

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AS AN INSTRUMENT OF HYBRID WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

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Abstract. The present article explores the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia's information warfare against Ukraine. It analyses the instruments of religious propaganda, used to shape political, cultural, and social events in Ukraine as a precondition for Russian military aggression. The paperwork proves that the Russian Orthodox Church exerts destructive information and psychological influences to activate pro-Russian sentiments among the Ukrainians, slow down Euro integration as state-building processes in Ukraine and return it under the control of Moscow.

Keywords: *Russian Orthodox Church; Moscow Patriarchate; Russian-Ukrainian war; information warfare; hybrid war; psychological influences; propaganda.*

Introduction

Hybrid war is generally understood as military action carried out by combining military, quasi-military, diplomatic, information, economic and other means in order to achieve strategic political goals. The specific of this combination is that each of the military and non-military methods of hybrid conflict is used for military purposes as a weapon. Weaponization takes place not only in the media sphere. The concept of hybrid warfare was theoretically and practically the most suitable for determining the specifics of the actions of the Russian Federation, which, combining all the above-mentioned means, without neglecting nuclear blackmail, consistently tries to achieve in Ukraine and in other parts of the world, its own political goals, incompletely understandable to international community¹.

One of the key elements of hybrid warfare is information and psychological operations. Information influences on the mass consciousness have been existed since ancient times. Shamans and priests used them as technology when trying to

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¹ Світова гібридна війна: український фронт : монографія [The world hybrid warfare; Ukrainian forefront – monograph]/за заг. ред., В. П. Горбуліна, Kyiv, НІСД, 2017, p. 15.

“construct the future” in one way or another. The term “psychological warfare” was first used in 1920 by the British historian J. Fuller, who analyzed the events of the First World War² Psychological wars (operations) are considered communication technologies, carried out through information flows, aiming to change the behavior of an individual or community by modifying his model of the world³.

Scientific understanding of the information indicator as a key factor of psychological influences and the basic resource of dominance was initiated in the works of such scientists as J. Akshay, R. Armitage, Zb M. Cox, M. Libitsky, S. Lux, J. Mettern, W. Owens, I. Parmar, M. Rubin, N. Snow, S. Walt, M. Fraser, F. Fukuyama, P. van Ham, K. Hill et al. Certain aspects of the phenomenon of information wars, the mechanisms of their origin and development have been studied by such well-known scientists as S. Bukharin, A. Manoilo, I. Panarin, A. Petrenko, S. Rastorguev, D. Frolov, V. Tsyganov, I. Sharavov, etc. Among the Ukrainian specialists one should note A. Barovska, M. Galamb, A. Gutsal, V. Dubov, V. Lipkan, O. Lytvynenko, A. Lutsenko, Y. Noev, M. Ozhevan, V. Ostroukhov, O. Panfilov, V. Petryk, V. Petrov, G. Pocheptsov, P. Prybutko, O. Yudin and others⁴.

Theorists distinguish the following functions of information and psychological influences:

- propaganda, designed to carry out information and psychological influence aimed at consolidating the desired ideas, habits, beliefs of a man (social group), or vice versa – the destruction of undesirable ideas, habits and beliefs;
- psychophysical, designed to carry out informational and (or) energy effects on mental functions and the work of physiological organs and systems of a man;
- neurolinguistic, aimed to control human consciousness and behavior through linguistic constructions, a set of certain symbols, colors, sounds, archetypes, visual images, etc.;
- psychotropic, the purpose of which is to affect the human brain, activate or reduce the processes of thinking and perception of information by changing the biochemical characteristics of processes occurring in the human nervous system;
- psychotronic, designed to influence the consciousness and subconscious of a human by different technical means in order to reduce his/her will, oppress or temporarily disable, etc.;
- psychogenic, aimed at changing the neuropsychological activity of the human brain;
- psychoanalytic, designed to influence the human subconscious by therapeutic means, in particular in a state of hypnosis and deep sleep by infusing necessary settings, etc.⁵.

