Religion and nationalism in post-Soviet space
Between state, society and nation

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Introduction

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the role of religion in post-Soviet societies increased significantly (Khristoradnov 1990, pp. 2–3). Simultaneously the breakdown of this international empire saw the rise of nationalist sentiments. Often these two processes accompanied and reinforced each other. A convergence between nationalism and religion in recent times is not unique to post-Soviet countries. Such phenomena as ‘Hindutva’ in India, Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar, the strengthening of Sunni nationalism in the Middle East show that these processes are developing all over the world. This chapter examines the recent growth of religious nationalism in Ukraine and Russia.

The Orthodox Church is dominant in both countries, with an informal status as the state religion. There are also are neopagan groups, whose role has grown in conditions of increasing migration flows and the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation. The third important religious category is Islam, and Muslims are influential minorities in both countries.

Despite having a strong historical and symbolic connection, Ukraine and Russia have significant differences. This chapter focuses on two of them: a) different state constitutions and policies; and b) different relations to the imperial past. In religious politics Ukraine follows a pluralistic model, more similar to the US experience. Russia adheres to an authoritarian policy, with patronage of ‘traditional’ religions (with a special role for Orthodoxy) and a wary attitude towards ‘non-traditional’ religions. The same strong differences can be seen about the imperial past. In Ukraine, anti-imperial sentiment prevails in public discourse, while in Russia nostalgia for the Russian empire is prevalent.

We will show that at the level of state policy the relationship between nationalism and religion is built in a similar way in both countries. In Russia the Orthodox Church acts as a state church; in Ukraine the authorities emphasize the idea of the national Ukrainian Church. In both cases the state adopts a so-called ‘instrumental pious nationalism’ (Rieffer 2003).
Nationalism and religion

There are various approaches to defining the connection between religion and nationalism. Brubaker (2012, pp. 2–20), in his analysis of the types of connection between religion and nationalism, has identified four main theoretical approaches: religion and nationalism seen as analogous phenomena, religions seen as an explanation of nationalism, religion seen as a part of nationalism, and religion seen as a form of nationalism (Brubaker 2012). Smith (1981, p. 64) understands religion as a primary source that gives birth to nationalism. Hence, nationalism has a special language that uses cultural and religious factors for forming and enhancing the nation. This definition seems to be quite bold since one cannot omit the influence and impact of economic, social and political factors that can reinforce processes of nationalistic formation or attitudes of the groups prone to such ideas (Casanova 2015).

Rieffer (2003, p. 224) suggests differentiating the possible relationships of religion and nationalism through the following categories: secular or non-religious nationalism (no religious influence); instrumental pious nationalism (uses religion as a reinforcement source); and religious nationalism (primarily based on religious identity and ideas). In this chapter we pay special attention to the second category (i.e. instrumental pious nationalism, which best fits the situation in the post-Soviet space). In instrumental pious nationalism, religion is not a central category but more a supportive element for community unification; it becomes a useful resource to influence society and build electoral support for national leaders. Moreover, religion can serve as a legitimation resource for new state institutions or state authority and prestige in critical times.

The main channels of such support are language, sacralization of ancient and modern history and justification of policies (Agadjanian 2001, pp. 351–365). A special appeal by political or national leaders to religion is to be seen during crises when economic, military and social institutions are losing their capacities—then religious and national ideas come in handy. Instrumental nationalism differs from religious nationalism due to the lower level of religious involvement in nation-building processes. At the instrumental nationalism level, religious institutions are not so embedded into political system; it is rather the political system itself that uses the prevailing religion to unite and develop the national movement. With great opportunities come great risks, namely politicization of theology and theologization of politics, where there are no more pure religious ideas and institutions, only rather religious-political entities (Beyer 1994, p. 30).

