

RELIGION, PUBLIC LIFE AND THE STATE IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA.

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Summary:

Despite post-Communist “religious revival” Russian society remains largely agnostic. The proportion of Russians who declare themselves “religious” grew from 25 % in 1985 to 62 % in 2004, but the share of practicing believers who attend church on a regular base and fulfill religious requirements remains as low as in the early 1990s. However, both religious identity and religious organizations are playing an increasing role in the country’s social and political affairs. Two aspects of “popular religiosity” are of importance. First, religious self-identification reflects neither a personal belief system nor a regular religious practice. Religion is frequently perceived simply as part of the traditional cultural environment and a component of ethnic identity.

Second, under decline of public confidence in the state institutions, mass media, and political associations the Russian Orthodox Church enjoys “intuitive” sympathy and confidence of both the religious and agnostic population. As to Church – State and inter-religious relations, the “Russian model” seemed finally to crystallize under Putin’s regime.

1). Introduction

Religion and religious organizations can contribute significantly to the shaping of a healthy civil society. At the same time, under certain political and social circumstances, religion can serve - or it can be used - to undermine the principles of tolerance and pluralism. It is the way in which religion is incorporated into the social realm which determines the nature of religion’s contribution to society and democracy.

The last decade of the 20th century was a period of turbulent transitions in the religious life of post-Soviet Russia. Until the late 1980s, for 70 years a “militant atheism” had been a part of state policy and official ideology of the USSR. Religious activity and religious organizations were at least discouraged and, in some cases, severely repressed. In Russia by the time of Gorbachev’s policy of political liberalization three out of four Russians did not believe in God [Greely, 1994, p.253]. After the cessation of an atheistic state policy in the late 1980s, all post-Soviet states have experienced a so-called religious revival. In the particular case of Russia, two events can be seen as symbolising the beginning and the end of this transitional process. The first one took place in 1988, when a religious festival - the Millennium of the Baptism of Russia - was officially declared a national festival and was

sponsored by the state. Under the conditions of a still Communist regime and technically atheistic state, this was hardly believable for most Russians.

The second event is dated December 1999. After the unexpected resignation of President Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin went to the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Alexey II, to ask for his blessing to serve as the temporary leader of the country until the next proper presidential elections took place. By then this was seen by the majority of the population as a perfectly natural move on the part of a political leader.

For social scientists and scholars of religion the break-up of the atheistic Communist regime in Russia provided a unique opportunity to analyze whether a long period of enforced secularization would destroy religion and leave it so enfeebled that it has little resiliency once the oppression is lifted. Or whether, on the contrary, religion would revive, and - if so - in what form and which implications this has for the civil society. In this paper I shall attempt to outline three major subjects:

- the phenomenon of what I call “popular religiosity” in today’s Russia;
- the slowly but yet clearly crystallizing model of Church – State relations under Putin’s regime;
- the challenges and issues in the sphere of religious freedom and tolerance.

2) Major Components of Russia’s Religious Landscape: Past and Present.

The religious demography and geography of Russia as well as the changes that have occurred in the country’s religious landscape during the 20th century are important for the correct understanding of the current religious life of Russian society and of the major issues in the sphere of religious tolerance and church-state relations.

Territories with populations as diverse in their religious and ethno-cultural traditions as for example, Bulgaria, Norway and Iran were for centuries incorporated into the common geographic, political and administrative space of the Russian Empire and, subsequently, the USSR. According to the 1897 census, of the Russian Empire’s 125 million residents, 72.0 % were Orthodox Christians, 9.2 % Catholics, 3.0 % Protestants (at that time primarily Lutherans), 11.1 % Muslims, 4.2 % Jews and 0.4 % Buddhist [Obshchij 1905].

There were a number of essential changes in the religious demography of the country during the period from 1897 (last pre-revolutionary census) to 1991 (break-up of USSR). First, thanks to the atheistic state policy under the Communist regime, the number of

agnostics (non-believers) increased significantly. Second, the proportion of Orthodox Christians decreased. To a certain extent, this was a result of the fact that in 1917 the Russian Orthodox Church was deprived of its established status and lost many nominal “Orthodox” who were only formally affiliated with this only state church. More important, however, was the fact that originally in the 1920-30s Communist antireligious policies were aimed particularly at the Russian Orthodox Church as one of the symbols of pre-revolutionary monarchic Russia.

Third, there was a relative growth in the Islamic population. In both the Russian Empire and the USSR Islam was the traditional religion of certain ethnic groups, who always had higher rates of demographic growth than the Christian population. In addition to this factor, the Soviet religious policies were generally more tolerant towards Islam than towards the Russian Orthodox Church.

Fourth, there was a significant decrease in the proportion of Catholics, which was chiefly the result of territorial changes, when Poland – a major enclave of Catholicism in the Russian Empire – became an independent state in 1918. Fifth, there was a dramatic decline in Judaism. This was mainly the result of the Holocaust (the majority of Jews in the USSR lived in the western parts of the country which were occupied by the Nazis during WWII), that was augmented by large scale emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel and to the USA in the 1970-80s.

Although today’s Russia is only one of fifteen post-Soviet states – former republics of the USSR – it remains a vast multiethnic and multi-cultural area, and it is almost as diverse religiously as it was in the past (Tab.1).

Tab.1 Religious Composition of the Population in the Russian Empire, former USSR and post-Soviet Russia (as % of the total population)

| | Russian Empire (1897, census) | USSR (1991, estimate) | Russia (late 1990s, estimate) |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Population total | 125.640.000 | 270.000.000 | 149.000.000 |
| Orthodox (Eastern) Christians | 72.0 | 22.8 | 33-40 (50-60 mln.) |
| Catholics (Roman and Greek Catholics) | 9.2 | 5.5 | 0.2 (300 thous.) |
| Protestants | 3.0 | 3.0 | 0.7 (1 mln.) |
| Muslims | 11.1 | 18.5 | 10-13 (15-20 mln.) |
| Buddhists | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.7 (1 mln.) |
| Judaists | 4.2 | 0.2 | 0.7 (1 mln.) |
| Non-Believers | - | about 50.0 | about 50 |

Sources of data: a) Russian Empire: [Obshij..., 1905]; b) USSR and post-Soviet Russia: [Religioznyje, 1996], [Religija, 1997].

As for the country's present religious geography, it is important to note that while followers of Orthodox Christianity comprise by the far prevailing majority of all believers, there are also significant parts of the Russian Federation where the other religions – especially Islam and Buddhism – dominate (Map 1).

From the perspective of the social and political impact on the contemporary Russian society, two religions – Eastern (Orthodox) Christianity and Islam – deserve special attention. Both religions can be regarded as indigenous, since they both took roots before the emergence of the Russian nation as a politically integrated unit.

Orthodoxy Christianity had formally become the state religion of Kievan Rus as early as A.D. 988, when Grand Prince Vladimir decided to convert his principality to the Christianity of the Byzantine Rite. By the time of the revolution of 1917, there were about 77,800 parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the Russian Empire. After two decades of the Communist policy of “militant atheism” only 3,100 were still functioning in the entire USSR, with none at all in 25 administrative regions (“oblasti”) in the territory of the current Russian Federation [Pospelovskij, 1995].

After the onset of Gorbachev's policy of political liberalization the ROC began to revive rapidly. In 1988, the ROC had about 6900 parishes, 21 monasteries, 5 theological schools. Its clergy comprised 74 bishops and about 6800 priests and deacons. Today, on the territory of the former USSR, the Moscow Patriarchate has about 23,350 parishes, more than 600 monasteries, and over 60 theological educational institutions. Its clergy comprises 162 bishops and 19,500 priests and deacons [Russkaja, 2005], [Orthodoxia, 2004].

