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Representations of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Organizations (2002-2021): from religion to politics

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to reveal the importance of the instruments of the Russian Orthodox Church in the European space: the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in the European institutions and the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Council of Europe. The *methodological basis* of the study is a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach that uses systemic, civilizational, historical-chronological and structural-functional methods. Everything leads to the conclusion that the activities of the missions are designed to contribute to the achievement of the foreign policy objectives, both religious and spiritual and State of the Russian Federation. By interacting with foreign media and civil society institutions, the offices of the Russian Orthodox Church promote a positive image of Russian Orthodoxy and the idea of a “Russian world”, creating a more favorable image of these ideas in the world for Russia’s foreign policy. In this way, we see that the Orthodox Church has intensified its external activities in the twenty-first century. At the same time, it is often not only religious but also political, attesting to the greater rapprochement of the “New Russia” with

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the Russian Orthodox Church, which continues to perform secular tasks on the foreign policy front.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church; Russian Federation; religion and politics; European Union; international organizations.

Representaciones de la Iglesia Ortodoxa Rusa en organizaciones europeas (2002-2021): de la religión a la política

Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es revelar la importancia de los instrumentos de la Iglesia Ortodoxa Rusa en el espacio europeo: la Representación de la Iglesia Ortodoxa Rusa en las instituciones europeas y la Representación de la Iglesia Ortodoxa Rusa en el Consejo de Europa. La *base metodológica* del estudio es un enfoque interdisciplinario integral que utiliza métodos sistémicos, civilizacionales, histórico-cronológicos y estructural-funcionales. Todo permite concluir que las actividades de las misiones están diseñadas para contribuir al logro de los objetivos de política exterior, tanto religiosos como espirituales y estatales de la Federación de Rusia. Al interactuar con medios extranjeros e instituciones de la sociedad civil, las oficinas de la Iglesia Ortodoxa Rusa promueven una imagen positiva de la ortodoxia rusa y la idea de un “mundo ruso”, creando una imagen más favorable de estas ideas en el mundo para la política exterior de Rusia. De esta manera, vemos que la Iglesia Ortodoxa ha intensificado sus actividades externas en el siglo XXI. Al mismo tiempo, a menudo no solo es religioso sino también político, lo que atestigua el mayor acercamiento de la “Nueva Rusia” con la Iglesia Ortodoxa Rusa, que continúa desempeñando tareas seculares en el frente de la política exterior.

Palabras clave: Iglesia Ortodoxa Rusa; federación rusa; religión y política; unión europea, organizaciones internacionales.

Introduction

Religious organizations are playing an increasingly active role in in the political processes of the modern world. They become influential participants in international relations in a globalizing world, remaining sometimes in the shadows, “behind the scenes” of events unfolding interstate or intrastate relations and contradictions. The influence of religious organizations on

the political destinies of the country, states and the entire world community can be clearly traced, for example, in the activities of the Vatican or Islamic institutions.

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) also seeks to occupy its niche in international relations. Obviously that the real activity of the Russian Orthodox Church in the international arena is not limited to the Soviet slogan “struggle for world peace” imposed on it. From now on, the Russian Federation, as in former communist times, supports the Russian Orthodox Church, which in turn supports Russia’s international prestige.

In the XXI century there is an increase in the interaction of the ROC and the Russian Federation in various spheres of life of the country, not only in the spiritual, but in the practical terms also. In March 2003, Patriarch Aleksiy II at a meeting of the Collegium’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation informed on the Russian Orthodox Church’s vision of the Russian diplomacy strategic objectives, given the role the ROC assigns to Russia in the international arena. According to the Russian Orthodox Church, Russia should become one of the international poles of the world, one of the decision-making centers. The Church, according to the Patriarch, has its point of view on the most important issues of political life and openly proclaims it. In turn, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov stressed that close contacts with the Russian Orthodox Church enrich the diplomatic service with a broader vision of the country’s national interests.