Russia: religion and nationalism in the service of the empire

In relation to Russia, it is necessary to refine the instrumental pious nationalism model with the concept of ‘imperial nationalism.’ Pain distinguishes several characteristic features of Russian ‘imperial’ nationalism: essentialism, imperial guardian character, and the principle of ethnic Russian domination. This form of nationalism developed in Russia in the 1900s. Later, after being banned during the Soviet era, it was resurrected in the 1990s in post-Soviet Russia. After its rebirth, imperial nationalism was an opposition political force, contradicting ideas of modernization, liberalism, federalism and tolerance. Since the early 2000s, however, imperial nationalism has been tightly connected with the governing powers, being ipso facto the ideology of the current Russian regime (Pain 2015, p. 57). Taking into account the ‘imperial’ character of Russian nationalism makes it possible to describe more precisely the relations between state and religion.
The most important case of religious pious nationalism in Russia is undoubtedly the ‘Russian World’ (Russkiy Mir) conception, developed within the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). This was born within intellectual circles in the Russian Federation, influenced by Schedrovitskyy and Ostrovskyy in the 1990s. Later on this conception was taken into the Kremlin and the ROC (Bilokobylskyi et al. 2015, p. 84). It started to take roots, as in Putin’s 2006 speech at a meeting with intelligentsia: ‘The Russian World yearns and manages to unite all those who hold dear the Russian word and Russian culture, wherever they are, in Russia or beyond. Say it more often—Russian World’ (Literator 2006).

A merely ethnic nationalism, concentrated on the interest of only one ethnic group, is not intrinsic for the ROC. It is about an empire as a whole: a strong multinational state, ruled from a sole center, and an appropriate church to stand beside it. Thus, ROC aims to be not just a national church but a church of an empire, and simultaneously the sole medium of genuine Orthodox values, the one and only Orthodox empire in the world, now Byzantine is no more (Desnitskyy 2015, p. 4).

In November 2014, the 18th World Russian People’s Council headed by Patriarch Kirill adopted the ‘Declaration of Russian Identity’ (Patriarchia.ru, 2014). There one can find the following definition of the Russian identity: ‘a Russian is anyone considering oneself as Russian; having no other ethnic preference; speaking and thinking in Russian; acknowledging Orthodox Christianity as the basis of the national moral culture; feeling solidarity with the destiny of Russian people.’ The Declaration emphasizes that Russian identity can be inherent to people with other nationalities, e.g. Tatars, Jews, Poles, etc. The implication is that ecclesiastical structures and their allied civic organizations (like the World Russian People’s Council) play the key role in defining ‘Russianness.’ Verkhovskyy (2012, p. 155) suggests that the ROC-proposed nationalism also dwells on global anti-liberal mobilization (global not only in design, but in practice of international activities of the church, striving to build unions with other forces, that could be defined as traditionalistic) and opposition to the modernization processes.

However, one should not overestimate the real influence of the clergy upon political decision-making. As Verkhovskyy notes, Patriarch Kirill and the ROC have much lower ‘apparat power’ than real top-level actors in Russia. Furthermore, all the changes implemented, including the church’s invasion into schools and the army, are foremost the results of public policies that accommodate long-time desires of the ROC, whereas a lot of the latter’s additional demands were not satisfied (Verkhovskyy 2013, p. 20). This situation underlines the instrumental nature of connections between state, nationalism and official Orthodoxy.

Support of these ideas and their ‘canonicity’ has also become widespread also in Protestant circles. The Union of Evangelical and Baptist churches in Russia commented on the Ukrainian situation with the following: ‘You shall not stick to the rebels’. Islam is also deeply intertwined with nationalism in the Russian context. Here an interesting phenomenon is to be observed: instrumental pious nationalism implemented at several levels, federal and regional.

At the federal level in the early 2000s an attempt was made to instrumentalize Islam around the ‘Russian World’ idea and to create a ‘Russian Islam’ conception. Both cases have the same prime mover, Schedrovitskyy. As Gradirovskyy (2003), the co-author of ‘Russian Islam,’ wrote, ‘why ... can Russian-speaking Umma not be considered to be part of the Russian World ... The Russian World has its Islamic part. And this part will inevitably grow in size and power.’ He considers Russian language to be important: ‘Russian Islam is Islam, soaked in Russianness, due to which it becomes complementary to the Russian roots,
linguagewise-embedded into the Russian-speaking space. It is a powerful sociocultural resource of Russia, a truly heterogeneous state’ (Gradirovskyy 2002). This idea was vehemently opposed by the ROC and members of the Tatarian (Muslim) religious elite. The ROC cannot allow Russification of Islam and inclusion of Islam into the Russian World, since it would undermine its monopoly. And the Tatarstan religious elite and local ethnocracy supporting it strive to preserve the instrumental potential of Islam for the sake of ethnic Tatar rather than Russian nationalism.