This research is dedicated to studying neurolinguistic and propaganda effects of the religious and information influences by the Russian Orthodox Church.

² Г. Почепцов, Психологические войны [Psychological wars], Moscow, Рефлбук, 2001, p. 337.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 338.

⁴ М. Требін, Феномен інформаційної війни у світі, що глобалізується [Phenomenon of the information war in a globalizing world], Вісник Національного університету “Юридична академія України імені Ярослава Мудрого”, No. 12(16), 2013, p. 188.

⁵ О. В. Левченко, Класифікація інформаційної зброї за засобами ведення інформаційної боротьби [Classification of information weapons by means of waging information warfare] // Сучасні інформ. технології у сфері безпеки та оборони, No. 2 (20), 2014, p. 144.

Attacks on the religious front and their impact on countries' defense capabilities are no less powerful than military operations. Information and psychological influences on the self-consciousness, behavior and political orientation of the population through the religious factor are actively used by the Russian Federation to achieve important domestic political goals, to pursue its geopolitical interests, as well as to strengthen its role in the international arena. The emphasis is put on changing the moral and ethical norms and values of society, national, historical and religious self-identification, as well as the view of certain facts, events etc. It is particularly noticeable on the European continent: in Ukraine and the post-Soviet countries. That is why there is a need to study possible ways to overcome the consequences of these influences and neutralize their threats in the field of information confrontation. In the context of the formation of the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine and against the background of the Russian-Ukrainian war, there is a need to explore ways to counter the destructive information and psychological influences of the ROC. They are used by Moscow as one of the key instruments of hybrid warfare in the political, military, social, informational and cultural spheres, aimed at slowing down European integration processes in our country and returning it under Russia's control.

With regard to the above-mentioned, the relevance of the article is determined by the need for theoretical research of the current state and features of the destructive information and psychological influences by the Russian Orthodox Church.

The purpose of the article is to study theoretical aspects of applying destructive information and psychological influences by the ROC in Ukraine and to evaluate the effect of such influences. Taking into account the purpose, the object of research is destructive information and psychological influences in international relations, and the subject of research is information and psychological influences of the ROC in relations between Russia and Ukraine.

Methodology includes analysis, synthesis and systematic approach to determine the features of modern information and psychological influences of the Russian Orthodox Church and the practice of their application in Ukraine. The method of analysis and synthesis also helped to determine the results of the ROC's destructive influences in Ukraine.

The scientific hypothesis is to prove that in the contemporary system of international relations Russia uses the ROC as a tool of destructive information and psychological influences in Ukraine to pursue its geopolitical interests and undermine trust in Western values and institutions.

Russian Orthodox Church propaganda in Ukraine

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has *de facto* been existed since the time of its self-proclamation in 1448, although it has never received a decree of autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. However, current authorities and governing structures of the ROC were formed in the mid-1940s, when the Soviet government lifted the ban on the ROC activity for propaganda purposes. Thus, in 1943, the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR established the

Council for the Affairs of the ROC and introduced a new church policy of the Soviet Union. The Moscow Patriarchate was recognized as the only legitimate Orthodox Church in the USSR. The activity of the ROC was under the control of the Council and was limited to services in the temples without missionary, preaching, educational or socio-political activities. The Orthodox Church worked closely with the KGB (Committee for State Security), and most of the high-ranking clergy were intelligence agents and carried out the committee's instructions. The head of the ROC, the Patriarch of Moscow and All-Russia, Kirill (Gundyaev), is no exception – during his ministry in Soviet Russia he was a KGB agent codenamed “Mikhailov”⁶. In nowadays Russia the ROC continues to cooperate with government institutions, supports and declares the same myths created by Russian political propaganda.

