International Condemnation of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and Its Ukrainian Branch — UOC MP



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Abstract

This article presents an analytical overview of the international, ecclesiastical, and political-legal condemnation of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and its Ukrainian branch — the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP). It examines the ROC's role as a tool of Russian aggression, responses from international institutions, legislative initiatives aimed at banning the UOC MP in Ukraine, and proposes concrete steps to safeguard national security and spiritual sovereignty.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church, UOC MP, Russian-Ukrainian war, spiritual security, "Russian World" ideology, international isolation.

The ROC as an Ideological Tool of War

Against the backdrop of the horrific and bloody aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine — which began in 2014 and escalated into a full-scale war on February 24, 2022 — an increasing number of international, religious, human rights, and political institutions have begun to offer legal, spiritual, and moral assessments of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as one of the key ideological instruments of this war.

Led by Patriarch Kirill Gundyaev, the ROC systematically supports the policies of Russian President Vladimir Putin, justifying war crimes and promoting the heretical concept of the "Russian World" (Russkiy Mir) — a doctrine that contradicts Christian teachings and reflects aggressive imperialism [1].

The UOC MP in Ukraine: Formal Autonomy, Actual Dependence on the Moscow Patriarchate

Despite its formal declaration of "independence" from the Russian Orthodox Church, the so-called Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP), headed by Metropolitan Onufriy Berezovsky and informally directed by the Moscow-aligned "gray cardinal" Metropolitan Antoniy Pakanich, continues to maintain full canonical and spiritual unity with the Moscow Patriarchate. This is evidenced, in particular, by:

- the continued mention of Moscow Patriarch Kirill Gundyaev in liturgical diptychs;
- recognition of him as its ecclesiastical head, using the title "Great Lord and Father";

- the absence of any canonical or administrative decisions that would indicate a complete break between the UOC MP and the ROC [2].

Moreover, throughout the entire period of Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine (2014–2025), the UOC MP has never officially condemned:

- the war initiated by the aggressor state;
- war crimes committed by the Russian army on Ukrainian territory;
- the blessing of this aggression by the ROC and its leader, Kirill Gundyaev.

On the contrary, the UOC MP as an institution — along with its episcopate and a significant portion of its clergy — continues to:

- maintain an anti-state stance;
- support and cooperate with occupation administrations in Crimea, Donbas, and other temporarily occupied territories;
- sabotage the efforts of the Ukrainian state in the areas of mobilization, humanitarian support, and spiritual unification;
- undermine the moral, spiritual, and national unity of the Ukrainian people [3].

International Assessment of the ROC as a Collaborator in Russian Aggression Against Ukraine

Statements by States, Churches, and Organizations

European Parliament, on July 7, 2022, officially condemned the ROC's support of Russia's war against Ukraine, specifically highlighting the role of Moscow Patriarch Kirill Gundyaev as one of the main propagandists of the Kremlin's imperial policies [4].

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), in Resolution 2540 (2024) adopted on April 17, 2024, explicitly recognized the ROC as a propaganda tool and accomplice in the war crimes of Putin's regime [5].

The Parliament of Estonia (Riigikogu), on May 6, 2024, declared the Moscow Patriarchate to be "an institution sponsoring military aggression" [6].

The Ecumenical Patriarchate, on May 24, 2024, officially condemned the ideology of the "Russian World" (Russkiy Mir) as heretical, anti-Orthodox, and incompatible with the teachings of the Church [7].

Parliaments of Latvia (08.09.2022), Lithuania (29.07.2022), the Czech Republic (June 2022), and Poland (March 2023) recognized the ROC as a threat to national security or disassociated their local Orthodox Churches from the Moscow Patriarchate [8].

- **Latvia** — The Saeima adopted a law granting the Latvian Orthodox Church full autocephaly and legally severed its ties with the Moscow Patriarchate.
- **Lithuania** — On July 29, 2022, the Lithuanian Orthodox Archdiocese officially condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine, distanced itself from Patriarch Kirill's position, and initiated steps toward administrative autonomy.

- **Czech Republic** — In June 2022, the Czech Senate called for a revision of relations with the ROC, recognizing it as institutionally dangerous to democratic societies.
- **Poland** — In March 2023, the Sejm adopted a resolution condemning the destructive role of the ROC in the war against Ukraine and its support for the Kremlin's genocidal policies.

The Georgian Orthodox Church has repeatedly protested against the actions of the ROC in the occupied territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, viewing them as ecclesiastical intrusion [9].

