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The activity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate as part of the Russian “soft power” strategy in Ukraine: from hybridity to war

The activity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in the context of the implementation of the Russian “soft power” strategy in Ukraine after 1991 is studied. It is established that during the three post-Soviet decades, one of the tools of imposing narratives on Ukrainian society, harmful to Ukrainian identity, territorial integrity, historical memory, or in general respect for Ukraine as an independent state, was the network of the UOC MP. It is noted that with the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, the majority of key figures of the UOC MP supported Russia’s invasion of Ukrainian territory, which was called “Russia’s peacekeeping mission in Ukraine”, and the events there after the start of the Revolution of Dignity, and then the Anti-Terrorist Operation in Eastern Ukraine interpreted as a “political crisis in Ukraine” and exclusively as an “internal Ukrainian conflict”. It is emphasized that when Onufriy became the head of the UOC MP, the situation did not improve, but on the contrary, instead of the “Ukrainian crisis” on the information portals, they began to describe it as “fratricide”, “internecine war”, “punitive operation” and “killing the population of Donbas with impunity”. It is stated that if at the level of the church leadership there was at least recognition of the Russian military invasion on February 24, 2022 (although it was interpreted as a “fratricidal war”), then part of the clergy of the UOC MP directly collaborated with the Russian aggressor (including the targeting of enemy artillery) and spread Russian propaganda stories in the mass media and among Ukrainian citizens – parishioners. It is concluded that the best strategy under such circumstances is to maximally “cleanse” the ranks of the UOC MP clergy from outspoken pro-Russian figures and bring to justice those guilty of cooperation with the occupier and strict legal regulation of the activities of any religious organizations in Ukraine associated with the Russian Federation.

Keywords: Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), “soft power”, Russian Federation, Ukraine, post-Soviet period, Russo-Ukrainian war

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Діяльність Української православної церкви Московського патріархату в рамках російської стратегії “м’якої сили” в Україні: від гібридності до війни

Досліджено діяльність Української православної церкви Московського патріархату в контексті реалізації російської стратегії “м’якої сили” в Україні після 1991 р. Констатовано, що впродовж трьох пострадянських десятиліть одним із інструментів нав’язування українському суспільству наративів, шкідливих українській ідентичності, територіальній цілісності, історичній пам’яті чи загалом поваги до України як самостійної та незалежної держави стала мережа УПЦ МП. Відзначено, що користуючись своєю чисельністю та розгалуженістю в Україні,

ця релігійна організація задовго до того, як тези про “єдність” російського та українського народів потрапила до лексику політичної верхівки сучасної Росії, просувала ці наративи серед українських громадян. Зауважено, що з початком російсько-української війни 2014 р. більшість ключових діячів УПЦ МП підтримали вторгнення Росії на українські терени, яке називали “миротворчою місією Росії в Україні”, а тамтешні події після початку Революції Гідності, а потім – Антитерористичної операції на Сході України – “політичною кризою на Україні” та виключно “внутрішньоукраїнським конфліктом”. Після того як по смерті глави УПЦ МП Володимира Сабодана предстоятелем Церкви став Онуфрій, ситуація не те, що не покращилася, а навпаки, ситуацію на Сході України замість “української кризи” на інформаційних порталах УПЦ МП почали окреслювати як “братовбивство”, “міжусобну брань”, “каральну операцію” та “безкарне вбивство населення Донбасу”. Наголошено, що якщо на рівні керівництва церкви принаймні відбулося визнання російського військового вторгнення 24 лютого 2022 р. (хоч і трактувалося як “братовбивча війна”), то частина духовенства УПЦ МП безпосередньо колаборувала з російським агресором (включно з наведенням ворожої артилерії) та поширювала російські пропагандистські нарати у ЗМІ та серед українських громадян – парафіян. Стверджено, що за таких умов події довкола т. зв. “роз’єднаної” собору УПЦ МП 27 травня 2022 р. виглядають не більш, аніж ширма та елемент “заспокоєння” для тої частини кліру церкви та вірян, які в сучасних умовах апелювала до більшої автономії у складі РПЦ, або ж почала навіть задумуватися про приєднання до ПЦУ. Підсумовано, що найкращою стратегією за таких обставин є максимальне “очищення” лав духовенства УПЦ МП від відвертих проросійських діячів та притягнення винних у співпраці з окупантом до відповідальності та жорстка юридична регламентація діяльності будь-яких релігійних організацій в Україні, пов’язаних з РФ.