Since Ukraine's independence in 1991, Russia has been actively using the religious factor to spread its influence on the Ukrainian society, its cultural and political life through the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) of the Moscow Patriarchate (MP) which it had turned into a platform for hybrid warfare. First of all, the UOC-MP became an ideological tool for promoting the latest geopolitical doctrine called “Russkiy mir” or Pax Russica, which sees Ukraine at its core (“Russkiy mir” is a concept of interstate unification of the Slavic states around the Russian language and culture, where the word “Russkiy” refers to ancient Rus). For decades, the ROC's outreach activity has eroded Ukraine's ethnic and civic identity and prepared a springboard for Russian expansion and absorption. Destructive informational, cultural, social, religious and political activities of the ROC once became a powerful factor in fueling separatist ideas, especially in eastern and southern Ukraine, where UOC-MP dioceses predominate, and served as an additional front for Kremlin aggression in the undeclared Russian-Ukrainian war.

One of the key elements of the Moscow Patriarchate's informational influence was the dissemination of church literature, cultivating the inferiority of Ukrainians and promoting slavish ideology imposed by Moscow. For example, such phrases as “guilt complex”, “older brother”, “fraternal peoples” were widely used, and there was a significant substitution of meanings (among them: Ukraine takes its roots from Russia, Kyivan princes – “Russian tsars”, population of ancient Kyiv – “Russian people”)⁷.

Similar messages were spread by various pro-Russian socio-political structures, concentrated mainly in the East and South of Ukraine, in particular, the All-Ukrainian Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots, which included about 125 registered public organizations. Their activities were sponsored by Viktor Yanukovich and political forces loyal to him.

During worship and services the UOC-MP clergy regularly repeated the

⁶ Felix Corley, *The Mikhailov Files: Patriarch Kirill and the KGB*, 2018, https://www.academia.edu/37152767/The_Mikhailov_Files_Patriarch_Kirill_and_the_KGB.

⁷ Гарда М. Код сепаратизму в богослужбових текстах УПЦ: форми, формули, статистика [Separatism code in the liturgical texts of the OCU: forms, formula, statistics] // Релігія в Україні. – 2015. – [online]. – Available at: <http://www.religion.in.ua/main/analitica/28628-kod-separatizmu-v-bogosluzhbovix-tekstax-upc-formi-formulistatistika.html>, 18 April 2021.

narratives about “common historical destiny”, the assertion that the ROC is “Kyiv font”, the idea of “unity of Holy Russia”. All these myths laid a favorable ground for the spread of Russian influence primarily in eastern and southern Ukraine. In addition, the Moscow Patriarchate engaged in the militarization of the Ukrainian population by imposing historical military myths, such as fighting neo-fascists – as they called the Revolution of Dignity participants – and promoting a narrative of “great victory” in the “Great Patriotic War”. For this purpose, magnificent celebrations of Victory Day and the Day of Liberation of Donbass from Nazi invaders were held in Donbass under the auspices of UOC-MP, during which the UOC-MP clergy carried posters with Soviet symbols identity, which had a significant impact on the development of the pro-Russian separatist movement in early 2014⁸.

Before the Revolution of Dignity, the annexation of Crimea and the war in the East of Ukraine, the ROC had worked closely with Viktor Yanukovich's regime to fight the opposition and supporters of European integration and discredit their pro-Western course. The phenomenon of “political Orthodoxy”, which the Ukrainian authorities at the time had adopted from the Russian authorities, became popular. Thus, high-ranking officials began to use the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate to strengthen their authority and exercise political influence. The ROC systematically used cynical disinformation against the opposition, incited hatred and intolerance against other denominations, called for violence and caused aversion to values and norms differing from those declared by Moscow. For these purposes, such propaganda instruments were used:

- promotion of the “Russkiy mir” geopolitical doctrine, cultivation of myths about “fraternal peoples”, East Slavic and Orthodox unity aimed at eroding civic and ethnic identity of Ukrainian citizens, discrediting Ukraine as a sovereign state (way of creating conditions for a full-scale information and propaganda expansion);