The relevance of the chosen topic is facilitated by the fact, that it remains poorly studied today. Some aspects of the issue were raised by Russian scientists: Olga Tserpitskaya (2011), Petr Kasatkin (2010a; 2010b), Roman Lunkin (2018; 2020), and Ukrainian scientist Oleksandr Trygub (2012; 2014), but there is no summary work. It should also be borne in mind that the situation in the international arena and inside the Russian Orthodox Church has changed significantly over the last decade.

Thus, the place and role of the Russian Orthodox Church in international relations is becoming very relevant today. Therefore, the authors aim to reveal the importance of the ROC instruments in the European space – the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions and the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Council of Europe (Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Strasbourg).

1. Methodology of the research

The methodological basis of the study is a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach. In the course of the research both general scientific theoretical

methods (systemic, civilizational) and special political science methods (theory of political systems, structural-functional, comparative analysis) were used.

In considering the conceptual foundations of cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Federation, the author followed a systematic approach, which clarified the role and place of the Russian Orthodox Church in the international arena, comprehensively reveal the internal logic of the ROC's international activity in the context of Russian Federation' foreign policy in a globalized environment.

In the study of political problems of international relations and global development, which includes the research topic, the institutional approach is of great importance. The use of the historical-chronological method in the positivist key played an important role, as all events are revealed in a logical sequence.

The use of these methodological tool made it possible to fully and objectively solve this problem.

2. Results and Discussion

2.1. The Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions

The Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions (further – 'Representation in EI') was established on July 17, 2002 in Brussels with the blessing of Patriarch and the Holy Synod of the ROC "taking into account a widening dialogue of the Russian Church with European international organisations". The primary purpose of this decision was to enable the ROC to participate in discussions about the future of Europe. Numerous theological, philosophical, ethical and social issues also played an important role in the debate about the future EU constitution. In addition, the mission planned to engage in ecumenical cooperation with other Church' organizations located in Brussels, as well as to communicate with the public (Trygub, 2012).

The official message of Patriarch Aleksiy II of Moscow to the European Commission President Romano Prodi states, that many members of the Russian Orthodox Church live in the current EU countries, as well as in the candidate countries. With the accession of Eastern European countries to the EU, the Moscow Patriarchate hopes that the Russian Orthodox Church will gain more weight and will be able to contribute to the creation of European integration structures (Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the EU in Brussels begins to work, 2002).

At a reception on the occasion of the mission' beginning of the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions, Bishop Hilarion (Alfeev) of Podolsk (now Metropolitan of Volokolamsk) on February 5, 2003, noted that "in recent years, the Russian Orthodox Church has a steadily growing interest to European problems. This is due to several factors. First, after the fall of the 'Iron Curtain', new opportunities opened up for dialogue between the European Union and the former members of the so-called 'Eastern Bloc'.

Secondly, the significant increase in the number of communities of the Russian Church in the European Unions' countries in recent years has made the participation and presence of our Church in the religious, cultural and social life of Europe more tangible. Third, the planned accession the States of the Orthodox tradition and the Baltic States to the European Union, which includes about 300 parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate, creates additional opportunities for interaction between our Church and European political structures...

The Russian Orthodox Church is not indifferent to the face of Europe in the near future, the place of religious communities in European law, and the role of the Orthodox tradition in Europe.

The Russian Church feels an integral part of the process of European integration and seeks to contribute to the formation of the spiritual and cultural identity of the new Europe...

The tasks of the newly created Representation are in some respects consonant, but by no means identical to the tasks of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Institutions" (**Reception on the Occasion, 2004**).

We see that the speech of the head of 'Representation in EI' clearly shows a trend towards political cooperation between the Church and EU structures, as well as the relationship with the Russian authorities in the face of the Russian Permanent Mission to the EU in achieving state goals.