No questions about personal religious affiliation have been asked in the recent 2002 census, but various sociological surveys and expert estimates indicate that 50-60 million Russian citizens identify themselves as Orthodox Christians [Religioznyje, 1996]. In other words Orthodoxy is a religion of 33 - 40 % of the total population or of about 2/3-3/4 of all believers in post-Soviet Russia.

It is important to note that the ROC has today a significant social impact on a larger proportion of Russia's population than those who actually consider themselves her members. For instance, a national survey in 2004 has revealed that the ROC enjoys the confidence of 50% of the country's total population and in this respect is well ahead of the government, parliament, the mass media and political parties [Levada, 2004].

The official position of the ROC regarding its role in society was declared in the document called “Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church” which was adopted by an all-church Council of bishops in 2000 [Bases, 2000]. In general, the main goal of the ROC is seen as religious, and moral and educational work with special emphasis on evangelism and catechizing activities. In relationship to the broader society the ROC considers herself to be a unifying and reconciling power. The pattern of relations between the ROC and the Russian state as described in “Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church” appears somewhat controversial. On the one hand, “The Church not only prescribes for her children to obey state power regardless of the convictions and faith of its bearers, but also prays for it.” On the other hand, however, “God's commandment to fulfil the task of salvation in any situation and under any circumstances is above this loyalty”. While recognizing the secular nature of the Russian state, the ROC believes that “the principle of the secular state cannot be understood as implying that religion should be radically forced out of all the spheres of the people's life, that religious associations should be debarred from decision-making on socially significant problems and deprived of the right to evaluate the actions of the authorities.”

Furthermore, “in implementing her social, charitable, educational and other socially significant projects, the Church may rely on the support and assistance of the state. She also has the right to expect that the state, in building its relations with religious bodies, will take into account the number of their followers and the place they occupy in forming the historical, cultural and spiritual image of the people and their civic stand.” In brief, the position of the ROC regarding its role in the Russian society was formulated by Patriarch Alexey II as follows: “Being separated from the state, the church can not be separated to any extent from the people and from the society.” [NG-Religii, 27.11.1997].

As for political involvement, according to the “Bases...”, the ROC “acknowledges the presence of various political convictions among her episcopate, clergy and laity”, but “it is impossible for the Church's Supreme Authorities and for the clergy to participate in such activities of political organizations and election processes as public support for the political organizations or particular candidates running for elections and so forth. The clergy are not allowed to be nominated for elections to any body of representative power at any level” [Bases, 2000]. This prohibition on direct political involvement does not exclude however the growing practice of official agreements signed between the Moscow Patriarchate and various

Russian national ministries (the last one was an agreement about co-operation between the ROC and Russia's Ministry of Health in March 2003 [Soglashenie, 2003]).

On the regional level, similar agreements about co-operation have been concluded between many individual dioceses of the ROC and executive state authorities of the Russian administrative provinces. Since 1995, a special department of the ROC is responsible for contacts and for co-operation between the ROC and the Russian Army.

The ROC must also be seen as an important actor in Russia's foreign affairs. Whereas in the Russian Empire and in the USSR the ROC was a predominantly national Church, after the breakup of the USSR it has become a truly international organization. The headquarters of the ROC remains in Moscow, but today more than half of the parishes and clergy of the ROC are no longer in Russia itself, but in the other former Soviet republics. In the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Moldova, the branches of the ROC are the largest religious organizations of these currently independent states (Tab.2).

Tab. 2 Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in Russian Federation and Abroad.

| Countries: | Status of the Russian Orthodox Church and number of its dioceses / bishops | Number of parishes | Number of monasteries | Number of clergy: priests and deacons | Educational institutions (a) |
|---|---|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| TOTAL | Moscow Patriarchate: 135 dioceses / 157 bishops | about 23.350 | 559 | about 19.550 | 61 |
| Russian Federation (2003) | 70 dioceses / 80 bishops | about 10.600 | 334 | about 8.400 | 33 |
| Ukraine (2002) | since 1990 – autonomous “Ukrainian Orthodox Church”: 35 dioceses / 40 bishops | 9.515 | 131 | 7.995 | 14 |
| Byelorussia (2003) | Exarchate of Russian Orthodox Church: 10 dioceses / 10 bishops | 1.277 | 22 | 1.205 | 5 |
| Moldavia (including self-proclaimed republic of Transdnestria) (2002) | since 1992 - autonomous “Orthodox Church in Moldova”: 4 dioceses / 4 bishops | More than 1.100 | 36 | about 1.000 | 5 |
| Lithuania (2000) | 1 diocese / 1 bishop | 40 | 2 | 37 | 0 |
| Latvia (2003) | since 1992 - autonomous “Orthodox Church in Latvia”: 1 diocese / 1 bishop | 118 | 2 | about 100 | 1 |
| Estonia (2003) | since 1992 - autonomous | 32 | 1 | about 50 | 0 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | "Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church": 1 diocese / 1 bishop | | | | |
| Georgia | since 5th century there exists autocephalous "Georgian Orthodox Church" (i.e. equal to Russian Orthodox Church) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Armenia (2003) | a part of diocese of Maikop (Russia) | 2 | 0 | no data | 0 |
| Azerbaijan + Daguestan, Russia Chechnya, Russia (2003) | 1 diocese/1bishop | 6 + 12 + 7 | 0 | 20+17+3 | 0 |
| Kazakhstan (2003) | Since 2003 - "Metropolitan district" 3 dioceses / 3 bishops | 222 | 8 | 340 | 1 |
| Countries: | Status of the Russian Orthodox Church and number of its dioceses/ bishops | Number of parishes | Number of monasteries | Number of clergy: priests and deacons | Educational institutions (a) |
| Uzbekistan +Turkmenistan +Kirghizia + Tadjikistan (2003) | 1 diocese / 1 bishop | 105 | 5 | 133 | 1 |
| United Kingdom (2002) | 1 diocese / 3 bishops | 22 | 0 | 32 | 0 |
| France + Italy + Switzerland + Spain + Portugal (2003) | 1 diocese / 1 bishop | 7 + 16 + 4 + 3 + 2 | 4 + 0 + 1 + 1 + 0 | 21 + 10 + 2 + 3 + 0 | 0 |
| Austria + Hungary (2002) | 1 diocese / 1 bishop | 2 + 8 | 0 | 1 + 2 | 0 |
| Germany (2002) | 1 diocese / 2 bishops | 44 | 0 | 45 | 0 |
| Belgium (2002) | 1 diocese / 2 bishop | 7 | 2 | 5 | 0 |
| Netherlands (2002) | 1 diocese / bishop position is vacant | 4 | 2 | 5 | 0 |
| USA (2002) | "Patriarchal parishes in the USA": no dioceses / 1 bishop | 31 | 1 | 42 | 0 |
| Canada (2002) | "Patriarchal parishes in the Canada" no dioceses / 1 bishop | 24 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Argentina+Chile+ Brazil+Colombia+ Panama+Peru+ Costa Rica+Equador(2002) | 1 diocese / 1 bishop | 20 | 0 | about 10 | 0 |
| China (2000) | since 1957 - autonomous "Orthodox Church in China": no dioceses/bishops | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Japan (2000) | since 1970 - autonomous | 70 | 1 | 18 | 1 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|--|--|
| | “Orthodox Church in Japan”:3 dioceses /3 bishops | | | | |
| Countries with individual Parishes or monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church (2002): | Australia (3), Bulgaria (1), Chechy (2), Denmark (2), Egypt (2), Finland (4), Greece (1 monastery), Iceland (1), Iran (1), Ireland (1), Israel (3+5 monasteries), Japan (1), Lebanon (1), Marocco (1), Mexico (1), Mongolia (1), Norway (3), South Africa (1), Sweden (5), Thailand (1), Tunisia (2), Serbia (1), Syria (1), Vietnam (1). | | | | |
| Countries with permanent official representations of Moscow Patriarchate: | Germany (Duesseldorf), Switzerland (Genf), Syria (Damascus), USA (New York), Belgium (Brussels), Thailand (Bangkok). | | | | |

a) “Educational institutions” = theological academies+theological seminaries+theological schools+Orthodox universities.