The political, religious and intellectual elites of the Tatar ethnic group have cultivated the religious differences of the Tatars, mainly symbolically and discursively. They seek to develop the Islamic component of Tatar ethnic culture in contrast to the general Russian culture. The elite’s discourse of ‘Tatar Islam’ also creates reasons for claiming special rights for the territory and provides unique symbols for external representation. Thus, the Tatars seek, first, to become the main agents in mutual relations between Russia and the Muslim world. Second, they try to win the leading positions in the state-Muslim relations of Russia (Yusupova 2016, p. 51). Thus Tatarstan religious elites cannot accept an alternative project of imperial nationalism. As Tatarstan mufti Gusman Iskhakov (2003) says:

As a mufti I cannot be happy to see Russians converting to Islam. I am against conversion from one religion to another: let Kryashens and Russians be Orthodox and Tatars be Muslim. And the Russian Orthodox Church will preach to those peoples who traditionally belong to Orthodoxy, whereas we will deliver our sermons to those who traditionally profess Islam.

It should be noted that nowadays Tatarstan elites continue trying to use Islam in connection with ethnic nationalism. First of all it is about the preservation of the Tatar language. In late 2017, due to the pressure from the federal center, the Tatar language was excluded from the mandatory school curriculum. After that it was the local muftiate, completely controlled by the Tatarstan political elite, that became an active defender of the Tatar language and national identity. In his speech at the Plenum of Religious Board of Tatarstan Muslims (Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul’man Respubliki Tatarstan—DUM RT), mufti Kamil Samigullin stated that the new task of the religious board is to preserve the national identity of the Tatar people and the Tatar language as official in Tatarstan, and revive the Tatar cultural heritage and school of formation of national intelligentsia (DUM RT 2018).

Consequently, the ‘Russian Islam’ project was marginalized, turning into a sort of club for ex-Russian nationalists. They founded the ‘National Organization of Russian Muslims’ (NORM): ‘NORM ... works towards the situation, when Russians will succeed in Islam as a nation ... as an integral ethnic group having its lawful interests and preserving the God-granted uniqueness’ (Bekkin 2012, pp. 164–165). It is the desire to stand apart from other Russian Volga Muslims (Khanafî) and Northern Caucasus (Shaﬁ‘i) that explains the NORM’s choice in favor of the Maliki school of jurisprudence (madhab). However, NORM’s anti-government stand has led to the emigration of its key figures—Vadim Sidorov (Kharoun ar-Rusi), Maksim Baidak (Salman Sever) and others, leading to the de facto collapse of the organization. Later Damir Mukhetdinov, deputy mufti of the Moscow-based muftiate DUMRF, was trying to adopt and use the ideas of ‘Russian Islam,’ while maintaining the dominant position of the Tatar Muslim elite (Kemper 2019).

The instrumentalization of ethnic nationalism and religion in modern Russia also covers contemporary Russian Neopaganism, often called rodnoveriye, from rodnaya vena (i.e. ‘native faith’). As Shnirelman argues, one can distinguish between right wing (national democratic) and
left wing (national socialist) among the Russian Neopagans. The former stands for capitalism and private property, and the latter aims for communism, although they do not justify its historical excesses (Shnirelman 2013, p. 65). Here national democrats do not need religion so much but a persuasive, mobilizing myth about glorious ancestors, and religion is determined by social-ethnic identity. Unlike national democrats, national socialists considered Orthodoxy to be the core of their ideology, seeing it as a ‘sacral fulfillment of our ethnic potential.’ Nevertheless, their understanding of Orthodoxy differs from the traditional one, namely they develop a religion of the chosen ones, ‘anchorites and heroes.’ One can agree with Likhachov (2003), who notes about Neopagans that a precise confessional choice is secondary in comparison to the nationalistic desire to purge one’s culture from foreign layers.

