

UKRAINE: Autocephaly: Balm or bomb for Ukraine's Orthodox?

By Geraldine Fagan

East-West Church Report (vol. 26, no. 4, 2018) – They're singing the Lord's Prayer, you might take off your hat!" Hearing the elderly woman's reproach, a man of similar age meekly slides his cap down to his chest. The pair stand near the editor of the East-West Church Report amid a 5,000-strong crowd facing the iconic St. Sophia's Cathedral, built a thousand years ago by the first Christian rulers of Kyiv. The occasion is a government-sponsored Prayer for Ukraine on the morning of 14 October. This is both the Eastern Christian feast day of the Intercession of the Mother of God and—as of 2015—Defender of Ukraine Day, a public holiday honoring the armed forces.

A day prior, some news reports claimed that local bureaucrats had pressured people into attending the event.[1] Yet perhaps a third present spontaneously cross themselves and join in prayers. Many more sing the unofficial national anthem, "O Lord, Almighty and Only" [Ukrainian: "Bozhe Velykyi, Edynyi"] and respond to the customary western Ukrainian greeting, "Glory to Jesus Christ!" [Ukrainian: "Slava Iisusu Khristu!"].

These official prayers are in thanksgiving for a decision to grant autocephaly—or full independence—to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, affirmed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople on 11 October. The move has implications for the development of all Christianity in Ukraine, as witnessed at the event by speakers from the country's Greek and Roman Catholic Churches, and Bible Society.[2]

Rivals for legitimacy

Ukrainian Orthodoxy is unusually factious. Inside the country, the post-Soviet period has seen the emergence of three major contenders to the status of canonical— or legitimate— Ukrainian Orthodox Church, one under the Patriarchate of Moscow and two breakaway entities. Until now, only the first of these has been acknowledged by the wider Orthodox world. (In diaspora, two further Ukrainian Orthodox structures formally under the Patriarchate of Constantinople are headquartered in Canada and the United States.)

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) retains the largest number of registered parishes in Ukraine, with approximately 12,000 (Russia has approximately 17,000). Its main rival, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate), has approximately 5,000. A third body, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), has some 1,000 parishes, concentrated in three far western regions of Ukraine that lay outside the Soviet Union before World War II.[3]

This ratio did not shift dramatically for 20 years. But since 2014—when clashes with pro-Kremlin forces erupted in eastern Ukraine—public allegiance to the Moscow and Kyiv Patriarchates has see-sawed. Respectively 35 and 22 percent in 2010, it is now 19 and 43 percent.[4]

National security concern

The Kyiv Patriarchate's anti-Kremlin stance is a key factor. During the 2013-14 demonstrations centered upon Kyiv's Maidan Square which ultimately toppled the pro-Kremlin regime of Viktor Yanukovich, the Kyiv Patriarchate's nearby St. Michael's Monastery provided refuge to those fleeing police batons. Today, the monastery's perimeter forms a Memory Wall displaying the names and photographs of 3,367 Ukrainian combatants killed in the Donbass conflict during 2014-17.

Ukrainian Autocephaly

Addressing the 14 October crowd and television audience, Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko thus characterized autocephaly as a question of national security. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, he explained, prays for the Russian authorities "who have committed aggression against our country." [5] The Orthodox leader conspicuously absent from the podium was Onufry, the Moscow Patriarchate's Metropolitan of Kyiv. 14 October is also a special feast day for the nearby Intercession Convent, and he leads worship there for approximately 1,000 faithful. Most senior Moscow Patriarchate clerics in Ukraine, including Onufry, oppose the autocephaly project. [6]

For them, the ambitious figure of Patriarch Filaret, head of the Kyiv Patriarchate, is a particular obstacle. [7] Nearly 90, Filaret was staunchly pro-Kremlin when a predecessor to Metropolitan Onufry. As late as 1990 he expressed alarm that the growth of "the so-called Ukrainian autocephalous church" might contribute to the independence of Ukraine from the Soviet Union. Such a separation from Moscow, he maintained at that time, "fundamentally contradicts our thousand-year tradition in which the Russian Church has always been the

source of unity.”[8]

After failing to be elected Moscow Patriarch that same year, Filaret reversed his position on Ukrainian autocephaly and state independence in 1991. Today, notwithstanding Kyiv’s ongoing efforts at de-Communization, he still vigorously defends his and other Soviet-era bishops’ collaboration with the KGB.[9]

Given Moscow’s aversion to full independence for the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, President Poroshenko made overtures to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople– the senior Patriarchate in the Orthodox world. Following the president’s April 2018 meeting with Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the Ukrainian parliament voted to support an appeal for autocephaly on the part of the state. In late August Patriarch Bartholomew hosted Patriarch Kirill of Moscow at his Istanbul headquarters. According to an alleged transcript of the meeting, Kirill disputed that Poroshenko and the Ukrainian parliament were legitimate representatives of the Ukrainian people, having “seized power as a result of a coup d’état during the Maidan uprising.”[10]