Principal sources of data: 1) Official web-site of the Russian Orthodox Church: www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru; 2) N.Mitrokhin, S.Timofeeva, “Episkopy i eparchii Russkoj Pravoslavnoj Cerkvi” (in Russian: “Bishops and dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church”), Panorama, Moskva, 1997; 3) Statistical data of “Secretariat for interorthodox relations and foreign institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church” of “Department of External Church Relations of Moscow Patriarchate” (not published) 4) Official web-site of the Byelorussian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church: www.church.by; 5) Official web-site of the “Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Patriarchate Moscow)”: www.orthodox.org.ua; 6) Official web-site of the “Orthodox Church in Moldova”: www.mitropolia.md. 7) “Tserkvi i religijni organizacii Ukraini u 2001 roci. Dovidnik” (in Ukrainian: “Churches and religious organizations of Ukraine in 2001. Reference book”), Kiev: VIP, 2002.

The new geopolitical realities since the break-up of the USSR have resulted in various conditions under which the parishes and dioceses of the ROC exist in different post-soviet states. For example, in Ukraine or Estonia, the conflicts between the branches of the ROC and the newly founded national Orthodox Churches that are independent from Moscow have had significant implications both for internal politics in these states and for their relations with Russia. They have been many times discussed in mass-media and analyzed both by political scientists and scholars of religion.

While still under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate the parishes and dioceses of the ROC in various former Soviet republics have been granted different legal status, which reflect various degrees of self-administration and independence from Moscow. Three major factors have determined the kind of the status achieved: the internal political situation in each state, the relationship between the new national elite and political authorities in Moscow, and the level of the social impact of the ROC in each post-Soviet state.

Basically, there are three major variants of adaptation of the ROC to the new political and social conditions:

A) **Autonomization.** In Ukraine (1990), Moldova (1992), Latvia (1992) and Estonia (1992) the branches of ROC were granted the status of “self-administered churches.” These churches are independent from Moscow in their internal affairs and daily life. With the exception of Estonia, the social impact of the ROC is considerable in all these states. At the same time,

these are also the states where the new political leaderships in the early 1990s have pursued a policy of keeping Moscow at a distance. Under conditions of growing nationalistic (and, sometimes, anti-Russian) sentiments, providing the structures of the ROC with the maximum autonomy was the only way of keeping the Orthodox parishes and dioceses under – even if limited - subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate.

B) Maintaining unity with Moscow. In Byelorussia and in Kazakhstan the social authority of the ROC is also significant. Yet in contrast to the states above both Byelorussia and Kazakhstan have always maintained close relations with Russia. Consequently, there was no need for any essential changes in the status the dioceses of the ROC. Both the “Byelorussian Exarchate” and the recently established “Metropolitan District” of the ROC in Kazakhstan serve simply as a convenient vehicle for the routine church-administration but make no claim to increasing independence from Moscow.

C) Keeping the Status-Quo. This applies to the countries where the Orthodox Christians - the members of the ROC – form only small religious minorities: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Lithuania, and the states of former Soviet Central Asia. The social and political impact of the ROC in these countries is small, and change in the status of the ROC has not been an important issue. At the same time as fulfilling their religious functions, the parishes of the ROC serve also as important ethnic-cultural centers that consolidate the Slavic population living in these states.

Islam is the second largest religion in the Russian Federation, and, in fact, more Muslims live in Russia than in Saudi Arabia, Islam’s country of origin. There are two main Islamic areas: the Northern Caucasus and the lower Volga Basin (Map 1). The penetration of Islam into the Caucasus began in the epoch of the Arabic conquest. In 685, the Arabs captured the seaport of Derbent (currently in the Russian republic of Dagestan), and in 722-723 they occupied the internal areas of Dagestan. Yet, it was not until the 18th century that the “Islamization” of the entire Caucasus was completed, when Islam had finally taken root among the ethnically diverse peoples of the Western Caucasus: Adygs, Kabardins, Cherkess, Balkars, Karatchai [Islam v Rossii, 1996]. The formal date of conversion to Islam of the Turkic-speaking peoples of the Volga Basin is 922, when Islam became the state religion of what was then known as “Volgo-Kama Bulgaria” upon the initiative of king Almush after a visit of the delegation from the Baghdad Caliphate.

Besides the Caucasus and Volga areas, substantial Muslim minorities are present in Southern Ural (Kurgan, Chelyabinsk, Orenburg regions), and in Western Siberia (especially - Tyumen region), as well as in capital Moscow. According to various estimates, between 600.000 and 1.2 million Muslims live in the Moscow city and Moscow district (“oblast”) [Malashenko, 1998].

Today there are over 3500 officially state-registered local Islamic religious communities in Russia (excluding regions of Chechnya and Ingushetia for which statistics are not available), but neither the real number of de-facto functioning mosques nor that of the actual Islamic believers is known. The commonly accepted estimate of the number of mosques existing in Russia is about 7000 [Malashenko,1999]. Evaluating the number of Islamic believers is complicated by fact that the term “Muslim” is frequently used in the broader ethnic rather than in a religious sense and encompasses therefore not only practicing believers but all the members of ethnicities of traditionally Islamic religious background: Tatars, Bashkirs, and the culturally and linguistically various peoples of the Caucasus. The estimates range therefore from 12 to 20 million Muslims [Halbach, 1996].

There is no doubt, however, that the proportion of Islamic ethnic groups in the population of the Russian Federation is increasing. Whereas in 1937, the “ethnic Moslems” made up 5.9% Russia’s total population, in 2002 their proportion was as high as 8.9 % [Perepis, 2002]. The data of the recent (2002) Russian census in comparison with that of the last (1989) Soviet census in the table below confirm this thesis. Demographic prognoses for the next decades agree that the Muslim component will continue to grow as the ethnically Russian component decreases [Halbach, 1996].

Today, “ethnic Muslims” form an absolute majority of the population in seven out of 89 administrative provinces of Russia. These are: the republics of Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karatchayevo-Cherkessia.

Tab. 3 The largest Islamic ethnic groups in Russia (1989-2002).

| | 1989 | 2002 | <i>Changes: 1989=100%</i> |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Tatars | 5.522.000 | 5.558.000 | <i>101 %</i> |
| Bashkirs | 1.345.000 | 1.673.800 | <i>124 %</i> |
| Chechens | 900.000 | 1.361.000 | <i>151 %</i> |
| Avars | 545.000 | 757.100 | <i>139 %</i> |
| Kabardinians | 386.000 | 520.100 | <i>135 %</i> |
| Dargins | 353.000 | 510.200 | <i>144 %</i> |
| Azerbaijanians | 336.000 | 621.500 | <i>185 %</i> |
| Kumyks | 277.000 | 422.500 | <i>153 %</i> |
| Ingushs | 215.000 | 411.800 | <i>192 %</i> |
| Lezgins | 257.000 | 411.600 | <i>160 %</i> |

Source of data: [Narody, 1994], [Perepis, 2002]

Any analysis of Islam in post-Soviet Russia requires careful consideration of strong ethnic, regional and even religious differentiations. The Muslim community of Russia consists of almost 40 ethnic groups, who speak different languages and have various cultures and traditions. Some of them live in compact areas and some are dispersed all across Russia. The particular forms of Islamic religious practice in Russia differ strongly from place to place. The majority of Russia's Muslims are Sunnis, but the Tats and Azerbaijanians living in the North Caucasus are Shiites. Most of Sunnis follow the Hanafite school, but the Chechens, Ingushs and Avars are the adherents of Shafiite mazkhab (school). Alongside "official Islam," the mystical Sufism (represented by Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya religious orders) is widespread in Chechnya, Dagestan and in Ingushetia. Remnants of pre-Islamic tribal beliefs and the norms of the customary law – the so-called "adat" - have a big influence on Islamic practices among the Adygei ethno-linguistic family (Adyg, Kabardinian and Cherkess peoples) [Islam, 1996]. As far as degree of religiosity is concerned, the Muslims of the Volga-Basin (Tatars, Bashkirs) in the Central-European part of Russia are much more secular than those in the Northern Caucasus, especially in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan, where Islamic prescriptions and rules are obeyed more strictly. It was in Chechnya and Dagestan, where as early as the beginning of 1990s several attempts were made to restore the system of Sharia'h law [Halbach, 1996], [Islam, 1996]. The issue of the incorporation of some elements of Sharia into the secular legislation has also been debated in the republic of Ingushetia [Novoe, 2000].