- application of manipulative technologies aimed at substituting the real events related to the Revolution of Dignity, updating the myth about the threat of Ukrainian pro-Western policy to Russia, Russian-speaking population, Orthodoxy in eastern Ukraine and Crimea (laying ground for intervention in the internal affairs of Ukraine);

- calling Russian aggression in Ukraine “fratricidal”, “civil war” (internal conflict), sacralization of the Russian-Ukrainian war in Donbass (protection of “canonical Orthodoxy”, “holy war”) as an attempt to legitimize Russia's armed aggression and destruction of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty;

- outreach activities to undermine trust in the current government and the process of gaining autocephaly by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (Russian propaganda called it “illegality”, “schism”, “fascism”).

After the overthrow of Yanukovich's regime, the illegal annexation of Crimea and Russia's occupation of the Ukrainian East, the ROC launched a large-scale

⁸ Россия должна вмешаться в дела Украины и спасти ее, считают в Русской церкви [Russia should interfere and save Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church believes], Interfax, 2014, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/print.php?act=news&id=54273>, 18 April 2021.

campaign to discredit not only the Ukrainian government but also Ukrainian Christian denominations being in opposition to the UOC-MP and supporting Ukraine's pro-Western course. Among them are the UOC-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC). The Moscow Patriarchate called these institutions "schismatics" and the UGCC clergy "Uniates". Tarnished image of the above-mentioned Ukrainian churches was to become part of a large-scale propaganda campaign, to slow down the state-building processes in Ukraine and to incline the faithful to the side of the UOC-MP and, accordingly, to arouse allegiance to the Russian Orthodox Church. Myths about the "need to protect Orthodoxy and Russian-speakers", "spiritual unity" between Russians and Ukrainians, the destruction of "our Church's unity", and promoting the idea that "Ukraine is part of the historical Rus heritage" are also in the weapons arsenal used by the Moscow Patriarchate to justify Russia's military invasion of Ukraine⁹.

The illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia was facilitated by the Moscow Patriarchate. In Crimea, the Russian Church has been openly carrying out Kremlin's "defense order" for a long time. In 2015, the saboteurs hid in the church of Andrew the First-Called: Russian "Cossacks" spent the night in the church before the so-called "decisive days" – the seizure of office buildings and the blockade of Ukrainian military units. Right after the occupation of the peninsula, the ROC began to pursue military policy among the youth and Kremlin military propaganda among children. In particular, in 2018, during the celebration of St. Fyodor Ushakov's Day, the priests organized an excursion for the children to the military unit, where they were photographed with military equipment. These photos were later published on the website of the Crimean diocese. The Russian Orthodox Church distributes grants to Orthodox camps where children are taught how to become spies. The ROC also helps the Russian Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Federal Security Bureau, the Ministry of Emergencies, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Investigative Committee to recruit students for the all-Russian military movement "Unarmy", which already consists of more than 500,000 children. On the basis of "Unarmy" there operate the so-called military-patriotic sections, where classes in various military disciplines are held. Children get acquainted with military equipment, shoot with automatic weapons, jump with parachutes, go to various military gatherings in camps and training grounds. The religious aspect lies in the fact that students are taught to protect "true Orthodox values", "holy and righteous faith" from the "Ukrainian junta" and "NATO fascists"¹⁰.

In addition to excessive militarization, the Russian Orthodox Church in annexed Crimea helps the Russian government to reshape Ukrainian history and spread imperial ideology. Father Tikhon wrote a play about the history of Crimea

⁹ Россия должна вмешаться в дела Украины и спасти ее, считают в Русской церкви [Russia should interfere and save Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church believes], Interfax, 2014, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/print.php?act=news&id=54273>, 18 April 2021.