A week later, Constantinople dispatched two exarchs– bishops of its Ukrainian diaspora structures–to Kyiv as its representatives “within the framework of the preparations for the granting of autocephaly.”[11] The Russian Orthodox Church responded by suspending senior-level relations with Constantinople.[12]

On 11 October Constantinople went further, lifting Moscow’s

disciplinary measures against the heads of the two breakaway Ukrainian Orthodox entities, Filaret and Makary; restoring their faithful to Orthodox communion; and rescinding Moscow's authority to ordain the Metropolitan of Kyiv, granted in 1686.[13] Roundly rejecting these rulings, Moscow broke of all relations with Constantinople on 15 October.[14]

Unification council

A unification council tasked with forming the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine met at St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kyiv on 15 December. It elected a senior Kyiv Patriarchate hierarch, Epifany (Dumenko), as the entity's Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine, beating Metropolitan Simeon of Vinnytsia of the Moscow Patriarchate by eight votes. Out of 10 Moscow Patriarchate hierarchs reportedly among the 64 who voted, two participated publicly. Their synod took disciplinary action against them on 17 December.[15]

The situation is murky and volatile. Some Ukrainian Orthodox under Moscow fear the creation of the new church will lead to violent property seizures. While the Ukrainian government rejects this suggestion, it may prove powerless to curb ultranationalist groups hostile to any perceived Russian influence.

Such a possibility was also plain on the afternoon of 14 October, when over 8,000 Ukrainian nationalists—some bearing Nazi insignia—took to the streets elsewhere in Kyiv. Although marginal, these elements could swiftly mobilize against Orthodox remaining under Moscow. As one youth engaged in such

harassment in the far western region of Ivano Frankivsk explained in a 4 November BBC documentary, “These people don’t love Ukraine. They is Russia [sic].”[16]

Yet the situation is also less binary than may appear. The wife of a Ukrainian-speaking Moscow Patriarchate priest whose Ivano-Frankivsk village church was seized by nationalists also told the BBC that her son had fought against Russian-backed rebels in the eastern Donbass region: “What kind of enemy are we?”

Local opinion overlooked

Such nuanced local opinion within Metropolitan Onufry’s church lies unnoticed beneath the Moscow-Constantinople polemic. Particularly overlooked is patriotic defense of Ukraine combined with loyalty to the Moscow Patriarchate, still understood by many as the only canonical Orthodox option. Indeed, such sentiments are mainstream: Onufry himself may not have been at the 14 October event, but Metropolitan Avgustin of Bila Tserkva and Bohuslav—his church’s representative to Ukraine’s armed forces—read out a statement praising the Ukrainian military’s committed defense of the Motherland. He was warmly applauded.

Over the following pages, the East-West Church Report presents diverging views—for and against autocephaly—held by two hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Both are auxiliary bishops of Kyiv, were born and raised in Ukraine, and are in their 40s. (The pro-autocephaly hierarch is one of those now facing disciplinary

measures for participating in the 15 December unification council.) In forthcoming issues, the East-West Church Report will feature less prominent Orthodox voices in Ukraine, as well as a range of other local views on the situation for Christians in the country, including with respect to religious freedom and the Donbass conflict.

[1] For example, [in Russian] <https://123ru.net/kiev/169810378>

[2] [In Ukrainian] https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=61&v=bo_7FE9a-QQ

[3] The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is officially called the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. "(Moscow Patriarchate)" is added here for clarity. [In Russian] <https://religsvoboda.ru/content/religioznayastatistika-na-1-aprelya-2018-goda;> [In Ukrainian] [http://mincult.kmu.gov.ua/document/245234300/Form1_MCU_Nakaz260-29032017.xls.](http://mincult.kmu.gov.ua/document/245234300/Form1_MCU_Nakaz260-29032017.xls)

[4] [In Ukrainian] Biblioteka Tsentru Razumkova, *Osoblyvosti Religiïnoho i Tserkovno-Religiïnoho Samovyznachennia Ukraïns'kikh Gromadian: Tendentsii 2010-2018 rr.*, Kyiv, 2018, 17.

[5] [In Ukrainian] "Vystup Prezidenta Ukraïny pid chas uchasti u molytovnomu zakhodi za Ukraïnu," 14 October 2018; [https://www.president.gov.ua/news/vistup-prezidenta-ukrayini-pidchas-u-chasti-u-molitovnomu-za-50446.](https://www.president.gov.ua/news/vistup-prezidenta-ukrayini-pidchas-u-chasti-u-molitovnomu-za-50446)

[6] [In Russian] <http://news.church.ua/2018/11/13/postanovlenie-sobora-episkopo-v-ukrainskoj-pravoslavnoj-cerkviot-13-noyabrya-2018-goda/?lang=ru>

[7] [In Russian] "Mitropolit Cherkasskii Sofronii: UPTs MP dolzhna uchastvovat' v ob''edinitel'nom sobore," *Akhilla*, 26

October 2018,
<https://ahilla.ru/mitropolit-cherkasskij-sofronij-upts-mpdolzhna-uchastvovat-v-obedinitelnom-sobore/>

[8] Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, Fond 89, Opis 8, Delo 41.