It was also in Dagestan that the radical-conservative Wahabi movement, advocating a return to an original "pure Islam," made its first appearance in Russia in the early 1990s, spreading fast in other parts of the North Caucasus.

There are several reasons for the recent emergence and spread of the Wahabi movement in the Russian Caucasus. First, as a result of 70 years of Communist anti-religious policy the Islamic regions of Russia have to a large extent lost their own specific historically-rooted religious traditions. This absence of cultural immunity to external influences and the crisis of identity in post-Soviet society created the favorable conditions for the spread of the new "imported" Islamic movements and ideas. Second, the dynamic rise of Wahhabism is characteristic of areas experiencing high unemployment and economic decline. This is the case of Russia's Islamic regions in Northern Caucasus, where the ideas of restoring equality

and social justice propagated by Wahhabi leaders have become popular, particularly among the younger generation of Russian Muslims. Third, the increasing activity of foreign Islamic missionaries and financial support of the Wahabi movement is backed from abroad, mainly from Saudi Arabia and from Egypt [Razhbandinov, 1998].

The differences within Russia's Muslim community are evident not only when one compares two big macro-cultural Islamic regions, the North Caucasus and the Volga-Ural area. They are also present within single geographic areas. In the Caucasus, the relation to Islam is more superficial among the Adygei peoples in the Western Caucasus than among Chechens or the various peoples living in Dagestan. In the religious culture of the Adygei peoples, Islam co-exists peacefully with elements of Christianity and with remains of various pagan practices and beliefs. Hence, Islam is perceived here more as a style of life and cultural tradition.

By contrast, in Chechnya and in Dagestan, Islam is much more a politic-religious phenomenon, and the social-political impact of Islam is especially evident there.

The mountainous republic of Dagestan in the Caucasus is a peculiar case of ethno-cultural mosaic combined with a variety of local Islamic religious practices, which demonstrated an amazing persistence even under the Communist regime. As a result Dagestan, along with neighboring rebellious Chechnya, has assumed a leading position in the process of Islamic revival in the Russian North Caucasus [Gammer, 1995], [Islam, 1996]. Of all Russian administrative provinces Dagestan has the densest Islamic "religious infrastructure": more than 600 legally registered mosques for 2.6 million of total population [Ministry, 2004], [Perepis, 2002].

The Dagestanian town of Bujnaxsk is widely recognized as the main Islamic educational and theological center for the entire North Caucasus. In the Russian Federation, it is only in Dagestan that the Islamic religion has been taught as an ordinary subject in the state schools since 1992 [Halbach, 1996].

Nevertheless, despite these strong Islamic traditions, the idea of "Islamic unity" has neither become the basis for the creation of a new post-Soviet identity for Dagestan's ethnically diverse population nor prevented latent and even open ethno-religious conflicts in this republic. The majority of the population in Dagestan comprises seven ethnicities - Avars, Dargins, Kumyks, Lezgins, Laks, Tabassarans, Azerbaijanians - each numbering 100,000 to 750,000. There are historical tensions amongst these ethnic clans and competition

for representation in republican and local administrations. These interethnic tensions have caused Dagestani Islam to split into several administrative structures (“muftiats”, “quadiats”) that co-exist on the same territory and play an essential role in the process of political mobilization within the various ethnic groups.

The underestimation of the political importance of the Islamic factor by the state authorities in Dagestan and in the North Caucasus in general has led to the first armed confrontation between two Muslim religious communities - the followers of the Sufi brotherhood “Naqshbandiya” and adherents of the Wahabi movement - in the Dagestani villages Tchaban Makhi and Kara Makhi in May 1997. The appeal to holy religious war (“jihad”) against Russians has been widely used by leaders of Chechen paramilitary groupings as a main slogan in the war with Russian Federal troops.

Whereas the growth of radical conservative Islamic movements in the Caucasus became evident already at the beginning of the 1990s, it was not until the late 1990s, when regional and federal Russian state authorities recognized it openly and paid attention to this fact.

In July 1998, the “Congress of Muslims of the Northern Caucasus” gathered in the city of Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. The declaration of this Congress was addressed to the secular authorities of Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan and it required “to outlaw all extremist movements, to establish strict control over all Islamic educational institutions and Islamic mass-media in order to prevent the penetration of Wahabi ideology into society” [Ignatenko, 1999]. Later the President of Ingushetia, Mr. Ruslan Aushev, signed a decree which imposed a ban on the activity of Wahabi organizations on the territory of the Ingush Republic.

In September 1999, the parliament of the Republic of Dagestan adopted the law “About prohibition of the Wahabi and other extremist activities on the territory of Republic of Dagestan.” This law was the very first example in post-Soviet Russia, when a regional legislature not only imposed certain limitations and restrictions in the sphere of religious life in general, but also directly named and outlawed a particular religious movement.

The extreme case of the numerous splits and inter-Islamic tensions in Dagestan reflects the general situation within the Islamic community of Russia. The repeatedly declared aspiration for some sort of unification of all Russian Muslims is overwhelmed by disintegrative tendencies based on ethnic tensions and political ambitions of various Islamic

leaders. Consequently, there is at the moment no single Islamic religious organization or leader that can claim to speak on behalf of a majority of Russia's Muslims.

The relations between the Islamic and Orthodox Christian (or, in broader sense, Slavic) populations in Russia is a sensitive issue. In the state-controlled mass-media, and by federal and regional authorities and even by most religious leaders these relations have been traditionally presented as tolerant and mutually respectful. Furthermore, the case of "Islam and Orthodox Christianity in Russia" has been frequently used to demonstrate the peaceful co-existence of two religious traditions in Russia (sometimes in contrast to the tensions between Russia's "traditional" religions and various "new" religious movements). Yet, the prolonged military conflict in Chechnya and the numerous terrorist acts in various Russian major cities have challenged seriously the relations between the Slavic and Islamic communities of Russia.

A survey completed in June 2003, which aimed to analyze public opinion about Islam in Russia, produced rather disturbing results. Answering the question, "Which one out of six religions is for you most "strange by the spirit," a much larger group of respondents (26%) chose Islam in comparison with Buddhism (21%), Judaism (18%), Protestantism (13%), Roman Catholicism (9%) or Orthodox Christianity (1%). Thirty two percent of respondents rejected firmly the possibility that their son would marry an Islamic woman and 45% did so when asked about possibility of marriage of their daughters with an Islamic man. Answering a general question about the influence of Islam on the modern world, 49% of respondents defined this influence as "negative" and only 14% believed it is a "positive" (37% were unable to respond this question) [Soldatov, 2003].

3) Religious Revival in post-Soviet Russia: the Realities of "Popular Religiosity."

There is little doubt that religion has become an influential social force and that religious institutions form today a significant component of the Russian post-Soviet civil society. Yet the people's actual religious participation and involvement is a contradictory issue and it requires careful analysis.