Ключові слова: Українська православна церква (Московського патріархату), “м’яка сила”, Російська Федерація, Україна, пострадянський період, російсько-українська війна

Formulation of the problem. The context of the modern Russian-Ukrainian war, which began back in 2014, and since February 24, 2022 has acquired the dimensions of a full-scale invasion, prompts researchers to study and analyze its origins, causes, prerequisites and factors that prepared the ground for the deployment of its active “hot” phases.

The immediate beginning of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine was preceded by a long hybrid war, which was started by official Moscow in various configurations literally from the first day of the restoration of the independence of the Ukrainian state. Next to the political and economic components of this hybrid aggression, a significant place belonged to the field of humanities itself (among other things, cinematography, music, didactics of literature and history, etc.), in which Russian narratives were sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly imposed to the detriment of Ukrainian identity, territorial integrity, historical memory or generally respect for Ukraine as an independent and independent state. A special role in this context belongs to the religious sphere, first of all, to the activities of the network of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Using a large and extensive network in Ukraine, the UOC MP long before theses about the “unity” of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples entered the lexicon of the political elite of modern Russia promoted these narratives among Ukrainian society, while not being burdened by either diplomatic, legal or any other barrier that the Kremlin did not dare to cross before

2014. So it was this religious organization that became one of the classic tools from the arsenal of the Russian “soft power” strategy of influencing Ukraine throughout the entire post-Soviet period – both on the eve of the latest Russian-Ukrainian war and during its course.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Various aspects related to the informational influence of the UOC MP on Ukrainian society and its activities in the context of the hybrid and real war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine have already been partially studied by scientists. In particular, Anatolii Kolodnyi devoted his attention to the activities of this church against the background of Russia’s occupation of the Crimean peninsula (Колодний, 2014). Svitlana Fylypchuk examined the manifestations of “Russian world” in the printed press of the UOC (MP) (Филипчук, 2015). The political influence of the relevant religious organization during the deployment of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine after February 24, 2022 was analyzed by Pavlo Demchuk (Демчук, 2022). Threats to the national security of Ukraine in the context of the activities of the UOC (MP), tracing the influence of the Moscow center on the functioning of its structural units and clergy, were reconstructed by Andriy and Mariana Mishchuk (Міщук А, Міщук М, 2023) and Oleh Muravskiy (Муравський, 2022). In the end, the problematic aspects of interfaith and state-faith relations in the current socio-political situation in Ukraine were analyzed by Vita Tytarenko and Lyudmila Fylyrovych (Титаренко, Филипович, 2020). The latter, in co-authorship with Oksana Horkusha, also has intelligence on the reaction of Ukrainian churches, including the UOC MP, to the geopolitical Russian-Ukrainian conflict after 2014 (Горкуша, Филипович, 2016).

However, there is no coherent and comprehensive work that would analyze the activities of the UOC MP as part of the implementation of the Russian “soft power” strategy of influencing Ukraine in the post-Soviet era, and consideration of this aspect is the key goal of this scientific article.

Presentation of the main research material. According to the concept of the American political scientist Joseph Nye, the concept of “soft power” refers to the state’s ability to achieve its goals due to the attractiveness of its own culture and socio-political values – in contrast to “hard power” based on military and economic pressure. Such “power of attraction” consists of three components: culture, political ideology and foreign policy (diplomacy in the broadest sense) (Nye, 2004).

In the context of Russian-Ukrainian relations in the post-Soviet period, the UOC MP played an important role in the influence of official Moscow on the policy of the Ukrainian state through the use of “soft power” (and became one of the most effective levers of influence on Ukrainian public opinion).

Briefly outlining the history of the UOC MP, it is worth noting that its foundation can sometimes be considered October 27, 1990. Then the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) abolished the Ukrainian Exarchate and established a self-governing Ukrainian Orthodox Church with the rights of wide autonomy – at least that was officially the case (Визначення про статус УПЦ, 1990) – headed with Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine Filaret (Святійший Патріарх Київський і всієї Руси-України Філарет).