[9] "A Conversation with Patriarch Filaret," Atlantic Council, 19 September 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29J7coFPcqs>; [In Ukrainian] "Kisel'ov. Avtors'ke. Gist' patriarkha Filaret," Telekanal Priamii, 31 December 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVsbQbUNWYE>

[10] [In Russian] "Ekskliuziv: Dialog Varfolomeia – Kirilla po ukrainskomu voprosu," Orthodoxy Info, 28 September 2018, <https://orthodoxia.info/news/экссклюзив-диалог-варфоломеякирилла/>

[11] [In Greek]
<https://www.ec-patr.org/docdisplay.php?lang=gr&id=2563&tla=gr>

[12] "Statement of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church concerning the uncanonical intervention of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church," 14 September 2018, <https://mospat.ru/en/2018/09/14/news163803/>

[13] "Announcement of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople," https://www.uocofusa.org/news_181013_1.html

[14] [In Russian] "Zaiavlenie Sviashchennogo Sinoda Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v sviazi s posiagatel'stvom Konstantinopol'skogo Patriarkhata na kanonicheskuiu territoriiu Russkoi Tserkvi," 15 October 2018, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5283708.html>

[15] [In Russian] "Stalo izvestno, kak budut vybirat' Predstoiatelia novoi Tserkvi," RISU, 15 December 2018,

https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/all_news/orthodox/orthodox_world/73913/; "Stalo izvestno, skol'ko golosov na vyborakh poluchil Predstoiatel' Epifanii," RISU, 17 December 2018, https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/all_news/orthodox/ocu/73933/; "Sinod UPTs (MP) nazval ob''edinitel'nyi Sobor 'raskol'nicheskim' i zapretil v sluzhenii mitropolitov Simeona i Aleksandra," RISU, 17 December 2018, https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/73950/

[16] "Ukraine's Church – Rejecting Russia," BBC News Channel, 4 November 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b0brfr0m/our-world-ukraines-church-rejecting-russia#>

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ISRAEL: FECRIS, ICVC and other anti-cult associations

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)*

HRWF (09.10.2018) – In 2012, HRWF published a book with the University of Dresden, *Freedom of Religion or Belief Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality, A Case Study: FECRIS*. Some of our main purposes were to prove that FECRIS and its affiliates

- had no academic background in religious studies;
- were stigmatizing people who had chosen to enjoy their right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief outside the traditional and historical religions which is protected by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- were spreading hate speech towards new religious movements (NRMs) and their members;
- were claiming that NRMs, labelled as cults without any scientific basis, were not religions and their members were not entitled to enjoy the benefits of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration although the successive UN Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Religion or Belief and various decisions of the European Court of Human Rights contended the opposite;
- were trying to protect a dominant religion or belief system in their own country, or had an anti-religious agenda;
- were misusing public money while disregarding their duty to neutrality and non-discrimination.

Our report on FECRIS' affiliates in Austria, France, Germany, Russia, and Serbia illustrated these arguments, and our

conclusion was that those anti-cult associations should not be morally and financially supported by state institutions.

Our recent study about the ICVC, FECRIS' correspondent in Israel, *The Israeli Center for Victims of Cults: Who is Who? Who is Behind it?* followed the same objectives and other anti-cult organizations will be investigated by HRWF in the near future.

HRWF reports on such issues are not academic studies; they are not written in attorneys' language but they are rather following the style of investigative journalism.

In a private letter addressed to us on 13 September 2018^[i], three scholars from MEIDA Center in Israel – Prof. Boaz Huss, Dr. Adam Klin Orin, and Dr. Rachel Werczberger – have questioned a number of points and interpretations in our report and have shared with us their divergent opinions.

Noteworthy is that the opinion of Professor Huss and his colleagues about the ICVC is not unanimous among Israeli scholars, including those who are or have been associated with the MEIDA Center. For example, in a recent article, Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, of Zefat Academic College, and Sharon Warshawski, of Ashkelon Academic College, have denounced the ICVC as an association that is “prominent in promoting the antiscientific discourse” about “cults,” a discourse they regard as very dangerous for religious liberty and human rights in Israel.”^[ii]

We will now analyze here the main dissenting views of the signatories of the letter.

ICVC, a secular façade of ultra-orthodox anti-missionary group Yad L'Achim?