¹⁰ РФ планує набрати у "Путінюгенд" мільйон дітей – InformNapalm [Russia plans on hiring millions of children for Putin Jugend], InformNapalm, 2019, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/2698973-rosia-planue-nabrati-u-putinugend-miljon-ditej-informnapalm.html>, 21 March 2021.

and Chersonesos dedicated to the 5th anniversary of the annexation. It glorifies the image of Putin as the leader and liberator of the Crimean people, who returned their small homeland to the “native harbor”, and also claims that Crimea is part of Russia and historical heritage of Moscow since the time of Catherine the Great. The play openly cultivates the famous slogan “Crimea is ours”. Father Tikhon said that the play was going to be staged or even screened – possibly, at the expense of the Ministry of Culture of Russia¹¹.

The ROC is also conducting subversive outreach activity in eastern Ukraine as part of the Russian Federation's hybrid war. It uses a wide range of tools, including media and Internet resources. For example, the representatives of the ROC promoted their propaganda films “Myths and true stories of the Ukrainians” and “Golgotha of Novorossiia” through the portals of such religious agencies as “Orthodox Russia” and “Russian People's Line”. These militant films, based on Russian propaganda clichés, were shot with the help of a large number of political scientists, historians, theologians and politicians. Their main goal was to prove that the armed struggle in Novorossiia was nothing more than a confrontation between “Heaven and Hell” and the resistance of Orthodox Russians against “external anti-Christian threat”. The films conveyed messages about the reduction of “godless Ukrainian authority”, the elimination of all anti-Orthodox heresies, the return of Ukraine (Novorossiia is seen as the first stage of this “reunification”) to Russia. All “Russians” and “Christians” were blessed on this struggle, which was called their “sacred duty”¹². Thus, the films contained an outright urge to participate in this armed bloodshed, that contradicted the official “peace appeals” of the ROC and Russian authorities.

Various public Orthodox associations operate in the occupied East of Ukraine under the auspices of the ROC: “Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods of Ukraine”, “Union of Orthodox Citizens of Ukraine” (renamed the “Union of Orthodox Citizens of Novorossiia”), “Russia Triune”, “United Fatherland”, “People's Council”. Simply by their existence and activity these entities create appropriate news topics (“images”) for the Russian pro-government media, giving them an opportunity to interpret the events in Ukraine in line with Kremlin propaganda. These very groups support Moscow-sponsored separatists and militants, given the fact that Kremlin justified invasion of the East of Ukraine by the so-called protection of the “cradle of Orthodoxy and Orthodox faithful”. The slogans of Moscow Orthodoxy – “For Russia!”, “God be with us”, “For faith! For the Fatherland!” – became the religious basis of the separatist movement. The black-and-orange St. George's ribbon and Orthodox icon for marching, have also become traditional attributes of the armed separatists. Illegal armed groups – “Russian Orthodox Army”, “Donetsk Orthodox Army”, “Orthodox Donbass”,

¹¹ Колесников А. Зачем митрополит Тихон написал пьесу об истории Крыма [Why metropolitan Tikhon has written a play about the history of Crimea], Московский центр Карнеги, 2019, <https://carnegie.ru/2019/03/12/ru-pub-78584>, 5 March 2021.

¹² Мифы и были украинства (фильм) [Myths and true stories about the Ukrainians – film], Русь Православная, YouTube, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3mqVX2YGTQ> 41, 15 February 2021. Голгофа Новороссии (фильм) [The Golgotha of Novorossiia – film], Русь Православная, YouTube, 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QekwePY1w1U>, 5 February 2021.

“Orthodox Sunrise”, Cossack detachments, created with the spiritual and practical support of the ROC – are being used to implement principles of “Russkiy mir” and “Orthodox civilization” (including the restoration of the “renewed” Russian Empire)¹³