According to the official position of the Russian Orthodox Church, the goals and objectives of the Mission are as follows:

- Direct dialogue of the Moscow Patriarchate with European intergovernmental institutions;
- Participation in discussions on European integration, the rights of believers in EU countries, human rights law, migration law, interethnic and interreligious peace, social justice, European security, bioethics, ethical aspects of the use of modern technologies;
- Establishing regular contacts and interaction with the representations of the Orthodox Churches in the European Union (the Patriarchate

of Constantinople, the Cypriot, Romanian and Greek Churches), as well as with various structures and representations of the Catholic Church, Protestant communities and inter-Christian organizations;

- Providing reliable information about the ministry and doctrine of the ROC to Western and domestic media (Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions, 2002).

During 2002-2009, the General Administration was headed by Metropolitan of Volokolamsk Hilarion (Alfeev), Head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Since 2009, the top management of the Russian Orthodox Church cannot decide on the head of the 'Representation in EI', appointing temporary acting: Archpriest Anthony Il'yin (2009-2013), Archpriest Dmitriy Sizonenko (2013-2016), and Abbot Philip (Ryabykh) (2016 –present). At the same time, Philip (Ryabykh) is also the head of the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and concentrated in his hands all the representative functions of the Russian Orthodox Church in the European political arena.

In 2009, due to the creation of a special Secretariat of the Moscow Patriarchate for foreign institutions, the hierarchical subordination of 'Representation in EI' changed. The Foreign institutions were subordinated not to the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate (DECR), but directly to the Patriarch. Previously, their activities were supervised by the Chairman of the DECR, who nominated candidates for the positions of their leaders to the Synod. However, in accordance with the amendments adopted by the Council of Bishops in 2011, foreign institutions were finally removed from the competence of the Chairman of the DECR.

At the same time, DECR remains the main institution that monitors the development of international activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in all major areas. He to oversees and continues cooperation with the representations of Moscow Patriarchate in international organizations (Tserpitskaya, 2011).

Regarding the activity of 'Representation in EI', only in the first years it has achieved considerable results in its activity, based on European approaches and classical technologies of public relations. During 2002, a website was created (<http://orthodoxeurope.org>) containing numerous materials in English, French, German and other languages. The official "Europaica Bulletin" has started to be published, which is available on the website and sent by subscription to everyone.

The bulletin was designed as a means by which the 'Representation in EI' will inform the Western public about its work, the participation of the

Russian Orthodox Church and other Christian Churches in the process of European integration, as well as explain the official position of the Moscow Patriarchate on topical issues. On February 2004, 34 issues of the bulletin had been published; the number of its subscribers exceeded 4,000. Among the readers of the bulletin are representatives of Christian Churches from different countries of Europe and the world (Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants), members of the European Parliament, politicians, scientists, public figures. On February 27, 2004, a Russian-language version of the bulletin was published.

In 2010, the “Europaica Bulletin” stopped publishing the 179th issue in May 2010 (even earlier, in 2008, the Russian-language supplement “Orthodoxy in Europe” was discontinued). The official website content of ‘Representation in EI’ (<http://orthodoxeurope.org>) was suspended, the latest notes in the “News” section are dated the end of 2010. According to the official position, “the official website of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate has started publishing information in four European languages – English, French, Italian and Greek, and all readers are asked to refer to this site” (Trygub, 2012:71-72).

As a result, the effectiveness of purposeful missionary work among the European community has declined significantly due to the blurring of the readership of the official website of the Department of External Church Relations. This naturally excited the management of Russian Orthodox Church and the site ‘Representation in EI’ was restored to a new address (<http://orthodoxru.eu>).

Until 2015, ‘Representation in EI’ worked quite actively in close contact with the Representations of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Greek Orthodox Church in the European Union, as well as with the Brussels Representations of the Roman Catholic Commission of Episcopal Conferences of Europe, with the Commission “Church and Society” of the European Churches Conference and other Christian missions in Brussels. The regular contacts with the media were organized.