The signatories of the letter recognize that “there are

significant connections between ICVC and Yad L'Achim" but dispute HRWF's alleged representation of "ICVC as only a cover for Yad L'Achim."

As said before, HRWF's report is not an academic work whose objective would be to highlight all the influences inside the ICVC throughout its history. HRWF points at some controversial influences exerted by a questionable group, its lack of neutrality and expertise.

HRWF's report brings concrete arguments that the ultra-orthodox group Yad L'Achim has been heavily involved in the creation, the financing and the staffing of the ICVC.

According to the ICVC's financial reports, it was founded and largely funded for years by activists of Yad L'Achim. Nowadays, it is being managed by a Yad L'Achim actor, Rachel Liechtenstein, and for many years its auditing committee was headed by another Yad L'Achim actor, Galia Ginerman. The Center also holds joint lectures with known Yad L'Achim figures^[iii] while this movement was historically not used to cooperate with secular entities for obvious theological reasons. The so-called secular ICVC also appears in ultra-orthodox neighborhoods in Bnei Brak, Jerusalem and other places on pashkevils (such postings usually enjoy rabbinic endorsements) where it is presented by central orthodox institutions as an organization founded by Yad L'Achim. This shows that the ICVC is perceived as part and parcel of the ultra-religious establishment; otherwise their religious DNA would not accept such an unholy alliance.

From these and other facts, it can be deduced that for a long time the ICVC has enjoyed a close and tight cooperation with Yad L'Achim and that the one-way porosity between Yad L'Achim and the ICVC is obvious.

Concerning the management of the ICVC, we do not dispute the fact that some members and activists, including some who speak publicly for ICVC in conferences and other events, are secular humanists and have no sympathy for Yad L'Achim. Some secular anti-cult activists may temporarily find a comfortable home base in the ICVC for their activity but they are not the decision-makers of the ICVC policies and their role is either representative or therapeutic.

This is not a unique situation within FECRIS. In Eastern Europe, some of the activists who operate in the local FECRIS affiliate associations are secular humanists. However, in the whole region, persons and groups associated with the Russian Orthodox Church play a crucial role in fundraising and management activities.

Our conclusion remains that the ICVC wants to cultivate a secular appearance to extend its influence and opportunities for funding, but it is not neutral and it is functioning in the orbit of Yad L'Achim.

It is also suspicious that the ICVC did not take a position in controversies about large and powerful Orthodox groups widely accused in the Israeli media of "cult-like" behavior. One example is the Ger community, the largest Hasidic group in Israel. Controversies about this group reached the mainstream media in Israel, but the ICVC remained silent about them^[iv].

Yad L'Achim, a controversial movement

The signatories of the letter state that “it is important to note that Yad L’Achim is a small and controversial group which was established, and is predominantly run, by members of the Habad Movement, which is in itself a contested and controversial movement.”

According to the letter, HRWF’s report

- implies that “Yad L’Achim represents ultra-orthodox Judaism” but the report does not say this;
- “overemphasizes Yad L’Achim’s control over the ICVC” but the report never said that Yad L’Achim controls the ICVC;
- “implies that the ICVC targets only Jewish movements” but, again, this is not the case as Christian and other non-Jewish movements are also mentioned;
- “accuses the ICVC and Yad L’Achim of being agents of ultra-orthodox Judaism”: again, the report is falsely depicted as it never accused “the ICVC and Yad L’Achim of being agents of ultra-orthodox Judaism”. The report describes mechanisms of influence and instrumentalization converging in a certain direction based on the accumulation of concrete facts;
- is not endorsed by the signatories concerning the description of the modus operandi of Yad L’Achim in its fight against so-called cults. This is not different from the modus operandi that religious scholars and attorneys have described in other studies about anti-cult groups published by HRWF, such as “Freedom of Religion or Belief Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality, A Case Study: FECRIS”, and in other academic publications;
- accuses ultra-orthodox Judaism to “instrumentalize the main mechanisms of society to impose its sole legitimacy of Judaism, not only in the religious field but also in the shaping of domestic and foreign political policies”.

We maintain that ultra-orthodox Judaism is in competition with other branches of Judaism and shapes domestic and foreign political policies that are highly criticized inside and outside Israel.

In summary, these criticisms expressed by the signatories of the letter are based on distortions of the content of the report and sound like emotional over-reactions. Readers should go and read HRWF's report on its website (<http://hrwf.eu/forb/our-reports/>) and make their own opinion.

About the Haredim Jews

Haredim Jews are incidentally mentioned in a footnote because most readers of HRWF's report outside Jewish circles are expected to ignore anything about this group and only need some indications about their profile. The Haredims are not related to the objective of HRWF's report about the ICVC and, in this framework, they did not need any further treatment than a footnote as it is not an academic paper. Criticizing "the superficial and disparaging way" they are described – in footnote 19 – while "there is much available literature in English about the Haredim" is again disproportionate, epidermal, and emotional over-reaction. Moreover, we contest the footnote is disparaging as some of their characteristics and some incidents can be verified in the sources that we mentioned.