First, the rise in personal religiosity is evident and astonishing if measured as the proportion of persons who identify themselves as "religious" or as "believers in God" or, more specifically, as followers of a particular religion. According to surveys, by the mid-1990s about 50% of Russian citizens declared themselves religious while before Gorbachev's

policy of political liberalization this figure was only 25% [Greely, 1994]. Although not as rapidly as in the early 1990s, this growth continues: 62% of respondents identified themselves as “believers” in the national survey carried out in 2004 [LEVADA, 2004-7]. In other words, according to the data above, more than one third of all Russians (or one half of former non-believers) has abandoned atheism after the collapse of the Communist regime. Moreover, the proportion of “neophytes” who newly came to believe is significantly higher than in any other formerly Communist Eastern European country [Greely, 1994, p.257].

Second, in today’s Russia the relationship between personal belief, religious identity and actual religious practice is complicated and controversial. In fact, religious self-identification frequently reflects neither a personal belief system nor a regular religious practice. Put another way, seven decades of consistent “atheisation” resulted in a society in which there exists a great difference between the notions of “being Orthodox” (or Muslim, or Jewish, etc.) and “believing in God,” and “practicing religion and participating in the Church life.” Religion is often perceived simply as part of the traditional cultural environment, and as a component of ethnic identity and style of life: “I am Russian and, therefore, Orthodox” or “I am Tatar and, therefore, Muslim.” Therefore the results of surveys always look paradoxical, because they indicate a higher total of respondents identifying themselves as Orthodox, Muslims, Buddhists, and so on, than the proportion of those who answer “yes” to the general question “Do you believe in God?” or “Are you a religious person?” (Tab.4).

Tab.4 Personal belief and religious identity in Russia: (1998, as % of respondents)

| Are you a religious person? | | What is your religion? | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|--|-------------|
| | | Russian Orthodox | 52.5 |
| | | “Christian” (without further definition) | 5.1 |
| | | Muslim | 2.4 |
| | | Various other religions | 1.1 |
| “Yes” | 45.1 | Total: | 61.0 |
| “No” | 38.3 | “I am not a believer” | 32.8 |
| “Difficult to answer” | 16.6 | “Difficult to answer” | 6.2 |

Source of data: [Mtchedlov, 1998].

In turn, both the proportion of those who identify themselves as belonging to a particular religion and the share of those who simply say that they are religious are much higher than the number of actually practicing believers: those who regularly attend church services and who fulfill other religious rituals and requirements (Tab.5).

Tab.5 Evolution of Religious Orientations and Religious Practice in Russia: 1985-2004.
(% of the total population, according to the results of public-opinion polls)

| | 1985 | 1989 | 1991 | 1996 | 1998 | 2002 | 2004 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Non-Believers | 75 | 66 | 61 | 43 | 38 | 33 | 32 |
| Believers | 25 | 33 | 32 | 48 | 45 | 57 | 62 |
| Those Who "Don't know" | | 1 | 7 | 9 | 17 | 10 | 6 |
| Attend church at least once a month | | | 5 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 6 |
| Receive Eucharist at least once a month | | | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| % of those who are baptized | | 65 | | | 76 | 77 | 76 |
| % of those who say: Religion and faith are very important to me | | | | | | 8 | |

Source of data: - a) 1985: [Greely, 1994]; b) 1989-2004 - sociological surveys carried out by "All-Russian Center for Study of Public Opinion" ("VCIOM") – currently "Levada-Center" - and partly published in [Obshestvennoe, 2002] and [Obshestvennoe, 2004].

For instance, among those who say that they are "Orthodox" less than 15% attend church services at least once a month (Tab.6). The vast majority of "Orthodox believers" in Russia participate only in the one-time church ceremonies (baptizing of the children, church wedding or funerals) or in the major religious festivals such as Easter or Christmas. In the other words, the sense of being Orthodox and belonging to the Orthodox Church is typically limited to the fact of baptism and to some very rare participation in special church ceremonies.

Tab.6 Regularity of Religious Practice in Russia among Orthodox Christians: 1991 - 1998 (as % of those who identify themselves as "Orthodox").

| Attend church services: 1991 / 1998 | | Receive eucharist: 1991 / 1998 | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| Monthly and more frequently | 13.2 / 13.8 | Monthly and more frequently | 6.9 / 4.7 |
| Several times a year | 39.0 / 33.2 | Several times a year | 14.2 / 10.9 |
| Less than once a year | 9.1 / 15.0 | Less than once a year | 16.2 / 10.4 |
| Never | 35.7 / 36.8 | Never | 59.5 / 65.9 |
| Difficult to answer | 1.5 / 1.1 | Difficult to answer | 3.2 / 3.1 |

Source of data: sociological survey carried out by Russian Center for Public Opinion Research (VCIOM) in 1991 and in October 1998. Partly published in [Dubin, 1999].

Even among the relatively strictly observing Muslims believers of the Northern Caucasus the rates of regular fulfillment of various Islamic religious rites are low: 28% by Ingushs, 34% by Avars, 36% by Chechens, 43% by Darguins [Krickij, 1997].

In fact, despite the above-mentioned self-declared conversion to religion of every third Russian, the indices of actual religious practice in Russia are among the lowest in comparison with the other formerly Communist European countries (Tab. 7). Moreover, Russians themselves confirm the superficial character of their religiosity, as only 3.4% define themselves as “very religious persons” and only 8% say that “religion and faith are very important to me” (Tab.5).

Tab 7. Religious Belief and Religious Practice in former Communist Countries (1998, as % of respondents)

| | I consider myself a very religious person | I have no doubt about existence of God | Church attendance: At least once a week | Personal prayer: every day |
|----------------|---|--|---|----------------------------|
| East Germany | 2.1 | 8.3 | 3.1 | 5.1 |
| Russia | 3.4 | 23.6 | 3.6 | 12.3 |
| Ukraine | 3.8 | 23.0 | 14.0 | 19.3 |
| Slovenia | 5.1 | 21.9 | 20.3 | 14.2 |
| Czech Republic | 6.2 | 13.7 | 8.9 | 9.0 |
| Byelorussia | 6.3 | 35.4 | 11.3 | 21.4 |
| Lithuania | 6.4 | 28.6 | 10.4 | 18.1 |
| Slovakia | 10.4 | 35.7 | 32.7 | 29.2 |
| Romania | 11.6 | 61.9 | 25.1 | 53.4 |
| Poland | 19.5 | 55.0 | 53.3 | 37.2 |
| Hungary | 22.6 | 27.4 | 13.6 | 20.9 |
| Croatia | 33.3 | 51.5 | 25.0 | 30.1 |

Sources of data: a) Tomka (1998); sociological surveys carried out by the Institute of sociology of the Byelorussian National Academy of Sciences in August-September 1998 (unpublished) and by “Russian Center for Public Opinion Research” (“VCIOM”) in Oktober 1998 (unpublished).

To sum up, the variety of approaches to measuring religiosity in today’s Russia allows for endless controversies and speculations on this subject: three quarters of the population are baptized, 50-60% - depending on the wording of the question – claim to be “believers,” 6-8% attend church on a regular monthly base. Most expert estimates agree, however, that between 10 and 15% of those who define themselves as religious persons or, in the other words, between 5 and 8% of the total population, can be said to be “practicing believers.”

Third, all above mentioned measures of religiosity demonstrate significant ethnic, regional, social and gender distinctions. The indices of religiosity depend especially strongly on ethnic background of respondents. They are much higher in the case of Islamic ethnic groups. Even among relatively “agnostic” Muslims of the Volga region in the

Republic of Tatarstan, 67% of urban and 86 % of rural Tatars identify themselves as faithful Muslims (compared with 34% and 43 % in 1989) [Musina, 1997].

The largest proportions of believers are among Islamic ethnic groups in the Northern Caucasus such as Tchechens (97%), Ingushs (95%), Karatchaevs (88%) [Krickij, 1997].