After the declaration of Ukraine’s independence on August 24, 1991, the Local Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church convened by Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine Filaret in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra on November 1–3, 1991 adopted a decision on autocephaly and made an official request to approve the independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Постанови Помісного Собору УПЦ, 1991).

Instead, in March-April 1992, the ROC Bishops’ Council leveled the statutory provisions of the UOC and the decisions of its Local Council in 1991. As a result of the anti-canonical actions of the Russian Orthodox Church to discredit Metropolitan Philaret of Kyiv and All Ukraine for his efforts to canonically obtain the autocephalous status of the UOC, an extra-statutory meeting of the UOC bishops took place in Kharkiv in May 1992. In June 1992, Metropolitan of Rostov-on-Don and Novocherkassk Volodymyr (Sabodan) (ROC) came to Ukraine and headed the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in canonical unity with the Moscow Patriarchate (Православна Церква України: шлях кризь віки).

The emergence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UPC KP) as the Local Church of the Ukrainian people occurred as a result of the decisions of the All-Ukrainian Orthodox Unification Council on June 25–26, 1992, which resulted in the unification of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAPC) and part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which was presented by Metropolitan Filaret and Bishop Yakiv (Panchuk). Mstyslav (Skrypnyk) – the nephew of the head of the Directorate of the Ukrainian People’s Republic and Chief Otaman of its troops, Symon Petliura – became the first head of the new church in the status of the His Holiness, Patriarch of Kyiv and All Rus-Ukraine. Since that time (since 1992), the term UOC (MP) appears to distinguish it from the UOC (KP), although the organization is officially registered under the name of the Kyiv Metropolis of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and its charter contains the name “Ukrainian Orthodox Church” (UOC) (30-річний ювілей Української Православної Церкви Київського Патріархату, 2022).

One of the first and most striking manifestations of “soft power” in the context of the activities of the UOC (MP) were the events of July 1995, which today are sometimes called “Black/Bloody Tuesday”.

On July 14, 1995, His Holiness Patriarch of Kyiv and All Rus-Ukraine Volodymyr (Romaniuk) (headed the UOC KP on October 24, 1993) died under mysterious circumstances in the Botanical Garden of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv – not far from his patriarchal residence in St Volodymyr’s Cathedral. The resulting body had traces of unknown injections, but the official cause of death was a fourth heart attack (9 грудня – 95-а річниця від дня народження Святійшого Патріарха Володимира (Романюка), 2020).

On July 17, he was mourned, and the leadership of the UOC KP decided to bury the deceased on July 18 on the territory of St. Sophia Cathedral. The government did not give permission for such a burial, citing the fact that St. Sophia Cathedral is a historical and architectural monument under the protection of UNESCO, and offered to bury the patriarch at the Baikove Cemetery (Горчинська, Лукаш, 2019). In fact, as the then Prime Minister Yevhen Marchuk later recalled, it was the Ukrainian head of state L. Kuchma who prevented the funeral of the leader on the territory of the Saint Sophia Cathedral on July 17, because at that time the Presidential Administration was

in close contact with the UOC (MP) (Похорон Святійшого Патріарха Володимира у спогадах УНСОВців, 2016).

Be that as it may, on July 18, on the day of the funeral, clashes broke out with the use of rubber batons and tear gas between the funeral procession, which turned from Volodymyrska street not in the direction of Baikove Cemetery, but towards St. Sophia of Kyiv, and law enforcement officers who refused to let it through (Котилко, Ігнатенко, 2021). And although as a result, they managed to bury the deceased near the wall of the cathedral, the beatings of the participants of the procession continued until the evening, the most active of whom were even taken to the Shevchenko district police station (Чорний вівторок: на похоронах священника беркутівці били вірян, 2018).