The Moscow Patriarchate was at the origin of the “Novorossiya” project in 2014, which, according to the Russian Federation's plan, should have torn Ukraine apart and turn its southern and central regions into puppet republics such as the “DPR” and “LPR”. Thus, in January 2014, a number of pro-Russian separatist groups took part in the celebration of the “360th anniversary of the unity of the Slavic peoples”, as they called the events of Pereyaslav Council in 1654 (an official meeting that convened for ceremonial pledge of allegiance by Cossacks to the Tsar of Muscovy; as a result, a Treaty of Pereyaslav was concluded – Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky submitted Ukraine to Russian rule in exchange for the military protection of the *Tsardom of Russia*). The events took place in Donetsk to the anthem of Russia. The Union of Citizens of Ukraine, National Liberation Movement – Ukraine, Donbass Rus, Russian Bloc and Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine took part in the ceremony. The same anniversary was celebrated in Odessa by “Youth Unity”, “Dozor”, “Rodina” (Motherland), the Communist Party of Ukraine and “Cossack” detachments. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia sent congratulations to the participants of the solemn meeting, pointing out the need to “preserve peace and harmony in the lands of historical Russia”, and once again voicing the slogan of “one nation”. The outreach activities of the ROC at the time of the Russian intervention in 2014 can be divided into the following areas: ensuring Russia's presence in the region (setting the information stage, working with believers in churches, direct communication, holding thematic mass actions with political undertone); promotion of certain pro-Russian narratives and ideas: forever together, Customs Union, Eurasian Union, regionalism, federalism, parliamentary republic, Russian language, in the long run – CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), free “Novorossiya”, free “Little Russia” (or “Malorosiya” – derogatory name of Ukraine, implying that Ukraine is a part of Russia's own patrimony), Subcarpathian Russia, Holy Russia, the cradle of Orthodoxy, the righteous faith, Ukraine and Russia – one Christian nation; demoralization of the enemy, disorientation in the situation, distortion of meanings (“Gayropa” – derogatory term often used by Russian officials to refer to Europe as a space of sexual deviance and lust due to the protection of LGBTQ rights, Ukrainian power – “fascist godless junta”, Revolution of Dignity – “obscurantism”, Ukrainian army – “murderers”).

Ukrainian autocephaly and the Moscow Patriarchate

Exacerbation of the destructive information and psychological influences of the ROC took place in 2018 when the Orthodox Church of Ukraine started to regain its independence from the Moscow Patriarchate. In order to disrupt the

¹³ Россия должна вмешаться в дела Украины и спасти ее, считают в Русской церкви [Russia should interfere and save Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church believes], Interfax, 2014, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/print.php?act=news&id=54273>, 7 January 2021.

process of recognition of the OCU by the Ecumenical Patriarchate the Moscow Patriarchate launched a powerful disinformation campaign against the clergy of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate and the Ukrainian authorities. In particular, by using all possible propaganda media resources both in Ukraine and in Russia, as well as communicating with the faithful and the clergy. The ROC and UOC-MP conveyed such key anti-Ukrainian messages, as following: the Autocephalous Church of Ukraine is non-canonical; its parishioners and leaders are “schismatics and atheists”; the OCU has no right to independently appoint hierarchs, has parishes outside Ukraine and make Holy Anointing Oil for worship; all the money of the schismatics will flow to Constantinople; the Vatican has refused to communicate with the new schismatic structure in Ukraine, while Orthodox churches abroad do not recognize the OCU as an independent entity; President Poroshenko began a pre-election Tomos-tour (“Tomos” is a decree on independence of the church from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew), travelling Ukrainian cities and showing his electorate this “empty piece of paper” as his main achievement during the five-year governance of the “exhausted country”; great bloodshed and redistribution of church property is brewing, after the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine has adopted a simplified procedure for the transition of church communities to a new “church”; the absurdity in Ukraine is gaining momentum: Ukrainian “Nazis” from the group of schismatic parishioners have proposed to canonize Poroshenko and even called him St. Peter the Apostle.

In addition, an important emphasis was placed on diverting attention from the fact that the ROC itself does not have a Tomos on the autocephaly, and therefore is not recognized by Constantinople as an independent full-fledged church. The head of the Synodal Department of External Church Relations of the ROC-MP called Ukraine’s autocephaly a “Catholic project”, posing a threat of schism comparable to the “Great Schism” of 1054, when Christianity was divided into the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches¹⁴.