As for the Slavic population, the level of religiosity differs significantly from one geographic area to another. Generally, a higher percentage of believers is characteristic of the Southern European part of Russia - an area of old-settlements with a relatively low proportion of recent migrants and a relatively large rural population. By contrast, territories of more recent settlement with a predominantly urban and industrial population (Siberia, Far East, Northern European part of the country) are more "godless." For instance, surveys show that almost 80% of respondents in the Voronezh region (about 500 km. south-west of Moscow) and 76% in the Stavropol region (the most southerly of the administrative regions of European Russia) answer "yes" to the question "Do you believe in God?" At the same time only 28 % do so in industrial Petrozavodsk - the capital of the republic of Carelia on Kola Peninsula in Northern Russia. [INTAS/Prometee/VCIOM, 1996]. In the capital Moscow in 1997, the share of believers nearly corresponded with the then average for Russia as a whole: 50.1 %, comprising 39.7 % Orthodox, 6.2 % "simply Christians", 1.8% Muslims, 1.4% Catholics, 0.6 % Buddhists and 0.2 % - Judaists and Protestants. [Rossija...,1997].

There are also evident differences in religiosity among various social and professional groups. In today's Russia the most "godless" seems to be the industrial workers and free-lance intellectuals; more religious are peasants, qualified technicians (engineers), office workers and pensioners; the highest proportions of believers are among students, business men, soldiers and house-wives. [Novyj,1996, p.98]

Finally, gender was and remains a significant differentiating factor. Today about 68% of women in Russia say that they are religious, but only 46% of men do so [Stark, 2002]. These gender differences appear almost as high as in the Soviet past. In answer to the question "Were your parents religious?", 56% of respondents said their mothers were, but only 33% said that their fathers were [VCIOM, 1999].

Interestingly enough, in comparison with the obvious ethnic, geographical, social and gender differences, surveys show that differences in religiosity among the various age

groups are tending to decline [Mtchedlov, 1998]. So are those amongst groups with different educational levels. For instance, in 1991, only 16% of persons with a university degree said that they were religious in comparison with 58% among those who did not have college-level education. In 1998, however, the corresponding numbers were 46 and 58% respectively [Dubin, 1999].

Fourth, the decade of the 1990s has been marked by the dramatic decline of public confidence in the various institutions of state power, mass media, public and political associations and, at the same time, by the high popularity of religious organizations, with the Russian Orthodox Church in first place. Today, about half the population declare their trust in the Russian Orthodox Church and, in this context, the popular confidence in the Russian Orthodox Church is greater than in any other state or public institution (Tab. 8).

Tab.8 Public Confidence in various State, Political and Public Institutions in Russia: 1994-2004 (as % of those who: “trust or rather trust” / “mistrust or rather mistrust”)

| Do you trust: | 1994: trust / mistrust | 1999: trust / mistrust | 2004: trust/ mistrust |
|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| President of Russia | 22 / 68 | 5 / 91 | 63 / 10 |
| Church | 55 / 21 | 57 / 22 | 49 / 16 |
| Russian Army | 52 / 36 | 52 / 37 | 42 / 30 |
| Government | No data | 22 / 72 | 42 / 30 |
| Mass Media | 34 / 58 | 33 / 60 | 25 / 48 |
| Trade Unions | 18 / 60 | 18 / 56 | 19 / 39 |
| Police | 25 / 67 | 20 / 73 | 18 / 56 |
| Parliament | 13 / 16 | 10 / 82 | 24 / 71 (2003) |
| Political Parties | No data | 7 / 76 (1998) | 11 / 59 |

Source of data: - [VCIOM 1994, 1999], [Levada 2004]

In other words, in a society which remains agnostic by its nature, the Church enjoys an intuitive support and sympathy of the relative majority of the population. The roots of this Church popularity in the largely secular society are in the fundamental and - for a majority of population - painful political, economic and social transformations of the last 15 years. In the spiritual sphere following the crash of the clear “black-white” Communist ideology these transformations have resulted in an atmosphere of frustration and spiritual perplexity. Under conditions of public frustration and low confidence placed in institutions of state power and political organizations the Church has been seen by many as a symbol of stability and a last stronghold of declining moral and family values.

The challenging question is: What are the implications of the public authority of the Church for the continuing process of civil society building, for the creation of a new national identity and for the “social reconciliation” of the increasingly polarized Russian society?

4) Church-State Relations and Religious Freedom in Russia: the Issues and Challenges

The 2004 “International Religious Freedom Report” released by the US Department of State evaluated the conditions of religious freedom in Russia as follows: “Although the Constitution provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, the Government did not always respect these provisions. Some federal agencies and many local authorities continued to restrict the rights of various religious minorities. Legal obstacles to registration under a complex 1997 law “On Freedom of Conscience and Associations,” which seriously disadvantages religious groups new to the country, and which had eased somewhat in the period covered by the last report, were cited as the basis for banning Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow and upheld in the second appeal of the case. There were indications that the security services increasingly treated the leadership of some minority religious groups as security threats. Religious matters are not a source of societal hostility for most citizens, although many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is at the heart of what it means to be Russian. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as societal hostility toward Roman Catholics and newer, non-Orthodox religions. Instances of religiously motivated violence continue, although it often is difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Roman Catholics, Protestants, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and religions new to the country. Leaders in the ROC have stated publicly their opposition to the presence of Roman Catholics, Protestants, and newer religions” [Department, 2004].

In his article in *First Things* magazine, Lawrence Uzzell - a reputable expert on religion in the post-Communist countries – summarized his vision of the situation in Russia in somewhat more expressive language: “Religious liberty, after shrinking since the mid-1990s, now seems to have reached an equilibrium. A year from now Russians will probably not have any more freedom of conscience than they have today, but they should not have significantly less.” According to Mr. Uzzell, the major reason for such a situation is that: “Vladimir Putin has achieved everything he needs in church-state relations: he has

no need to put believers in chains, because he already has them on a leash.” [Uzzell, 2004].

Today, one can be easily lost in the sea of various and not always consistent information about church-state and inter-religious relations and about various questions of religious freedom in Russia. Some of the articles, news, and reports on this subject deal with the individual cases and circumstances, while the others focus on important general tendencies. Some describe particular local situations, while the others reflect on the problems and events which have national implications.

The major challenge - especially for an outsider to Russian society - is how to interpret this diverse information from the perspective of Russia’s historical traditions and in light of the country’s current political and social circumstances. In this chapter I attempt to outline the historical and contemporary context in which the issue of religious freedom in present-day Russia can be approached, understood and evaluated. A few examples from the religious life of Russian society will help to illuminate major tendencies in the church-state relations and in the area of religious freedom during the most recent period – under conditions of the increasingly authoritarian regime of Mr. Putin, which the Kremlin prefers to call a “vertical democracy.”

The first example is related to the establishment in February 2002 of the four dioceses of the Roman Catholic Church (with headquarters in the cities of Moscow, Saratov, Novosibirsk and Irkutsk). These dioceses have replaced the provisional so-called “Apostolic administrations” (two were formed in 1991 and two in 1999). Roman Catholics, being present in Russia for centuries, form only a tiny religious minority.

The expert estimates vary from 15-20,000 regularly practicing Catholic believers up to 500,000 “virtual” Roman Catholics - counting all persons of Lithuanian, Polish, and German origins, for whom Roman Catholicism can be seen as a traditional religion of their ancestors [Lunkin, 2002]. At the same time, the elevation of the provisional administrations to established ecclesiastical structures - dioceses - has reflected the dynamic growth and institutionalization of the Roman Catholic Church in Russia during the post-Soviet epoch.

The creation of the Catholic dioceses on the territory of the Russian Federation has caused a very negative reaction by the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church and resulted in a temporary break in relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and Vatican.