American and Israeli anti-cultists: a Jewish orthodox anti-cult conspiracy?

The signatories of the letter deem as irrelevant the inclusion of a number of disturbing details in the report that point at the lack of expertise of ICVC's public figures and their background. However, they are not in a position to say what is and what is not relevant in HRWF's report as they had not

understood the objective of HRWF as described in the report and, again, in the introduction of this paper.

Another characteristic of the signatories of the letter is that they repeatedly express severely distorted and biased interpretations of HRWF's narrative. One example, among others mentioned in the letter, concerns the American deprogrammer Rick Ross used as an expert by the ICVC. The fact that he is also presented as "a Jewish activist" in HRWF's report is criticized, but this collateral detail is taken out of context, which is:

"A study of Rick Ross' background shows that he is neither a scholar in religious studies nor a cult expert. He is a Jewish activist trying to fight missionary activities targeting the Jews and to reconvert, including through illegal means, Jews who changed their religion."

We referred to how Ross started his career and did not imply that he offers his deprogramming activities to Jewish families only. We are well aware that Ross' definition of a family that is the "victim of a cult" refers to any family prepared to pay his fees, irrespective of its religious persuasions.

HRWF's report also says, among many other things, in the long description of the profile of this controversial American deprogrammer (praised and used in Israel by the ICVC but criticized by other fellow deprogrammers in the US) that he organized the forceful deprogramming in sequestration conditions of dozens of converts to the Evangelical and Pentecostal faiths. On 18 January 1991, he organized the – violent – kidnapping and forced change of religion attempt (deprogramming) of Jason Scott, an 18-year-old member of a Pentecostal Church. This led to a multimillion-dollar judgment against him and the financial collapse of the renowned but now defunct anti-cult organization Cult Awareness Network (CAN) to which he was closely connected.

Among his other illegal activities, HRWF's report also says that he was previously prosecuted for attempted burglary, embezzlement of \$100,000 worth of jewelry, and kidnapping...

But the top of the biased interpretation of HRWF's report by the signatories of the letter is that it allegedly implies that there is a transnational anti-cult conspiracy organized by orthodox Jews. Such a thing was never said in HRWF's report and nothing is so far from the truth. It is pure imagination.

In conclusion, the ICVC should not be supported, both morally and financially, by state institutions and be considered a credible player by courts as

- the ICVC serves private religious interests and is therefore not a neutral organization;
- the ICVC spreads hate speech that stigmatizes certain religious minorities;
- the ICVC claims to have 'cult experts' but none of them are experts in religious studies;
- the ICVC uses concepts and theories such as "cult", mind control, brainwashing, or mental manipulation that have been denounced by religious studies scholars and the scientific establishment as unfounded.

The signatories of the letter have ignored and failed to recognize these conclusions of HRWF's report which were the main objective of its investigation.

Readers of the HRWF's report will judge for themselves what it says and does not say about FECRIS' correspondent in Israel on HRWF's website (<http://hrwf.eu/forb/our-reports/>) and will make their own opinion.

[i] A copy of the letter has apparently been sent to other religious studies scholars.

[ii] Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro and Sharon Warshawski, "Trance, Meditation and Brainwashing: The Israeli Use of

Hypnosis Law and New Religious Movements," *The Journal of CESNUR*, 2(4), July-August 2018, 61–96 (quote at page 65).

[iii] For example, Avraham Bitkin, a former Yad L'Achim national coordinator of volunteers, who worked in the same department in charge of anti-missionary activities where Ms Liechtenstein used to work as a secretary.

[iv] Yair Ettinger, "Ger Hasidim's Secret Rules on Male-female Relations Revealed by Ex-member," *Haaretz*, July 3, 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-ger-hasid-r-reveals-sects-secret-rules-1.5404825>

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RUSSIA: Ungodly espionage:

Russian hackers targeted Orthodox clergy

AP News (27.08.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2MZCNP4> – The Russian hackers indicted by the U.S. special prosecutor last month have spent years trying to steal the private correspondence of some of the world's most senior Orthodox Christian figures, The Associated Press has found, illustrating the high stakes as Kiev and Moscow wrestle over the religious future of Ukraine.

The targets included top aides to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, who often is described as the first among equals of the world's Eastern Orthodox Christian leaders.

The Istanbul-based patriarch is currently mulling whether to accept a Ukrainian bid to tear that country's church from its association with Russia, a potential split fueled by the armed conflict between Ukrainian military forces and Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The AP's evidence comes from a hit list of 4,700 email addresses supplied last year by Secureworks, a subsidiary of Dell Technologies.