The official contacts of ‘Representation in EI’ with the religious and political leaders of Europe were quite active. Only during 2002-2003, the head of ‘Representation in EI’ Bishop Hilarion, met leaders and officials’ representatives of European international organizations (European Commission, European Parliament, Council of Europe, NATO, etc.), also with diplomats accredited to these organizations from the different states of world on a regular basis.

Thus, in 2003, Bishop Hilarion met the Secretary General of the Council of Europe W. Schwimmer; Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the European Communities, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary V. Likhachev; Permanent Representative of the Russian

Federation to the European Communities, Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for the Development of Relations with the EU Minister M. Fradkov; Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the North Atlantic Alliance, General of the Army K. Totskiy; Adviser to the President of the European Commission on Social Affairs M. Weninger.

Her Majesty Queen Paola of Belgium, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, the Head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Archbishop Jukka Parma, and others also visited the Brussels Office of the Russian Orthodox Church (Main Events, 2004).

The political basis of these meetings can be clearly seen in the bilateral dialogue between Bishop Hilarion and the President of the European People's Party Wilfried Martens, which took place on January 24, 2008. In particular, Episcopo Hilarion stressed that "bilateral relations with the Russian Orthodox Church will create a platform for dialogue between the European People's Party and Russian civil society." (Bishop Hilarion, 2008).

Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, through 'Representation in EI', took part in the annual (since 2005) meetings of the European Union leadership, led by the President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso, with the European religious leaders. The issues discussed at the meetings were very diverse.

Thus, at the 7th meeting on May 30, 2011 at the headquarters of the European Commission more than twenty representatives of traditional religious organizations of the European Union gathered to discuss the topic: "Cooperation for Democracy and Mutual Prosperity: A Common Aspiration to Promote Democratic Rights and Freedoms." The discussion touched on a much wider range of issues, including immigration, interfaith and intercultural dialogue, the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, and many others.

The Russian Orthodox Church was officially represented by the Deputy Chairman of the DECR, Abbot Filaret (Bulekov). The event was also attended by Archpriest Anthony Il'yin, a representative of 'Representation in EI'.

In his speech, Abbot Filaret noted that with the undoubted importance of annual high-level meetings, it is necessary to develop a permanent mechanism for dialogue between EU institutions and religious organizations. The representative of the Moscow Patriarchate also stressed the responsibility of Europe, its secular authorities, civil society and religious leaders in defending religious freedom in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, where ancient Christian communities were in serious danger.

Abbot Filaret expressed concern that believers most often face the impossibility to openly express their position in the European Union on the moral problems of modern society. The participants of the meeting emphasized that freedom of religion and the adequate role of religion in the public sphere are conditions for fruitful cooperation to achieve the above goals.

According to Abbot Filaret, the main focus of his work in “Representation in EI”, is “expert analysis of current political and legislative initiatives of the European Union, which concern the Orthodox Churches.” (Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church Took Part in a Meeting, 2011).

Since 2005, cooperation between the Russian authorities and the Russian Orthodox Church has been officially announced. On November 3, 2005, the representative of ‘Representation in EI’, Bishop Hilarion (Alfeev), met the Head of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the EU, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary V. Chizhov. During the meeting, the prospects of cooperation between ‘Representation in EI’ and the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the EU were discussed (The Russian Orthodox Church and the Permanent Mission, 2005).

Russian diplomats quite often invite representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church to official meetings. Thus, on March 21-22, 2011, a regular meeting of the Russia-EU Parliamentary Cooperation Committee took place in the European Parliament in Brussels. Acting representative of the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions, Archpriest Anthony Il’yin, was present at the meeting as an invited participant. In his speech, he touched not only on religious, but also on political issues (Trygub, 2012).

With the onset of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014 and the deepening gap between Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the ROC, ‘Representation in EI’ regularly has rhetoric about the need to protect the Orthodox in Ukraine. Emphasis was placed on the need to protect the rights of religious communities and individual believers at the European level through the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights.