The analysis of the sets of arguments used in this dispute by the Catholic and Orthodox sides is far beyond the limits of this article. The point is, however, that both the Russian political establishment and the national state authorities intervened openly in the inter-Church conflict by backing the position and lobbying for the interests of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In a special appeal the members of the Russian parliament have requested the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to stop issuing entrance visas for Catholic clergy working in Russia (the majority of the Roman Catholic priests in Russia are foreign nationals). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has produced a statement, which stressed the fact that the Vatican's decision about creation of the dioceses was not coordinated with the Russian Orthodox Church and, therefore, has recommended to cancel it [Platonov, 2003]. A number of Catholic clergy (including the Bishop of Irkutsk, Ezhi Mazur) have been either deported from the country or denied Russia's entrance visas. Apparently the strengthening of Catholicism in Russia not only contradicts the interests of the Moscow Patriarchate in the competition for the souls of the faithful on the missionary field, but it also irritates the the Kremlin and the national political leadership, for whom the Roman Catholic Church has been and will remain an influential international power which is controlled and administered from abroad.

Another indicative example is the situation with the Church of Jehovah's Witnesses. It appeared initially in Russia in the late 19th century and it was entirely outlawed in the former Soviet Union for the clear-cut refusal not only to co-operate with but even to conform silently to the rules of the Communist state (for example, many Jehovah's Witnesses young men were imprisoned for their refusal to serve in the Soviet Army). After its legalization in the wake of Gorbachev's political liberalization, the Church of Jehovah's Witnesses similarly with many other religious organizations experienced a dynamic growth. The number of officially registered local Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in Russia increased from 92 in 1991 to 386 in 2004 (although the latter number does not reflect numerous congregations existing without state registration), and they claim to have about 133.000 members

The first lawsuit against Jehovah's Witnesses in the post-Soviet Russia was filed in 1998 by a Moscow regional prosecutor. It accused Jehovah's Witnesses of inciting

religious discord, breaking up families, violating individual Russian citizens' rights, and luring teenagers and minors.

In March 2004, after several years of legal battles, a District Court in northern Moscow ruled to liquidate the legal entity of the Moscow organization of Jehovah's Witnesses and to impose a ban on their activities in Russia's capital. The verdict of the judge dismissed charges of religious hatred, but sustained charges of forcing families to disintegrate, violating the equal rights of parents in the upbringing of their children, violating the Russian Constitution and freedom of conscience, encouraging suicide, encouraging the ill to refuse medicine for religious reasons, and inciting citizens to refuse both military and alternative service. In June 2004, this decision was upheld by the Moscow City Appeal Court.

The case of the Church of Jehovah's Witnesses could have been seen as simply another example of violations of religious freedom in Russia, but its two particular aspects may have long-lasting implications for the future of religious liberty in Putin's Russia. First, one should remember that in 1988 Russia signed and joined the European Convention on Human Rights, thus, committing itself to and recognizing the authority of the European Court on Human Rights. The final decision of the Moscow court regarding organization of Jehovah's Witnesses was in this context in obvious contradiction with the position of the European Court on Human Rights which, in June 2003, submitted questions to the Russian government regarding its treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow. Second, the case of Jehovah's Witnesses creates an important precedent in that a particular religious organization was not simply refused state registration (which is helpful but not required for a religious organization to operate), but it was also legally outlawed on the territory of one of the country's 89 administrative regions (the Church of Jehovah's Witnesses is still registered as a religious organization on the federal all-Russia level).

Both the attack on the Roman Catholic Church and the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses have received wide international public attention. Much less known are the situations of the violations of the principles of religious freedom and equality which do not involve the interests of the "foreign actors."

A good example was a nationwide council ("sobor") which was held in February 2004 by the Russian Orthodox Old-Believer Church with the goal to elect a new head of the Church ("Metropolitan"). Shortly before this meeting, Old Believer priests across the

country were summoned to visit the field offices of the FSB (Federal Security Service which has replaced an infamous KGB) in their respective regions. The secret-police officers asked the priests what they thought of the mainstream Russian Orthodox Church, asked whom they intended to vote for as their new Metropolitan, and hinted at which of the candidates the FSB preferred [Uzzell, 2004]. The Old Believers stayed firm to their three-century tradition of tenacious independence from state pressure and rejected the candidate suggested by the secret police, but this case has indicated clearly that a characteristic “innovation” of Putin’s epoch (or rather a well-rehearsed return to the past Communist practice) is an increasing desire of the state to monitor and, if necessary, to intervene in the internal affairs of religious organizations. The example of the Orthodox Old Believers is not unique. According to information released in July of this year by Forum 18 News Service, the justice departments in the administrative regions of Samara, Irkutsk, Perm, Tambov, Udmurtia, Ekaterinburg have requested various religious organizations for full names, ages and addresses of church members [Forum, 2004a].

The last example - the continuing controversies around the theme of religious education in the state schools - is a remarkable sign of the increasingly close ties between the Moscow Patriarchate and Russian regional and national state authorities.

According to the Russian federal religious law: “Upon request of the parents and under condition of agreement of the children, the administrations of the state and municipal educational institutions shall provide possibilities for the religious organizations to teach children religion beyond the schedule of the mandatory curricula.”

In other words, the law simply indicates that the facilities of the state schools should be available for the voluntary religious lessons upon mutual desire and agreement between parents, school administration and religious institutions. A public discussion has emerged on the question of whether religious education must become a part of the mandatory curricula in the state schools and, if “yes,” in which form it should be present: either as the lessons “about religion” (in which case the children will be provided with knowledge about the history and essentials of various religions) or rather as “religious education” per se (in which case the children will be taught the doctrine, ethic and the rituals of a particular religion).

Meanwhile the Orthodox Church has an increasing actual presence in the Russian schools. In 1999, in a letter addressed to diocesan bishops, Patriarch Alexey II requested

that they should “pay special attention to the organization of the Orthodox education of the children studying in the state and in the municipal schools.” The letter also mentioned that “if there will be any difficulties with the teaching of the basics of the Orthodox religion, the lessons must be titled ‘The basics of the Orthodox culture’” [Shipkov, 2002]. The mandatory curricula in each state school consists of three components: federal, ethno-regional and local. Of these components only the first one is under direct control of the Federal Ministry of education and must be uniform for all schools nationwide. The decisions about the contents of the ethno-regional and local segments are made by the authorities at regional and local levels. As of summer 2004 in more than 20 (out of 89) regions of Russian Federation, “The basics of the Orthodox culture” have been included into the programs of state schools as a part of their ethno-regional or local components [Yakovleva, 2004].

The Moscow Patriarchate has the possibility to lobby for the introduction of Orthodox religious lessons not only in the individual regions of the Russian Federation (in the frame-work of agreements signed between the ruling diocesan Orthodox bishops and the regional state administrations) but also on the national level through the so-called “Coordinating Council for relations between the Ministry of Education and the Russian Orthodox Church.” One of the major proponents of the inclusion of the “Basics of the Orthodox Culture” into mandatory curricula of the state school is Nikolaj Nikandrov - a President of the Russian national Academy of Education [Petrov, 2004].

The position of the political leadership of the country with regard to this matter seems also to be clear. In October 2002, the conference on “Relations between the state and religious associations in the sphere of education” was held upon the initiative of the three plenipotentiaries of the Russian president, who are responsible for the administrative macro-regions in the European part of Russia (in addition to 89 administrative regions governed by the elected governors, Russia is also divided into 7 macro-regions headed by presidential appointees). All presidential plenipotentiaries as well as the representatives of the Federal Ministry of Education supported introduction of the “Basics of the Orthodox Culture” or similar subjects representing other traditional religions according to the so-called “regional principle.” In the other words, they suggested teaching a religion which is dominant in any of 89 administrative regions of Russia.

Needless to say that such an approach would result in a situation in which not only Russian Roman Catholics or Protestants, but also followers of Judaism (because of their geographic dispersion), will have little chance to be present in the Russian state schools.

In January 2004, the Federal Ministry of Education held a Conference on “Study of the Orthodox Culture in a secular school.” Although with several references to the secular character of education in Russia, the final document adopted by the conference suggested that “The role of Orthodox Christianity in creation, strengthening and development of the Russian statehood and culture must be adequately reflected in the federal state standard of general public education. This should be achieved first of all by the relevant changes and additions in the federal component of state standard of general education.”