Investigations and Legal Proceedings Regarding ROC Activities

- In France (2023), both journalistic and intelligence investigations were initiated into the activities of the ROC, which reportedly served as a front for hybrid warfare operations, including allegations of espionage [10].
- In the Netherlands (2023), an individual was arrested for attempting to infiltrate international institutions under diplomatic cover — the case is believed to be linked to networks associated with the ROC [10].
- In Canada (2023), amendments were adopted to the Special Economic Measures Act, allowing for the arrest and confiscation of assets belonging to sanctioned Russian entities — including ROC-related property — with the purpose of funding Ukraine's reconstruction.
- In the United States (2023), legislative and administrative initiatives are underway to examine the financial sources of the ROC and to impose restrictions on the activities of its representations [11].

Calls for the Ban of the UOC MP in Ukraine

On August 20, 2024, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted Draft Law No. 8371, directly aimed at banning religious organizations affiliated with the aggressor state — the Russian Federation — effectively targeting the UOC MP [12].

Sanctions were also imposed by the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine (NSDC) against over 20 individuals affiliated with the ROC [13].

Simultaneously, in various regions of Ukraine, in accordance with current legislation, local religious organizations are passing decisions to transfer parishes and places of worship from the UOC MP to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) [14].

On August 7, 2025, the People's Movement of Ukraine officially released a statement demanding the immediate prohibition of the ROC's activities in Ukraine — that is, the so-called UOC MP — and called on state authorities to take decisive legal action. In this document [15]:

- it was confirmed that the UOC MP remains part of the ROC and has not severed ties with the Moscow Patriarchate, despite the adoption of Law No. 8371;
- the canonical illegitimacy of the UOC MP was emphasized, noting that it has no canonical status as an autocephalous (self-governing) Church within the global Orthodox communion, and is not recognized by any Local Orthodox Church as a separate autocephalous ecclesiastical structure;

- numerous examples of anti-Ukrainian activity by both clergy and leadership of the UOC MP were highlighted;
- references were made to the positions of PACE and the Estonian Parliament, both of which had already classified the ROC as an instrument of war and propaganda for the totalitarian regime of the Russian Federation;
- a conclusion was drawn regarding the passivity of Ukrainian authorities in implementing existing legislation to terminate the UOC MP's activities, with a call for urgent and resolute action.

Necessary Actions from the Ukrainian State and Society

In the context of the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine, and given the internationally recognized role of the Russian Orthodox Church as an ideological instrument of aggression and propaganda, the Ukrainian state and civil society must implement a comprehensive set of decisive organizational and legal actions:

1. Impose a full legal ban on the activities of the UOC MP in Ukraine as a structural subdivision of the Russian Orthodox Church, which remains canonically, administratively, and spiritually dependent on it.
2. Support and facilitate the legal and organizational transition of religious communities, monasteries, clergy, and other legal entities formerly affiliated with the UOC MP to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) — the only Local Orthodox Church in Ukraine recognized by the global Orthodox communion.
3. Conduct a nationwide state and ecclesiastical spiritual-educational campaign aimed at exposing the heretical, anti-Christian, anti-Ukrainian, and imperial nature of the “Russian World” ideology promoted by the ROC and its affiliates.
4. Adopt and implement a national program for supporting the development and consolidation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.
5. Establish and deploy spiritual-cultural diplomatic missions of Ukraine abroad.
6. Engage in active international lobbying, particularly:
    - for the isolation of the ROC in inter-Orthodox communication (including at the level of global Orthodoxy);
    - for its legal and public discrediting as an accomplice to war crimes and crimes against humanity;
    - for the exclusion of its representations from interreligious forums and diplomatic platforms, including in structures such as the UN, OSCE, and the Council of Europe.

Conclusions

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is not a religious institution in the classical sense, but rather an ideological, spiritual-propagandist, espionage, and subversive apparatus of the political totalitarian regime of the Russian Federation, headed by war criminal Vladimir Putin.

Its presence in Ukraine — in the form of the so-called UOC MP — constitutes a direct threat to national, territorial, and spiritual security, to state sovereignty, constitutional order, and the unity of the Ukrainian people.

There is an urgent need for the immediate prohibition, dissolution, and complete elimination of any influence or activity of the ROC and its structures on the territory of Ukraine. This is not merely a matter of faith or jurisdictional purity — it is a matter of survival for the Ukrainian nation, its statehood, identity, and freedom.

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