Thus ended one of the first attempts to discredit the entire movement of supporters of the UOC (KP), which eventually continued with the election of Metropolitan Filaret as the Patriarch of Kyiv and All Rus-Ukraine on October 22, 1995 at the All-Ukrainian Local Council. Already two years later, in 1997, at the request of the bishopric of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP), the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church issued the “Act of Excommunication from the Church of the monk Filaret (Denysenko)” (he was no longer considered a metropolitan in this environment even after the events of 1992), accusing him of “continuation of schismatic church activity”. Filaret appealed this decision as well, supplementing his previous appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Then the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other local Orthodox churches gave neither an affirmative nor a negative answer. In total, according to Bishop Makarios of Christopolis, assistant to Patriarch Bartholomew, there were six such appeals (Єпископ Макаріос Хриstopольський, помічник Патріарха Варфоломія, 2018). And although none of them produced any legal results against Filaret and his associate, in fact, over the next two decades, the image of the UOC KP (as well as the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church) as exclusively “non-canonical churches of schismatics” was firmly established in the UOC MP environment.

At the same time, credit must also be given to Volodymyr (Sabodan), who nevertheless tried to maintain a certain independence for the UOC (MP) in relations with Moscow, and for opportunities to expand it. Thus, in 2000, at the Bishops’ Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, the status of the UOC MP was clarified and the effect of certain provisions of the statute of the Russian Orthodox Church regarding the UOC MP was canceled. But the Ukrainian Church never received the status of autonomy. At the same time, in 2007–2008, the leadership of the UOC MP took certain steps to develop a system of administrative management of the Church different from the Russian one, to update the system of spiritual education, to overcome pro-Russian and political tendencies within the Church. However, it was not always successful, especially after the end of the 2000s, when the Russian Orthodox Church, headed by the Moscow Patriarch Kirill (Gundiaev) since 2009, began increasingly active contact with the power structures of the Russian Federation in the sphere of protecting the interests of Russians and compatriots for the border. For the UOC (MP) in this case, the role of the Kremlin’s promising tool for keeping Ukraine in the zone of its own geopolitical influence was assigned (Муравський, 2022).

In general, it can be stated that until 2014, the Russian Orthodox Church used several tactical methods of planting political technology in Ukraine, including through the use of the UOC (MP):

1) regular (starting from 2009) visits to Ukraine by the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, which, despite the constantly announced pastoral character, were distinguished by a political and propaganda orientation in line with Russian propaganda narratives;

2) opposition of the Russian Orthodox Church to the independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the formation of a local Ukrainian Orthodox Church in any format;

3) reliance on the aggressive clericalism of public movements related to the church – such as the Union of Orthodox Citizens of Ukraine “Jedynoe Otechestvo”, the Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods of Ukraine, the Oleksandr Nevskiy All-Ukrainian Orthodox Brotherhood of Oleksandr Nevsky, the All-Ukrainian Public Association “Orthodox Choice” and others;

4) initiation of projects and events designed to demonstrate to the general public the existence of a common cause, genealogy, common spiritual heritage and future in Ukraine and Russia (giving awards, organizing concerts, festivals, “friendship days”, etc.).

In addition, resistance to the activities of Volodymyr (Sabodan) was also carried out inside Ukraine. Thus, in July 2011 the Donetsk billionaire Viktor Nusenkis (today he finances the terrorist organization “Donetsk People’s Republic”), spoke out against the granting of greater autonomy to the UOC MP, saying that he would cut off financial support to the church (Б: Великий донецький бізнесмен згортає фінансову підтримку УПЦ МП, 2011).

At the same time, Metropolitan of Odesa and Izmail Agafangel repeatedly stated his hopes for “the restoration of historical justice, a new integration based on the thousand-year-old God-given unity of Holy Rus” (Митрополит Одеський Агафангел уgliedв у Путіні “незрівнянну харизму”, 2012). In this context, he spoke categorically against the separation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Russian Orthodox Church and also against the “separation of two peoples of the same blood and the same faith”.

A similar position was held by Metropolitan of Donetsk and Mariupol Hilarion, who was one of the first to support the anathema of “schismatics” from the UOC (KP), after which he advocated unity with the “mother” Russian Orthodox Church, calling on the laity not to visit “demon temples”. Metropolitan of Tulchyn and Bratslav Jonathan went even further, the leitmotif of his calls was not even spiritual, but political unity of “Holy Rus” on the basis of “Eastern Slavic Orthodox identity”, which is opposed to European one (Мир Русский или Украинский? – два размышления на тему, 2010).