For this, in May 27, 2017 on the basis of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (to enter the canonical field of the Russian Orthodox Church and actually its satellite) “in connection with the need to convey the position of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on important ideological, religious, social and socio-political issues” the Representation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions was formed. Archimandrite Victor (Kotsabu) was appointed the head of this institution, who was later ordained Bishop of Baryshivskiyi, Vicar of the Kyiv Metropolis (The Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 2017).

In fact, the leadership of the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches appealed to the EU institutions to protect the religious rights of citizens and the status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), reaffirming the idea, that the Ukrainian crisis cannot be resolved only in a bilateral format between Russia and Ukraine. This issue should include a revision of the EU's relations with Ukraine and Russia's relations with the European Union (Mironenko, 2018).

The key to understanding the foreign policy strategy of the Russian Orthodox Church is the visit of Patriarch Kirill to Strasbourg on May 26-27, 2019. The leader of the ROC met, in particular, the Council of Europe's Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland and the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović. At the end of the visit, the Patriarch spoke in defense of conscience freedom:

I am constantly raising the issue of Ukraine, and especially here in Strasbourg, because this topic is directly related to human rights and religious freedom. In the European country, the rights of a huge number of Orthodox believers were grossly violated (Lunkin, 2020:159-160).

The result of the “pro-European” policy of the patriarchate was the intensification of activity the Representation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions and separately the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Churches at the Council of Europe and other organizations in Strasbourg (headed by Abbot Philip (Ryabykh). Since 2019, the Representation in Strasbourg publishes a report on the violation of Christian rights in Europe, where most of it is dedicated to Ukraine.

The Synodal Department of the ROC for the Church's interaction with society and the media also regularly declares the rights of believers, appealing to the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and the principles of religious freedom. According to Russian researcher Roman Lunkin, such rhetoric can be seen as a political declaration for the tactical purpose of putting pressure on Ukrainian politicians. At the same time, the Ukrainian factor only accelerated the recognition of certain European values in the foreign policy strategy of the Russian Orthodox Church (Lunkin, 2020).

2.2. The Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Strasbourg

On March 24, 2004, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church decided to establish the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Strasbourg (further – ‘Representation in Strasbourg’), which is entrusted to conduct a dialogue and present the position of the ROC in the Council of Europe. Abbot Filaret (Bulekov) was appointed the first representative of the ROC in Strasbourg.

Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyaev), the head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, noted: The activities of the Council of Europe, the oldest European international organization, are of great interest to the Church. The Council of Europe is one of the personifications of integration processes that affect all aspects of the life of the peoples of the continent, including their spiritual traditions. The parishioners of the ROC, which is the largest religious community in the post-Soviet space, also feel the influence of the work carried out within this organization.

The Russian Orthodox Church saw its place in the implementation of one of the key areas of the Council of Europe's work – the protection of human rights, as “the realization of human rights is impossible without religious freedom.” Therefore, interfaith dialogue, recognized and supported by the member states of the Council of Europe, should become the starting point for building a ‘Greater Europe’, which respects traditional spiritual values (Kirill, 2006).

2004 was mainly an organizational year for ‘Representation in Strasbourg’ – the formation of a ‘team’, setting priorities, preliminary meetings with leading politicians of ‘Old Europe’. Only on September 14, 2005, the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the Council of Europe, Ambassador Aleksander Orlov, gave a reception at his official residence on the occasion of the beginning of the ‘Representation in Strasbourg’ and the arrival of Abbot Filaret (Bulekov). The reception was attended by the Consul General of the Russian Federation in Strasbourg Vladimir Korotkov, the Catholic Archbishop of Strasbourg Joseph Dori, and the Vatican Representative to the Council of Europe Monsignor Vito Rallo.