In 2007, after the anti-extremist laws were tightened, a lot of Neopagan groups dissolved or softened their rhetoric. Patriotic mood among Neopagans as well as the popularity of hand combat (especially its Pagan version, gorits fighting) and readiness for violence, led to Russian Neopagan groups taking an active part in the conflict in the Eastern Ukraine (supporting the self-proclaimed republics) and Syria. For instance, a Russian Neopagan under the nickname Cheslav Osmomysl, combatant and ‘DNR’ militant, states:

[i]t was only the Sloviansk period of war [early stages of an armed conflict, when pro-Russian militants occupied Sloviansk in Donetsk oblast] when I understood that there are more native faith adepts among volunteers [combatants]. I got acquainted with one of them, a member of DRG (reconnaissance and sabotage group). There were three more of them in that DRG. I have seen people from various divisions with our symbols. In my military unit there surely are two more Pagans.

(Donets and Zaitsev 2015)

The so called Wagner Group is active in Syria. It is a Russian paramilitary organization that was previously fighting in the Eastern Ukraine. Members of this organization say that one of its leaders, D. Utkin (call sign Wagner), is a rodnover, native faith believer, whereas there are another native faith believers in the Wagner Group:

Wagner is a tough guy, not some sissy. He visited our positions near Palmyra, took his clothes off, he has a tattoo of German Swastika here on the arm (on the shoulder). He wears a headpiece with horns. He is a native faith guy . . . To lead a military unit . . . You’d better be a native faith adept.

(Khazov-Kassia 2018)

Meanwhile a prominent Russian nationalist Anton Raievski has a different opinion, suggesting that the participation of nationalists (including Neopagans) was a project organized by Ukrainian and Russian secret services:

[t]his war was fired up by secret services and politicians of both states . . . it was just a bait for Russian right-wing patriots—to lure them into their units, into the Eastern Ukraine, just to mince them in this fratricidal war. It was merely a honeypot created by secret services.

(Volchek 2016)

Thus we can observe how several versions of Rieffer’s ‘instrumental pious nationalism’ cohabit in Russia, when nationalism has both ethnic and imperial characteristics. Competition between various projects is also to be seen, for instance, in the clash between...
the ‘Russian Islam’ project (based upon imperial nationalism) and ‘Tatar Islam’ (based upon ethnic nationalism).

Ukraine: a case of church-political symphony?

Ukraine differs from Russia due to broader religious pluralism, with several powerful religious organizations that claim to be nationwide. For a long time, the model of state-confessional relations in Ukraine has had an essential difference from the situation in Russia, as well as in the majority of European countries. One can use the term ‘denominationalism’ to describe a system based on equality between confessions and sects. Thus, all religions retain equal rights guaranteed by the state, and they compete with each other. Ukraine may be the sole state in Europe that can develop such a model following the US example and preserve religious pluralistic balance without politicizing certain churches or confessions (Casanova 2013).

Since the acute phase of social-political conflict began at the end of 2013 (‘Maidan’) with the annexation of Crimea and the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine (Anti-Terrorist Operation—ATO), there has been a certain change of religious influence within homogenous confessions: new support has come to those churches or religious communities that have shown distinct pro-Ukrainian positions. Conflict between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC KP) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) is a dramatic example. The former tends to highlight the connection to the nation; the latter attempts to hold the balance between all the parties in the conflict. The ecclesial systems of the UOC MP and the UOC KP today seem to present alternative societal visions (Kulyk 2016, pp. 588–608). Their conflict entered its new phase after the UOC KP strengthened its positions during the Maidan events and growth of social trust towards the church and Patriarch Filaret (Denysenko) personally.

The conflict has been developing not only as opposing ideas but has also grown into a jurisdictional standoff. There have been several cases of intra-Orthodox parish ‘migration’ whereby certain parishes switched from the UOC MP jurisdiction in favor of the UOC KP. There were also some cases of vice-versa switch. Although the total number of such switches is 49 as of January 2018 (unofficially it is 100+ parishes), less than 2% of total parish numbers, they are striking examples of the tense conflict, sometimes leading to physical clashes. The parish switch was catalyzed by a UOC MP priest who refused to pray for Ukrainian soldiers or properly bury dead Ukrainian warriors from ATO, to pray for ‘Heavenly Hundred’ heroes (people dead during Maidan events). He supported Yanukovych’s regime and Russia’s actions, praised Patriarch Kirill and his stance towards the Ukrainian conflict and refused to hold ceremonies in Ukrainian (Moroz 2016, pp. 8–9). He has used the ‘Russian World’ conception to call for the defense of Orthodox believers beyond Russia and appeal to Ukrainian preachers. The conflict in Eastern Ukraine is not the ultimate source of these intra-Orthodox clashes; they are a part of a larger picture in which value systems of the UOC MP and UOC KP fight for domination in society (Danilevich 2015).