In the winter of 2011–2012, the mentioned church figures tried to remove Volodymyr (Sabodan), who was weakened by a serious illness, from the leadership of the UOC (MP), and thus to stop his course for the church’s independence from Moscow. However, in the spring of 2012, Metropolitan Volodymyr recovered and removed some of the participants of the winter coup attempt from important positions.

In the context of the military occupation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation and the active participation of Russian mercenaries and special forces in sabotage actions in the East of Ukraine, the rhetoric of the members of the UOC (MP) intensified their emphasis on

the presence of a “potential enemy” who sought to separate Ukrainian lands from Eastern Orthodox civilization.

Therefore, they say, anticipating the encroachment of the “enemies” on the “integrity of the historical space of Holy Rus”, the Russian Orthodox Church and most of the key figures of the UOC MP supported Russia’s invasion of Ukrainian territory, which they called “Russia’s peacekeeping mission in Ukraine”, and the events there after the start of the Revolution of Dignity, and then - the Anti-terrorist operation in the East of Ukraine they interpreted as a “political crisis in Ukraine” (Святіший Патріарх Кирил: Церква завжди була запорукою миру і єдності народів Росії та України, 2014).

Typical of such narratives were abstract calls for a peaceful settlement of “relationships between brothers living today both in Ukraine and in the Russian Federation” and the prevention of “military clashes between brothers, so that brothers of the same faith, of the same blood, never bring death and destruction to each other” (Святіший Патріарх Кирил: Церква завжди була запорукою миру і єдності народів Росії та України, 2014) along with assigning responsibility for the events in Crimea and Donbas exclusively to the “Kyiv authorities” and increasingly openly questioning the fact of the existence of an independent Ukraine. At the same time, calls were made for negotiations with pro-Russian puppets who were at the helm of power in the self-proclaimed so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (“DPR” and “LPR”).

At the same time, despite the obvious information support of the pro-Russian separatists in Donbas by the ROC, the latter still permanently accused the Ukrainian Christian churches (except the UOC MP) – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (in the narratives of the ROC they were labeled as “schismatics”, “separatists”, “uniates”) – in support of only “one side of the conflict” (Ukrainian) and at the same time the Russian Orthodox Church and the UOC MP (as the “Orthodox Church in Russia and Ukraine”) were presented in the pro-Russian mass media as the only parties capable of achieving peace “on the Ukrainian land” (Святейший патриарх Кирилл: “Сегодня нет более важного вопроса, чем мир на Украинской земле”, 2015).

The situation did not change significantly even after Onufriy, a permanent member of the ROC synod, the leading bishop of the Kyiv Diocese of the UOC (MP), became the head of this church on August 17, 2014.

Moreover, gradually the situation in the East of Ukraine instead of the “Ukrainian crisis” on the information portals of the UOC MP began to be described as “fratricide”, “internecine hostilities”, “punitive operation” and “unpunished killing of the population of Donbas”, in which the civilian population was allegedly forced to participate of Ukraine, forcibly mobilizing him to join the Ukrainian army, which, in particular, was supported by all Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, except the UOC (MP) (Святейший Патриарх Кирилл: “Обращаюсь ко всем, от кого зависит принятие решений: немедленно остановите кровопролитие”, 2014).

At the same time, the war in Donbas for the circles close to the UOC (MP) was not a story about the protection of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, but about the preservation of “canonical Orthodoxy” (in its Russian version),

“Orthodox civilization”, which required conducting “Holy war” against the “pro-Nazi junta” and the “destructive activities of pseudo-church schismatic groups” generated by the “failed “Ukraine project””, which, they say, was a kind of renunciation of the “Orthodox Rus choice of the Holy Prince Volodymyr” and posed a further threat to the preservation of “Rus” identity among the Ukrainian population (РПЦ обвинила греко-католиків во втручальстві в конфлікт на Донбасі, 2014).