In last quarter of 2005, Abbot Filaret held a series of meetings to explain the position of the Moscow Patriarchate on education, freedom of conscience, gender issues, freedom of religion, and more. During the autumn session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (October 3-7, 2005), the abbot met individual deputies on “Women and Religion in Europe” and “Education and Religion”; On October 10 and December 20, Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights Alvaro Gil-Robles met Abbot Filaret to discuss a wide range of issues between the Council of Europe and the CoE Commissioner for Human Rights with various institutions of the Moscow Patriarchate, human rights in Europe, and religious education, in secular schools, etc.; November 21 – Meeting with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Terry Davis, etc (Trygub, 2014).

It should be noted that all activities of ‘Representation in Strasbourg’ were constantly under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. This is evidenced by the regular meetings of Abbot Filaret with Russian diplomats, their care of the ‘Representation

in Strasbourg'. Thus, on June 14, 2006 in Strasbourg, Abbot Filaret met Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Aleksander Grushko, who was in charge of European and Euro-Atlantic organizations, and on October 4 the same year Abbot Filaret met Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergei Lavrov.

It is interesting that such close cooperation was not hidden, but veiled. This is evidenced by the interview of Abbot Filaret to the Interfax-Religion correspondent on November 5, 2009, where he noted:

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Representation of Russia [in Strasbourg] have been providing us with all possible assistance from the very beginning. This does not mean that we are a unit of the Russian diplomatic corps. At the same time, we have always emphasized that the representation of the Moscow Patriarchate does not represent the Church in the Russian Federation, but Orthodox believers in all countries of the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church... (Lozitskaya, 2009: n/p).

A landmark event in the history of 'Representation in Strasbourg' was the visit of Patriarch Alexiy II on October 2, 2007 the session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe by invitation of its President Rene van der Linden. The offer to the spiritual leader of the largest Orthodox Church in the world to speak on topical issues of the European agenda was an expression of the readiness of representatives of the political elite of all European countries – members of the Council of Europe to listen to the voice of modern Orthodoxy.

Patriarch Alexiy not only addressed the PACE deputies, but also answered a number of questions concerning religious education, respect for the feelings of believers, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, the death penalty, and others. This, in turn, testified the readiness of the Russian Orthodox Church for a real dialogue with the Council of Europe on the whole spectrum of mutual interests. At the same time, certain issues (religiosity, same-sex marriages, etc.) provoked discussion among deputies.

The Patriarch also touched on political issues. Thus, Alexiy II touched upon the Kosovo problem, noting: "The negotiation process must be made open to all those who can have a positive influence on it. Thus, Kosovo still does not pay due attention to the peacekeeping potential of religious communities. The Russian Orthodox Church, which has extensive experience in peacekeeping, is ready to help bring peace." However, the Patriarch's proposal to join the peace process in the region of Europe where human rights and the rights of religious and ethnic communities are constantly and severely violated has not provoked any response from the Council of Europe (Trygub, 2014:160-162).

In 2011, Abbot Philip (Ryabykh) was appointed to the official ‘Representation in Strasbourg’ (New Representative of the Moscow Patriarchate, 2011), who became the leader of the European policy of the newly elected Patriarch Kirill (Gundyaev). Since 2016, Abbot (now Archimandrite) Philip has united all the representative functions of the Russian Orthodox Church in the European arena under his leadership.

‘Representation in Strasbourg’ pays great attention to the possibility to influence the decision of the European Court of Human Rights, which is located in this city. Thus, on July 9, 2012, Abbot Philip (Ryabykh) met the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights Nils Muižnieks. A representative of the ROC handed over a document of the ROC on human dignity, freedom and human rights, adopted by the Council of Bishops in 2008 to the Commissioner for Human Rights.

