC from bringing the issue to the WCC's knowledge.

Despite the many differences between the cases that took place outside the Russian Federation's borders, it is possible to find some commonalities. Common to these four cases – or five, if the non-discussed Estonian case is counted – that took place in different countries outside the Russian borders was the motive of religious activity. The motive was not national in the sense that the ROC would have been concerned about the existence or integrity of a particular, single nation, as was the case during the events in Russia. Rather, the concern was about peace or the position of the ROC, other Orthodox Churches or other religions in those countries, which manifested themselves in different ways depending on the varying situations. Outside the Russian borders, the ROC appeared as a church that was more concerned about its own members than a church that was concerned about the integrity of a state or nation. Along with taking care of the group's own members, a wish was also present to secure structures of the church. Therefore, the ROC's actions outside the Russian borders were not just theologically based but they had also an institutional aspect.

Conclusions

Are religious doctrinal arguments about a nation completely unthinkable? This was not the case for the ROC in the early years of the 1990s. The institution's relationship with the nation has been described from the point of view of the church's essence. The task of the church is to lead people to salvation and therefore it is called upon to be multinational. This is the ground for the church's work among a nation. Salvation gives people the task of acting in this world, and the ROC has interpreted it so that its task is to help states in searching and finding lasting ethical–moral values. Resigning from the restrictions of a national hegemony thus enabled the ROC to find reasons to work for different nationalities and for different states.

Does a doctrine lose its religious nature and motivation when the ROC uses it as a means of co-operation with the state and politics? Yes and no. In the end of the socialist regime, the ROC didn't see any prospects for co-operation with communist political ideology, but later the ROC was open to co-operation with different political trends in order to serve people and work for peace – actions that the ROC understood as stemming from its doctrine. A religious nature remained in the ROC's argumentation on nations within the Russian territory, but it was not completely coherent and started to include aspects of non-doctrinal reasoning for national integrity. Also, spiritual-mythical explanations on the nation under God's guidance were present in the ROC's argumentation.

Outside the Russian borders, the ROC seemed to be more concerned about its own integrity than the integrity of one or another nation or state. It used the Orthodox

principle of canonical territories, which is a doctrinal one and describes the structures of the church in the visible world. The use of this principle might then have had a negative influence on the integrity of other states and nations, but also for the ROC itself. The ROC had understood this especially in Ukraine, where it translated the religious debates into human rights language and emphasised thus the political aspect of the issue. The religious nature of the problem, which arises from the doctrinal argument, might then be hindered and left without proper theological and religious discussion. The religious nature of the argument seems to be visible but also to disappear in different cases. Only in the discourse of the Nagorno-Karabakh war did it work for national integrity – in other cases, the church's position emphasised the integrity of the church at the cost of the integrity of nations and states. This put a question mark on the ROC's multinational identity: Is the ROC able to work for such nations, which do not belong mainly to the Orthodox Church?

Did the ROC's doctrinal interpretations generate a nation of peace or conflict in the early years of the 1990s? The ROC's attempt was to work for peace among nations and states through its doctrinal argumentation. This was especially true in Russia. Its intention was to generate peace also outside the Russian borders. However, the issues concerning especially the canonical borders of the ROC and spiritualising the fate of the nation within the Russian Federation's border, make one wonder, whether the ROC's ecclesiastical and multinational identities conflicted in a way that might have contained the seeds for future conflict as well.

Acknowledgement. The papers in the Block "Philosophy and Religion" are based on the reports, scheduled in the 34th International Conference Program of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion (ISSR): RELIGION, COOPERATION AND CONFLICT IN DIVERSE SOCIETIES - Lausanne (Switzerland) July 4 – 7. 2017. They are presented before the session "The God's Chosen Nation": A Mythological Construct and Conflict-generating Potential (Session Convenor's note – Nonka Bogomilova).

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Memorandum (23rd December 1993). 1pp
The ROC (undated): *Statement*. 1pp
The ROC (August 1991), *To the Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR*. 1pp
The ROC (23th August 1991) *Message to the archpastors, pastors, the religious and all the faithful children of the Russian Orthodox Church*. 2pp.
The ROC (28th August 1991) *To the Editor in Chief of the Newspaper [...]*. 1pp.
The ROC (30th August 1991) *Appeal to the Archpastors, pastors and all its faithful children*. 3pp.

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The ROC (3rd November 1993) *Mitteilung für die Massenmedien vom 03.11.1993*. 7pp.

The ROC's correspondence to the WCC (9th September 1992) 3pp.

The ROC's correspondence to the WCC (8th January 1993) 1pp.

The ROC's correspondence to the WCC (5th February 1993) 1pp.

NOTES

1. Obtaining permission to use the WCC archives required a promise to anonymise names from the material. Therefore, the abbreviation “the ROC” is used broadly to mean both individual and communal statements and correspondence from the ROC to the WCC. Names of people and organisations are mentioned only if they appear in published ISBN-registered material.

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