The All-Ukrainian Orthodox Forum “For Peace in Ukraine”, which took place in November 2014 in Kyiv under the auspices of the UOC MP, became indicative in this direction. In fact, only pro-Russian religious public organizations from Ukraine, the Russian Federation, Belarus and Moldova took part in its work. This largely determined the ideological direction of the speeches during the event - in the reports and adopted resolutions of the congress, the possibility of achieving a peaceful scenario in Donbas and the “general spiritual consolidation of Ukrainian society” was linked exclusively to the need to improve Ukrainian-Russian relations at the cost of Ukraine’s rejection of the idea of European integration as “unnatural” for this state. At the same time, at the meeting, the “peacekeeping mission of the Russian Orthodox Church” in Ukraine, in particular in the Donbas, as well as the Russian humanitarian convoys for the local population were positively evaluated, and the conference participants themselves in their speeches directly stated that they identify with the “Russian world”, its values, culture and Orthodoxy” (Яремчук, 2015).

After the “hot” battles at the front finally turned into a phase of positional confrontation, and at the end of May 2015, Russia announced the official closure of the “Novorossia” project, and the Russian economy began to gradually feel the consequences of international sanctions, the rhetoric in the camp of the ROC and UOC (MP) became “gentler” and gradually the references to the “Holy war” or ensuring the “celebration of Orthodoxy” in the East of Ukraine were removed from it, and instead it was about the need for “spiritual unity of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples” (В канун Дня Крещення Русі Святейший Патріарх Кирилл обратився с посланием к Президентам России и Украины, 2015).

Meanwhile, the emergence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) could be a turning point in the life of the UOC (MP). Perceiving it as a threat to its own existence, the leadership of the UOC (MP) decided to forbid the ministers of their church to participate in the council held on December 15, 2018. Therefore, although according to unofficial data, 10 bishops were ready to come to the council, but only two bishops of the UOC MP - Metropolitan of Vinnytsia (Simeon) and of Pereyaslav (Oleksandr) – arrived and joined the newly created Orthodox Church of Ukraine (На об’єднавчий собор прибули митрополити УПЦ МП Симеон та Олександр – ЗМІ, 2018). Metropolitan of Cherkasy and Kaniv Sophroniy spoke at the meeting in the format of a video address (Відсутній на Соборі митрополит УПЦ МП Софроній записав відеозвернення до побратимів, 2018).

In the end, the effect of granting the Tomos of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine for the parishioners of the UOC MP turned out to be more than modest – in a year and a half (January 2019 – June 2020), only about 600 parishes transferred from the UOC MP to the OCU (out of more than 10,000 parishes operating in Ukraine) (Шульгат, 2021).

At the same time, the Ukrainian parliament began a certain opposition (at least initially in the nominal component) to the activities of the UOC MP, which are destructive for

Ukrainian national security. Thus, on December 20, 2018, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine approved a decision on the adoption of changes to the legislation, which obliged the UOC (MP) to change its name, indicating its affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church. This decision was supported by 240 deputies out of the required 226 (“Російська православна церква в Україні”: Рада зобов’язала УПЦ МП перейменуватись, 2018). The relevant religious organization had to change its name and submit relevant changes to its charter for registration by April 26, 2019. However, on April 22, 2019, the Kyiv District Administrative Court suspended the process of renaming the UOC (MP) (Козаченко, 2019).

At the same time, it should be recognized that the share of supporters of the UOC-MP has decreased in recent years: if in 2010 they were almost 35 % of the total number of religious communities in the country, while the UOC (KP) – 13 %, and the UAOC – 3,5 % (Солодзько, 2013), then in 2021 the share of believers of the UOC MP decreased to 23,6 %, and the newly created OCU was already positively evaluated by 52 % of Ukrainians (according to the results of a survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on June 25–28, 2021) (Кількість прихильників ПЦУ в Україні за рік зросла із 42 до 52%, – опитування, 2021).

In the conditions of the start of a full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the UOC MP found itself, to put it mildly, in a specific position. On the one hand, immediately on the first day of the so-called “special military operation” announced by Vladimir Putin, the head of the UOC (MP) Onufriy addressed the faithful, calling for “increased penitential prayer for Ukraine, for our army and our people, please forget mutual quarrels and misunderstanding and unite with love for God and for our Motherland”. At the same time, he expressed “special love and support for the soldiers who stand guard and protect and protect our land and our people”. However, addressing the Russian president with a call to end the war, Onufriy first of all emphasized that it is “fratricidal”, since “the Ukrainian and Russian peoples came out of the Dnipro baptismal font and the war between these peoples is a repetition of the sin of Cain, who killed his own brother out of envy” (Звернення Блаженнішого Митрополита Київського і всієї України Онуфрія до вірних та до громадян України, 2022).