The priest also expressed concern over the increasing number of cases of interference of secular state and public institutions in the internal affairs of religious associations, stressed the inadmissibility of insulting believers and desecrating their shrines, noted the need to protect the rights of believers to defend morals and public life according to religious doctrine, for example, in the formation of legislation governing the creation and life of the family, the relationship between the sexes, the origin of human life and departure from it, the activities of the media, education (Representative of the Russian Orthodox Church in Strasbourg, 2012).

One of the most important tasks, which have been implemented throughout the decade of ‘Representation in Strasbourg’, is to try to influence the moral and legal initiatives of the European Union. Thus, in June 2011, in connection with the summer session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg, the discussion on the recognition of same-sex marriage in Europe, gay parades and sanctions against those who disagree with these phenomena intensified again in the media and on the Internet.

‘Representation in Strasbourg’ published on its official website a report by Russian legal experts “On the right to critically evaluate homosexuality and on legal restrictions on the imposition of homosexuality”, where it criticized the support of a number of European structures, in particular the European Court of Human Rights, for this issue (Representative of the Russian Orthodox Church in the EU, 2011).

The purpose of this step is to promote an objective and comprehensive discussion on discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Council of Europe welcomes the wide-ranging discussion of the above-mentioned report by Russian experts. The Representation will also be interested in discussing the report of the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human

Rights following the public appearance of his text (Russian experts have prepared a report, 2011).

At the same time, ‘Representation in Strasbourg’ expects that as a result of joint efforts of various public organizations, religious unions and the ROC, European countries will disagree with the position of the European Court of Human Rights and will defend traditional values, as a result of which the European Court of Human Rights will be forced to change its decision. Such confidence in the effectiveness of these measures is based on the positive practice in previous years.

Thus, on May 15, 2006, the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs of the European Parliament approved a report on the “EU Framework Strategy on Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities”. ‘Representation in Strasbourg’ took an active part in the preparation of the document within the framework of expert-consultative interaction with the deputies – members of the Committee.

The result of this interaction was the inclusion in the final text of the report the concept of “distributive justice”, which allows the realization of the collective rights of vulnerable groups, mainly ethnic minorities in Europe which will be the basis for the development of a system of so-called “positive actions”. This system will be used by the European Union to ensure proportional representation of different groups of the EU population in all spheres of life, including politics and public administration (The European Parliament, 2006).

In the last five years, the activities of the European representations of the Russian Orthodox Church have focused on the Ukrainian issue and the protection of the rights of believers in Ukraine (we have already discussed this). In his interview at the end of 2018, Philip (Ryabykh) noted that “two thirds of violations of the rights of European Orthodox believers in 2017 occurred in Ukraine,” and in accordance with its commitments under the European Convention on Human Rights, Ukraine “must protect religious communities from physical and verbal attacks by third parties.” (Interfax Interview with Abbot Philip (Ryabykh, 2018). Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church through ‘Representation in Strasbourg’ tried to organize pressure on the Ukrainian political circles.

Conclusions

Thus, the Representations of the Russian Orthodox Church are a new form of foreign institutions, created to establish a dialogue with the world community, to protect traditional Russian values at the international level (through the popularization of the ideas of the “Russian World”), protection

of the rights of Orthodox believers through European institutions, bringing to the attention of international organizations and the authorities of foreign states the views of the ROC on topical issues, as well as increasing the influence of the Russian Federation in the international arena.

The activities of the Representations are designed to contribute to the achievement of both religious and spiritual and state foreign policy goals of the Russian Federation. Interacting with foreign media and civil society institutions, the missions promote a positive image of Russian Orthodoxy and the idea of the “Russian world”, creating a more favorable image of these ideas in the world for Russia’s foreign policy.

In this way, we see that the Russian Orthodox Church has intensified its external activities in the 21st century. At the same time, it is often not only religious in nature, but also political, which indicates the further rapprochement of “New Russia” with the Russian Orthodox Church. It continues to carry out secular tasks on the foreign policy front, continuing the historical traditions of both imperial politics and the Soviet post-war use of the Church in its political interests.

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