The AP has been mining the data for months, uncovering how a group of Russian hackers widely known as Fancy Bear tried to break into the emails of U.S. Democrats , defense contractors , intelligence workers , international journalists and even American military wives . In July, as part of special counsel

Robert Mueller's ongoing investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election, a U.S. grand jury identified 12 Russian intelligence agents as being behind the group's hack-and-leak assault against Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.

The targeting of high-profile religious figures demonstrates the wide net cast by the cyberspies.

Patriarch Bartholomew claims the exclusive right to grant a "Tomos of Autocephaly," or full ecclesiastic independence, sought by the Ukrainians. It would be a momentous step, splitting the world's largest Eastern Orthodox denomination and severely eroding the power and prestige of the Moscow Patriarchate, which has positioned itself as a leading player within the global Orthodox community.

Ukraine is lobbying hard for a religious divorce from Russia and some observers say the issue could be decided as soon as next month.

"If something like this will take place on their doorstep, it would be a huge blow to the claims of Moscow's transnational role," said Vasilios Makrides, a specialist in Orthodox Christianity at the University of Erfurt in Germany. "It's something I don't think they will accept."

The Kremlin is scrambling to help Moscow's Patriarch Kirill retain his traditional role as the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and "the more they know, the better it is for

them," Makrides said.

The Russian Orthodox Church said it had no information about the hacking and declined comment. Russian officials referred the AP to previous denials by the Kremlin that it has anything to do with Fancy Bear, despite a growing body of evidence to the contrary.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko flew to Istanbul in April in an effort to convince the patriarch to agree to a split, which he has described as "a matter of our independence and our national security." Moscow's Patriarch Kirill is flying to Turkey later this week in a last-ditch bid to prevent it.

Hilarion Alfeyev, Kirill's representative abroad, has warned that granting the Tomos could lead to the biggest Christian schism since 1054, when Catholic and Orthodox believers parted ways.

"If such a thing happens, Orthodox unity will be buried," Alfeyev said.

The issue is an extraordinarily sensitive one for the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Reached by phone, spokesman Nikos-Giorgos Papachristou said: "I don't want to be a part of this story."

Other church officials spoke to the AP about the hacking on condition of anonymity, saying they did not have authorization

to speak to the media.

Bartholomew, who is 78, does not use email, those church officials told AP. But his aides do, and the Secureworks list spells out several attempts to crack their Gmail accounts.

Among them were several senior church officials called metropolitans, who are roughly equivalent to archbishops in the Catholic tradition. Those include Bartholomew Samaras, a key confidante of the patriarch; Emmanuel Adamakis, an influential hierarch in the church; and Elpidophoros Lambriniadis, who heads a prestigious seminary on the Turkish island of Halki. All are involved in the Tomos issue; none returned recent AP messages seeking comment.

Spy games have long been a part of the Russian Orthodox world.

The Soviet Union slaughtered tens of thousands of priests in the 1930s, but the Communists later took what survived of the church and brought it under the sway of Russia's secret police, the KGB, with clerics conscripted to spy on congregants and emigres.

The nexus between Russia's intelligence and religious establishments survived the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union and the KGB's reorganization into the FSB, according to Moscow-based political analyst Dmitry Oreshkin.

"Our church leaders are connected to the FSB and their

epaulettes stick out from under their habits,” Oreshkin said. “They provide Vladimir Putin’s policy with an ideological foundation.”

That might make one target found by the AP seem curious: The Moscow Patriarch’s press secretary, Alexander Volkov.

But Orthodox theologian Cyril Hovorun said he wouldn’t be surprised to see a Russian group spying on targets close to home, saying, “they’re probably checking him out just in case.”

Volkov did not return AP emails seeking comment.

Hovorun is unusually qualified to speak on the issue. In 2012 he – like Volkov – was an official within the Moscow Patriarchate. But he resigned after someone leaked emails showing that he secretly supported independence-leaning Ukrainian clergy.

Hovorun has since been targeted by the Russian hackers, according to the data from Secureworks, which uses the name Iron Twilight to refer to the group.

Hovorun said he believes that those who published his emails six years ago weren’t related to Fancy Bear, but he noted that their modus operandi – stealing messages and then publishing them selectively – was the same.

“We’ve known about this tactic before the hacking of the Democrats,” Hovorun said, referring to the email disclosures that rocked America’s 2016 presidential campaign. “This is a familiar story for us.”

The Russian hackers’ religious dragnet also extended to the United States and went beyond Orthodox Christians, taking in Muslims, Jews and Catholics whose activities might conceivably be of interest to the Russian government.

John Jillions, the chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America, provided the AP with a June 19, 2015, phishing email that Secureworks later confirmed was sent to him by Fancy Bear.

Fancy Bear also went after Ummah, an umbrella group for Ukrainian Muslims; the papal nuncio in Kiev; and an account associated with the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, a Byzantine rite church that accepts the authority of the Vatican, the Secureworks data shows.