On the other hand, the war (even if half-heartedly interpreted in the UOC MP as “fratricidal”) did not prevent the UOC MP network from continuing to function in the general structure of the Russian Orthodox Church, and their priests from continuing to promote the narratives of the ideology of the “Russian world”, directly collaborating with the Russian occupiers, or even adjust enemy fire on Ukrainian military and civilian objects (Романенко, 2022). And therefore – to transfer the hitherto hybrid attack of “soft power” into direct participation already in “heavy power” – the hot phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

In this context, the initiative to hold the so-called “disconnecting” cathedral of the UOC (MP), which took place on May 27, 2022 in the St. Panteleimon Monastery (Theofania), looks questionable. According to information disseminated in some mass media, the council made changes to the Statute on the Administration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church aimed at the full independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, condemned the position of Patriarch Kirill regarding Russian aggression, and announced a call for dialogue with the

OCU. In the end, the new version of the statute was not published officially, although the old version of the statute disappeared from the website of the religious organization. At the same time, the decisions of the Council were not accepted by the Donetsk and Simferopol dioceses, which wished to remain in unity with the Russian Orthodox Church.

If it were not there, one should obviously agree with the opinion of the head of the OCU, Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine Epiphanius, that in fact the May 2022 UOC (MP) Council did not change anything, since this church continues to maintain unity with the Russian Orthodox Church, and its priests, for the most part, continue to spread theses of Russian propagandists (Епіфаній: собор УПЦ МП нічого не змінив, вони зберігають єдність із вбивцею Кірілом, 2022).

Therefore, the decision of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine dated December 27, 2022 regarding the recognition of constitutional amendments to Article 12 of the Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” that referred to “names of religious organizations (associations) that are part of the structure (are part) of a religious organization (association), the management center (management) of which is located outside Ukraine in a state recognized by law as having carried out military aggression against Ukraine and/or temporarily occupied part of the territory of Ukraine” (that is, they actually demanded a change of the name of the UOC MP with a mandatory indication of its affiliation to the Russian Orthodox Church) (Конституційний Суд України ухвалив Рішення у справі щодо повної назви релігійних організацій, дійшовши висновку, що зміни до статті 12 Закону України “Про свободу совісті та релігійні організації” є конституційними, 2022).

The first open criminal proceedings against those priests of the UOC MP who directly cooperated with the enemy look logical and regular. One of the first cases in this context was the detention by Ukrainian law enforcement officers on April 26, 2022 of Archpriest Andriy Pavlenko, abbot of the Church of the Holy Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God, who was collecting information for the Russian military about the number, location, equipment, and armament of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in Severodonetsk and nearby villages. He was charged with collaborative activity (Part 2 of Article 28, Part 7 of Article 111-1 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine) (Судитимуть священника УПЦ МП, який зливав ворогу дані про ЗСУ у Севєродонецьку, 2022). After he made a deal with the prosecutor and fully admitted his guilt, the court found the cleric guilty and sentenced him to 12 years in prison (Вирок суду, 2023).

In general, as of April 2023, according to the information of the head of the Security Service of Ukraine Vasyl Maliuk, criminal proceedings were opened against 61 clergymen of the UOC (MP), and the courts have already handed down seven verdicts against some clerics-collaborators (“Стали на бік ворога”. Голова СБУ розповів, скільки вироків отримали священники УПЦ (МП), 2023).