During the winter of 2018–2019, the situation changed dramatically after the creation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU): first, after December 15th at the Union of Orthodox churches of Ukraine (with participation by several archbishops from the UOC MP) and second, on January 6th when Patriarch Bartholomew presented a document on autocephaly for Kyiv. Although OCU is an autocephalous church, it is not recognized by the global Orthodoxy, only by several Patriarches. From the beginning of 2019, more than 300 parishes switched to the OCU from the UOC MP, but those tendencies need to be analyzed.
across a period of time. Bartholomew’s decision created new lines of division within ROC and patriarch Cyril that are much wider than the Ukrainian case. There were several decisions made by the Ukrainian parliament about the renaming of the UOC MP as the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine (Cenzor.net 2018) and the new law involving parishes (Burega 2019).

The Pew Research Center published its new data on the religious landscape in Central and Eastern Europe, Ukraine included, in May 2017. It shows that 51% of Ukrainians believe that being Orthodox means also being a true national representative of your country (Pew Research Center 2017, p. 13). Ukrainians define their religious identity through national, cultural and family traditions (46%), peculiar properties of faith (12%), both aforementioned (12%) and other (7%) factors. Being Catholic or Orthodox due to the primarily national-cultural factor accounted for 12%. Another strong position is religious exclusivism. Generally, it tends to decline, but 33% of respondents believe that only their faith provides the way to heaven. Orthodox-dominated countries show higher national pride (i.e. people are more likely to state that their culture is better than others). More religious people are prone to be proud about their nationality; 48% of Ukrainians who are very proud of their nationality say that religion is important.

Despite the liberal nature of state-church relations in independent Ukraine, since the events of Maidan the governing institutions have started to consider religion as an important factor of homeland security and use it more actively for their own benefit. This can be observed in government officials’ appeals to ‘moral values’ during hot stages of conflict (WWI also resulted in the sacralization of the nation as a search for the legitimization of the crisis and the deaths of victims). There are now constant public prayers for peace for MPs, the President and the largest Ukrainian denominations (always headed by Patriarch Filaret, the UOC KP head), and the public commendation of religious organizations for their help with certain issues. Politicians thank the churches for their ‘contribution to the unification of the country’ and their help in solving certain issues, such as the release of prisoners from uncontrolled territories in December 2017 (Prezydent Ukrainy 2015). Increased state attention to the religious sphere is also to be seen in new documents, laws and draft laws. These include, for instance, the establishment of the Council for pastoral care (Council at the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine to coordinate the service of military chaplains, while there is no official law) (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine 2014); legislative groundwork for prison and healthcare chaplaincy services; state recognition of diplomas of religious educational institutions thanks to the decision of the special Commission at the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2018); and an additional official holiday for celebrating Christmas in the Western Christian rite. In early 2018, President P. Poroshenko actively intervened in the religious sphere, initiating the process of obtaining autocephaly for the Ukrainian Church through an appeal to Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (RISU 2018). His initiative was supported by the Parliament.

Since 2014 Ukrainian state institutions have been promoting the idea of a ‘patriotic hour’ in schools as well as introducing Christian ethics as part of an open curriculum (Ministerstvo molodi ta sportu 2016). There is no state curriculum yet for it, and secular and religious organizations understand it differently. Such organizations as PLAST (an all-Ukrainian scout organization) and ‘Azov’ (a volunteer military unit) have been active promoters of national-patriotic ideas and are known to have connections with certain religious groups. The foundation of PLAST was inspired by the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada and the United States. Its activities are ‘based on Christian morals,’ prayers, commandments and participation in church services (mainly UGCC and UOC KP).
In 2015 the children’s camp ‘Azovets’ (i.e. ‘little members of Azov’) was organized by the ‘Azov’ movement for kids aged 7 to 18 (Bura 2017). The daily schedule starts with a ‘Ukrainian nationalist prayer’ (AZOV media 2014), and the educational plan includes not only technical and first-aid courses and general lectures, but also weapons handling. ‘Azov’ members do not state their religious adherence, nevertheless, there is known to be serious Neopagan influence. There have been public displays in which the god Perun, a warrior in the Slavic mythological pantheon, has been glorified and weapons sanctified (LIGA news 2017). As long as religious freedom remains, such civic, political and religious organizations are able to transmit their ideas to the younger generation.