Also on the hit list: Yosyp Zisels, who directs Ukraine’s Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities and has frequently been quoted defending his country from charges of anti-Semitism. Zisels said he had no knowledge of the attempted hacking. Vatican officials did not return messages.

Protestants were targeted too, including three prominent

Quakers operating in the Moscow area.

Hovorun said Protestants were viewed with particularly intense suspicion by the Kremlin.

“There is an opinion shared by many in the Russian establishment that all those religious groups – like Quakers, evangelicals – they are connected to the American establishment,” he said.

Secureworks’ data shows hacking attempts on religious targets that took place in 2015 and 2016, but other material obtained by the AP suggests attempts to compromise the Ecumenical Patriarchate are ongoing.

On Oct. 16, 2017, an email purporting to come from Papachristou, who was just being appointed as spokesman, arrived in the inboxes of about a dozen Orthodox figures.

“Dear Hierarchs, Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in Christ!” it began, explaining that Papachristou was stepping into his new role as director of communications. “It’s a very big joy for me to serve the Church on this position. Some suggestions on how to build up relations with the public and the press are provided in the file attached.”

The file was rigged to install surveillance software on the recipients’ computers.

The email's actual sender remains a mystery – independent analyses of the malicious message by Secureworks and its competitor CrowdStrike yielded nothing definitive.

Church officials told the AP they were disturbed by the hacker's command of church jargon and their inside knowledge of Papachristou's appointment.

"The one who made this is someone who knows us," one official said.

Priests and prelates don't make obvious targets for cyberespionage, but the stakes for the Kremlin are high as the decision on Tomos looms.

Granting the Ukrainian church full independence "would be that devastating to Russia," said Daniel Payne, a researcher on the board of the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University in Texas.

"Kiev is Jerusalem for the Russian Orthodox people," Payne said. "That's where the sacred relics, monasteries, churches are ... it's sacred to the people, and to Russian identity."

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Russia: Terrorist attack on Orthodox church in Chechnya

RIA Novosti (19.05.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2J03iBQ> – An incident with an attempt to seize parishioners in the church of the Archangel Michael in Grozny is an attempt by extremists to set Orthodox against Muslims, the head of the synod's Department for Relations of Church and Society and News Media of the Moscow patriarchate, Vladimir Legoida, declared.

“Another attempt by pseudo-Islamic extremists to set Orthodox against Muslims,” Legoida wrote on Saturday in his account on one of the messenger services.

A press release distributed by the synodal department notes that the attackers tried to intimidate Orthodox believers of Chechnya and sow inter-confessional strife, but they got a worthy rebuff.

“We mourn the parishioner of the church of the Archangel Michael who fell victim to the terrorist act, and also for law enforcement agents who showed themselves to be real heroes and perished in performing their duty of protecting worshipers,” Legoida declared, as quoted in the report.

The head of the synodal department expressed confidence that “the act of terror will be unanimously condemned by representatives of world religions in Russia and abroad, as well as by all healthy-minded people.”

“Orthodox and Muslims of Russia, as before, will be united in struggle with terrorists, supporting one another in the face of the common danger,” Legoida added.

The head of the Chechen republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, reported to journalists earlier that four militants penetrated the church of the Archangel Michael in the center of Grozny and their goal was to seize parishioners. He said that as the result of an immediately mounted special operation, all four were wiped out, one policeman died from wounds, and one parishioner had an injury of moderate severity. According to information of the Investigative Committee of the RF, two policemen guarding the church perished, another two were wounded, and one civilian was killed. (tr. by PDS, posted 19 May 2018)

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Moscow Patriarchate promotes the Kremlin's interests and its own in the Middle East

*HRWF: 'The West' is losing the hearts and minds of Christians in the Middle East**

By Paul Goble

Eurasia Daily Monitor (12.12.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2nUW74J> – The Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate is intensifying its efforts to promote the Kremlin's interests and its own in the Middle East. Although the Church, either directly or as a cover for Soviet and Russian security agencies, has long been active in that region-the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society is the only Russian post there that lasted from Imperial times through Soviet ones to the present (<http://bit.ly/2CbKHYM> Mospat.ru, October 11; <http://bit.ly/2CemnKD> Portal-credo.ru, December 9) the Moscow Patriarchate is now expanding its efforts. These activities help Vladimir Putin in his drive to expand Russian influence in the Middle East, given the waning of US power there (see <http://bit.ly/2nX4Q6h> Jamestown.org, October 5). At the same time, they ensure that Orthodox Churches in the region will continue to back the Moscow Patriarchate against the Universal Patriarchate in Constantinople on issues like autocephaly for Ukraine and the Moscow Patriarchate's claim of "canonical territory" over the entire former Soviet space.