For example, as of the beginning of 2024, among the most high-profile cases that are in the center of attention of Ukrainian society, there is a criminal proceeding against one of the most odious representatives of the UOC (MP), the long-time (since 1994) vicar of the Assumption Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, Metropolitan Pavel (Lebid), to whom on April 1, 2023, the SSU served Pavel with suspicions under Art. 161 of the Criminal Code “spreading religious enmity” and Art. 436-2 “denial of Russian aggression and glorification of its

crimes” of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. In October 2023, the case was brought to court, and he faces up to 8 years in prison with confiscation of property. In particular, according to the SSU, the Metropolitan repeatedly publicly denied the existence of Ukraine as a sovereign state. In addition, the investigation managed to establish that, being an official of a religious organization – the vicar of the Holy Dormition Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Male Monastery of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – he presented the aggression of the Russian Federation as an internal civil conflict, and in telephone conversations with the faithful, the cleric incited national, regional and religious enmity. Moreover, according to the investigation, the clergyman made statements that justified the actions of the aggressor state, and in his speeches he insulted the religious feelings of Ukrainians, humiliated the views of believers of other faiths and tried to create hostile attitudes towards them. According to the SBU, all the mentioned facts are confirmed by the conclusions of relevant examinations (СБУ передала до суду справу колишнього намісника Києво-Печерської лаври Павла Лебедя, 2023).

An initiative of the Ukrainian parliament to adopt legislation banning religious organizations linked to Russia can be an additional countermeasure to the harmful activities of the UOC MP. In January 2023, the relevant draft law was registered in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (№ 8371), and in October 2023, people’s deputies of Ukraine supported it in the first reading (Сітнікова, 2023). As of early March 2024, the Verkhovna Rada’s Committee on Humanitarian and Information Policy recommended that the parliament adopt the draft law in the second reading and as a whole, but the document has not yet been brought to the meeting hall for discussion. If it is adopted, the activities of Russian churches will be terminated according to a clear procedure, which will include an investigation, an order for the execution of the law and a court injunction. The Russian Orthodox Church and its affiliated structures will not be able to use state and communal property, and the transition of communities to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine will be significantly simplified (Климковецький, 2024).

Conclusions. During the three post-Soviet decades, one of the tools (and it should be admitted that it is quite effective) of imposing narratives on Ukrainian society that are harmful to Ukrainian identity, territorial integrity, historical memory, or in general respect for Ukraine as an independent and independent state was the network of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (of the Moscow Patriarchate) are actually branches of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Taking advantage of its size and reach in Ukraine, this religious organization long before these about the “unity” of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples entered the lexicon of the political elite of modern Russia promoted these narratives among Ukrainian society, while not being burdened by either diplomatic or legal or any other barrier that the Kremlin did not dare to cross before 2014.

With the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, the majority of key figures of the UOC MP supported Russia’s invasion of Ukrainian territory, which they called “Russia’s peacekeeping mission in Ukraine”, and the events after the start of the Revolution of Dignity, and then the Anti-terrorist operation in the East of Ukraine, they called “political crisis in Ukraine” and exclusively “internal Ukrainian conflict”. Volodymyr (Sabodan), the

already seriously ill and weakened head of the UOC MP, who previously somehow tried to maintain a certain internal autonomy from the Russian Orthodox Church and overcome the influence of the pro-Russian wing of the clergy in Ukraine, had little influence on these processes in 2014. And after Onufriy became the head of the church after Volodymyr’s death, the situation did not improve, on the contrary, instead of the “Ukrainian crisis” on the information portals of the UOC MP, they began to describe the situation in the East of Ukraine as “fratricide”, “internecine strife”, “punitive operation” and “killing the population of Donbas with impunity”. The head of the church Onufriy called the full-scale war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine nothing more, nothing less, but a “fratricidal war”. In any case, if at the level of the church leadership there was at least recognition of the Russian military invasion (albeit half-hearted), then at the level of the clergy there were manifestations of direct collaboration with the aggressor (including the pointing of enemy artillery) and the spread of Russian propaganda narratives in the mass media and among Ukrainians citizens – parishioners.

Under such conditions, the events surrounding the so-called “unification” cathedral of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Russian Orthodox Church on May 27, 2022, look like nothing more than a screen and an element of “reassurance” for that part of the church’s clergy and believers, who in modern conditions appealed for greater autonomy within the Russian Orthodox Church, or even began to think about joining the OCU.

The best strategy under such circumstances at the current stage seems to be the maximum “cleansing” of the ranks of the UOC MP clergy from outspoken pro-Russian figures, including agents (or even employees) of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation by collecting a convincing evidence base against them and bringing the culprits to justice and strict legal regulation of their activities any religious organizations in Ukraine related to the Russian Federation.

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