Nationalism is also actively used by some Muslim organizations in Ukraine. The Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Ukraine, known as ‘Umma’ (Dukhovne upravlinnia musul’man Ukrainy ‘Umma’—DUMU-Umma), created in 2008 and led by Sheikh Said Ismagilov, is most prominent. Ismagilov’s nationalistic speeches were especially prominent during Kyiv’s Maidan events, the annexation of Crimea and ATO in Eastern Ukraine. Ismagilov’s nationalism is instrumental in character, intended to strengthen his authority within a society where a vividly declared patriotic, or even nationalist, stance allows him to defend himself from accusations of collaborating with the ‘enemy.’ Moreover, such tactics also support the attempt to found a niche within the Ukrainian Muslim community, where there are several large Muslim unions and ideological antagonism between DUMU-Umma and the other most influential among Ukrainian Muslims organization, the Religious Administration of the Muslims of Ukraine (Dukhovne upravlinnia musul’man Ukrainy—DUMU), headed by sheikh Akhmed Tamim (Brylov 2018).

Being a prominent media figure of the modernist-nationalist segment of Ukrainian Muslims, Said Ismagilov attracts other Muslim organizations with nationalist overtones such as the ‘Slavic Islamic League’ (SILA—the acronym is a wordplay, ‘SILA’ translates into English as ‘power’ or ‘force’), which appeals to a base of Russian and Ukrainian nationalists who are converts to Islam. This organization supports the ideas of preservation of the ethnic identity of Slavic Muslims in Islam as well as the further promotion of Islam among their compatriots. According to the statements of SILA, Said Ismagilov became one of those figures who ‘attained the reputation of being proponents of Ukraine, faithful citizens and friends of Ukraine’ (Brylov 2016, pp. 276–277).

Unlike ethic-national or general cultural identity, religious identity can be defined as a combination of culture, values, traditions, coded within rites and rituals, connected to the belief in the supernatural (Bureyko 2016, p. 55). One can define oneself as an Orthodox primarily through ethnic or cultural identity, sometimes without having special religious beliefs or nominal religious adherence, which is to be seen lately in opinion polls in Ukraine and Russia (Ipatova 2008, pp. 7–67). As the social structure is deforming, confessional affiliation shaping sociocultural differences is becoming more important. The religious system can support a model of the world seen through ‘friend-or-foe’ division. Critical events highlight the very existence of this model: protests and armed conflicts shape where one looks for a ‘friend.’ Thus, religious affiliation situates one in relation to an ethnic-confessional community.

Conclusions

The use of nationalism in religious rhetoric is remarkably attractive for political and religious leaders in the post-Soviet countries of Ukraine and Russia. What is happening in both countries can be best understood as ‘instrumental pious nationalism,’ even though there is much more religious pluralism in Ukraine. In Russia, the state and the largest church, the
ROC, use the ‘Russian World’ conception to support imperial nationalism. This defines affiliation through Russian identity; ethnic nationalism is mainly marginalized, though also used by the state. In Ukraine, ethnic nationalism dominates and is actively instrumentalized by Orthodox denominations (mainly the UOC KP), some Muslim organizations (mainly the DUMU-Umma), and Neopagan ones, especially those connected to volunteer brigades like Azov.

The use of ethnic-national rhetoric by religious leaders, as well as the politicization of religion, has contributed to the deepening of cleavages and conflicts, both within the religious sphere and in other social institutions. An attempt made by the state to instrumentalize religion and nationalism, chiefly by creating a state church, can shatter the balance that enables various religious groups to coexist. Other religious leaders also instrumentalize religion—there are facts of religious rhetoric being used to cover anti-state activities, for instance in the conflict in Ukraine. All of this embeds religion into the national idea. In the Russian case it divides society by differentiating conflicting groups; in Ukraine the power balance shifts to certain privileged religious organizations.

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