The Kremlin is currently convinced it can fill the niche that Washington had in the Middle East for three reasons: First, as Putin's recent visit to the region shows (<http://bit.ly/2AkuIuz> Kremlin.ru, December 11), the

perception of victory of Russian forces over the Islamic State in Syria as well as Moscow's successful backing of President Bashar al-Assad are popular. Second, the Russian president has presented himself as the chief defender of Christians in the region, something popular even among Donald Trump's base in the United States; it is, thus, yet another means of projecting influence at Washington's expense. And third, the Kremlin has positioned itself against Trump's declaration that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, a widely unpopular view in the region (<http://bit.ly/2j0FS0k> Yerkramas.org, December 12).

In support of those policies, Moscow Patriarch Kirill organized a meeting last week (December 4) between Putin and eleven patriarchs and two heads of delegations of Orthodox Churches who were in the Russian capital for a major conclave of the Russian Orthodox Church. Most of the churchmen attending were the leaders of the historical Orthodox patriarchates in the Middle East, and all appeared more than willing to lend their support to the idea that cooperation at the Church-to-Church level would boost the policies Putin and Kirill now back (<http://bit.ly/2BhEUBg> Russkaya Liniya, December 5).

A major reason behind their agreement on this point is that the Russian president promised to offer his support to all the Orthodox Churches in the entire world, including, as the Russkaya Liniya religious affairs portal noted, "in the Middle East in particular." That was music to the ears of many if not all in attendance, who are under pressure not only from the predominantly Muslim populations in which they function but also from the Universal Patriarchate in Constantinople. The latter has pretensions, as the senior Orthodox body, to becoming a kind of eastern papacy that can give orders to the others, including making decisions-as it has already-on the autocephaly of groups within their canonical areas that want independence from the existing patriarchates (<http://bit.ly/2CbJ8yD> Russkaya Liniya, December 5).

Of the 14 universally recognized Orthodox Church organizations in the world, only four were not represented: Constantinople, the Greek, the Bulgarian and the Georgian, the latter three being closely related to and dependent on the former. Thus, Moscow feels the Putin meeting in effect not only "eclipsed" but rendered null and void the efforts of Constantinople at the 2016 Crete conclave to unite the Orthodox World under its scepter. Indeed, the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian government have very much opposed this play by Constantinople, to the point of being willing to promote a new schism in the Christian East (<http://bit.ly/2ymRfoN> Rosbalt, June 9, 2016; <http://bit.ly/2ABSCWT> Windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com, June 13, 2016).

Putin thanked the churchmen for coming to Moscow and said they, together with the Russian Church and the Russian state, must struggle against the mistreatment of Christians in the Middle East as well as against those who would destroy existing states and thus put Christian communities at risk-as has happened in Syria. The Kremlin leader said he considers it particularly important that the Churches work with Moscow and others to ensure the return of the peaceful Christian population of Syria now that the conflict there is winding down and to help them rebuild their parishes and their communities (<http://bit.ly/2ABptet> Russkaya Liniya, December 5).

Clearly, Putin hopes that cooperation on this issue will lead to cooperation on others, with the Orthodox Churches-other than Constantinople and its allies-speaking out on behalf of Russia. The Kremlin leader has few qualms with presenting Russia as being the chief defender of these cooperative Orthodox Churches; and at least some of the Moscow-friendly Churches are willing to accept it as such.

The Moscow Patriarchate, given its caesaro-papist traditions, would likely have gone along with the Kremlin's above-mentioned overtures even if the Russian Orthodox Church itself

gained nothing out of the deal. But from Patriarch Kirill's point of view, the Moscow Patriarchate actually obtains three important benefits: First, it returns into the Kremlin's good graces after the problems that have arisen over Church leaders' recent obscurantist talk about the supposed ritual murder of the Imperial Family (TASS, <http://bit.ly/2o07w3a> November 29, <http://bit.ly/2AAdZaZ> 30). Indeed, Kirill may have in this way edged out Bishop Tikhon Shevkunov, Putin's sometime spiritual advisor, who took the "wrong" stance on this issue. Second, Kirill has ensured that the Kremlin will continue to work with him against the influence of Constantinople, which recognized autocephaly in Estonia and elsewhere, and thus will not be inclined to make any deal about independence for the Ukrainian Church. And third, Kirill will certainly use Putin's support to reaffirm his notions about the Moscow Patriarchate's "canonical territory" embracing the entire post-Soviet space. No such concept actually exists in Orthodoxy, but both Kirill and Putin nonetheless support it.

All this means that the Orthodox Churches of the East, at the urging of both the Kremlin and the Moscow Patriarchate, are set to become more politically active. Such a situation will further complicate the position of the West in the Middle East and give Putin new allies he can deploy for his own purposes.

(*) The sub-title is from HRWF, not Eurasia Daily Monitor

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