Some of the ROC’s fakes and propaganda were directed against the United States and Canada, which supported the granting of autocephaly to the □CU. The Moscow Patriarchate called Tomos an “American project” and accused the United States and Canada of “extreme nationalism, Uniatism, and Russophobia”. Besides manipulating the media, ROC began to blackmail Orthodox churches in other countries to achieve non-recognition of the OCU, severed Eucharistic unity with Constantinople, and noted that the Ukrainian Church had “broken away from the Russian Orthodox Church and, thus, should return to its bosom”. Although, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew had called the Russian Church “a daughter of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church”, not the other way around¹⁵.

Against a background of the acquisition of Tomos by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the ROC propaganda machine discredited and tarnished the Ukrainian government, accusing it of interfering in church affairs and bringing discord into

¹⁴ Як Ісус Христос вчинив би з Порошенком. Реакція російської пропаганди на томос [How Jesus Christ would deal with Poroshenko. The reaction of Russian propaganda to the Tomos], StopFake, 2019, <https://www.stopfake.org/uk/yak-isus-hrystos-vchynyv-by-z-poroshenkom-reaktsiya-rosijskoyi-propagandy-na-tomos/>, 5 February 2021.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

the religious unity of the Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox peoples. Russia even carried out cyberattacks to prevent the OCU from being granted the autocephaly. Fancy Bear hackers controlled by Russian military intelligence tried to hack the mail of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in order to steal correspondence files related to the extradition of Tomos to the OCU¹⁶.

Conclusions

Destructive information influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on the European integration processes in Ukraine remains a powerful instrument in Russia's hybrid war. The effectiveness and regularity of ROC's information and psychological attacks are mainly aimed at forming positive attitude towards Russia, sacralizing the Russian-Ukrainian war in Donbass (protection of "canonical Orthodoxy", "holy war"), discrediting Ukraine's pro-Western course; undermining trust in the authorities and the autocephalous single local Orthodox Church, as well as pursuing the policy of non-recognition of the OCU by other independent churches abroad. As a result, such activities help the ROC to destabilize the situation in the East of Ukraine and in the occupied Crimea and incite hatred among Ukrainians towards Western values and the European lifestyle. Due to religious propaganda, a large part of the faithful of the Moscow Patriarchate perceive the Russian Federation as a friendly and fraternal state and at the same time do not trust the Ukrainian authorities.

With its position on non-acceptance of the Euromaidan, the Revolution of Dignity and the pro-Western course of Ukraine, the ROC was directly involved in forming the appropriate public sentiments among the Ukrainian society (messages about the destruction of "Russia's historical heritage", Ukraine's separation from "East Slavic civilization", spread of "anarchy" and "lawlessness" in the country), laying ground for military intervention in Ukraine, disguised as the "crusade", and promoting the doctrine of "Russkiy mir".

From the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the ROC has been an essential technological component of the hybrid warfare against Ukraine, aimed at distorting the real socio-political situation in the country, and has become an important factor in strengthening anti-Ukrainian sentiments.

Russia uses the UOC-MP and the ROC as "soft power" factors to slow down European integration and state-building processes in Ukraine. At one time, the ROC has become a powerful spiritual and mobilizing factor for violating the territorial integrity of Ukraine, activating pro-Russian separatists, legitimizing the pseudo-state formations of the "DPR" and "LPR", and annexing Crimea. Today, it is one of the Kremlin's key tools in delegitimizing the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine and serves as a propaganda machine in Russia's cultural, religious, informational and military expansion in Ukraine.

In general, the study confirmed the scientific hypothesis and proved that Russia uses the ROC as a tool of destructive information and psychological influences in Ukraine to achieve its geopolitical interests and undermine trust in Western values and institutions.

¹⁶ "How Putin Uses Russian Orthodoxy to Grow His Empire", The Heritage Foundation, 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/europe/commentary/how-putin-uses-russian-orthodoxy-grow-his-empire>, 23 January 2021.

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