Furthermore, it stipulated that “Inclusion into content of the general education of the subject “Orthodox Culture” will contribute to spiritual upbringing of students and will prevent the continuing mass-propaganda of the violence, sexual dissoluteness and social irresponsibility that threaten the existence and future of the Russian state and society [NP, 2004].

Either state-sponsored pressure on certain “uncomfortable” religious groups (the cases of Roman Catholics and Jehovah’s Witnesses), or desire to administer the internal affairs of religious organizations (the example of Old Believers), or attempts to lobby the interests of particular churches (the issue of Orthodox religious education in the public schools) demonstrate that fifteen year after the fall of Communist atheistic state today’s Russia is still far from the situation when proclaimed principles of religious freedom have become a reality of the daily life of society. However, as passionate as they are in transplanting to the Russian cultural soil the Western principles of democracy, human rights activists will have little chance to succeed unless they take into consideration three factors:

- the country’s distinct historical pattern of church-state relations;
- the current political realities;
- the social stereotypes widespread in Russian society.

There is little doubt that religious pluralism, clear-cut division between Church and State, and an abundance of grass-roots church-based social initiatives have always been among the fundamental elements of the American civic model. With certain nuances

and at different times, this model has been adopted also by most Western European countries. Quite differently, in Russia, the notion of the “national” and even “nationalized” (or “state-owned”) Church has been historically inherited in the Russian mentality.

Ironically, despite entirely different political systems and ideologies, both in the monarchic Russian Empire and in the Communist Soviet Union, the state was always seeking for thorough control, and for administration of the religious affairs of society.

In the Russian Empire, the Orthodox Church was the only state church. The famous triad “Orthodoxy – Autocracy – Peoplehood” formulated in the early 19th century by Count Sergei Uvarov – a minister of education of the Russian Empire – pointed at the oneness of these elements, and it has become an enduring symbol of the Russian statehood. Yet, despite its privileged status, beginning from the 18th century the Russian Orthodox Church entirely lost its independence from the secular authorities. Not only did the state take away most of the Church’s lands and enterprises (thus depriving the Church of its economic independence), but in 1721 Emperor Peter the Great abolished the position of the Patriarch - the head of the Orthodox Church. Since that time and until 1917, it was administered by the “Holy Governmental Synod”, which was headed by the secular official - the “Attorney-General.” As for other religions, the state has controlled them through the “Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Creeds” which was a part of the Ministry of Interior. Indeed, the Russian Empire has been for centuries a multiethnic and multi-religious country, where the numerous faith communities have co-existed more or less peacefully. However, while the Russian Orthodox Church was supported by the state, the other religions and churches were either tolerated or in some cases discriminated against (or even persecuted).

On the popular level and by the commonly shared social stereotypes, there has always been an amalgamation of three notions: “to be Russian (or in a broader sense “Slav”)” and “to be a good citizen” and “to be an Orthodox Christian.”

After the revolution of 1917, the separation of church and state was declared. In fact, however, it was the beginning of the state policy of atheism (called initially “militant atheism”) which lasted for seven decades. The constitution of the Soviet Union guaranteed equality of all religions and freedom of worship, but there is little question that religion was repressed under Communist rule. The forms of repression, however, changed significantly from outright persecutions during the 1920-30’s to grudging toleration with

considerable civil discrimination against clergy and openly practicing believers from mid 1940s and until the mid 1980's (while many religious organizations were still entirely outlawed). In 1944, the so-called "Council for Religious Affairs" was established as a part of the Soviet government with a network of commissioners in all administrative provinces of the USSR. Serving de facto as a Ministry for Religious Affairs, the Council for Religious Affairs supervised the activities of all religious organizations in the country, and it existed until the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In the mid 1980's, Gorbachev's policy of political liberalization was accompanied by the gradual lifting of restrictions on religious activities. Religion was "allowed" to return into public space. The de facto achieved emancipation of religious organizations from the direct state supervision was legally secured in the law "About freedom of belief" adopted in October 1990.

In today's Russia, the religious life of society is regulated by the federal law "About freedom of conscience and about religious associations" which was adopted in September 1997 and which has replaced the previous law of 1990. In brief, the 1990 law focused on various freedoms and rights granted to religious organizations and it considered the religious life of society as a free market that is regulated only by natural competition. The present (1997) legislation emphasizes the idea of co-operation between the state and religious organizations in different spheres and depending on the social significance and on the historical contribution of various religious communities in the context of Russian society.

In many ways the 1997 legislation is also more restrictive with regard to religious organizations which are recently established or which are of foreign origins. The 1997 law, for example, has put into operation for the newly established religious communities a 15 years census for obtaining a legal recognition by the state as a "religious organization" – the status which provides essential privileges.

The introductory section of the 1997 law also caused numerous controversies and criticism, because it included a sentence about the "special role of Orthodoxy in the history of Russia and in the development of its spirituality and culture." Several years later, however, it has become clear both for the supporters and opponents of the privileged position of the Russian Orthodox Church that this statement has no direct implications, because the preamble of the law has no legal power.

In Putin's Russia, several attempts have been made to amend the legislation of 1997 with the purpose to define a limited number of so-called "traditional" religious organizations and to grant them various legal privileges. For example, two bills were submitted in 2002 by MPs Vasily Shandybin and Alexandr Chuev. Both of them by defining the term "traditional" have suggested the criteria of long-term existence and the barely measurable principle of "correspondence with Russian traditions." In Mr. Shandybin's project, only Orthodox Christianity and Islam would be recognized as religions traditional for Russia.

The former head of the parliamentary committee for "Affairs of public associations and religious organizations" Mr. Viktor Zorkaltsev has proposed to consider as traditional the religious organizations that have mainly Russian-based sources of income and which are independent from the foreign religious administrative centers [Verkhovskij, 2003].

Another bill "About social partnership of the state and religious organizations" has been drafted by MP Mr. Sergej Glazjev, whose name is associated with the Communist Party and with the so-called "Orthodox patriotic public" (*pravoslavno-patrioticheskaja obshestvennost*). According to Mr. Glazjev, the main goal of the amendment is the "development of treaty forms of co-operation between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church and the other traditional religions in the such spheres of mutual responsibility as upbringing of the young generation, education, assistance for prisoners, support for health care institutions" [Nedumov, 2003]. This bill has defined as "traditional" the Russian Orthodox Church and also "authorized in required order Islamic, Buddhist and Jewish religious organizations existing in the areas of traditional compact settlements of their followers" [Verkhovskij, 2003]. Neither the term "authorized in required order," nor the definition of "the areas of traditional compact settlements" have been explained. In fact, by this approach Orthodox Old Believers, Russian Catholics and Lutherans would have no chance to be recognized as a part of the country's religious establishment (although they have existed in Russia for centuries), and even Jewish religious organizations would have only vague chances to be considered as traditional, because of the geographic dispersion of Jews living in Russia.

Russia remains one of the few post-Soviet states (along with Georgia and Lithuania), where there is no single national governmental agency supervising the

religious life of society. While in the case of Western democracy this would be considered as natural self-evident state of affairs, under the current Russian realities it leads to a situation in which the actual conditions of religious freedom and pattern of relations between state authorities and religious organizations vary significantly from one administrative region to another. In this context, federal religious legislation is not always obeyed or it is interpreted differently in the various parts of the country. Furthermore, after 1997 the legislatures of about 30 out of the country's 89 administrative regions have adopted their own "religious laws" many of which are not only "in addition" but also "in contradiction" to the federal legislation.

More recently, from 2001 on, several Russian regions (Belgorod, Kursk, Smolensk, Magadan) have produced laws aimed in particular against foreign missionary workers.

In general, when decisions are made about regional religious issues and religious organizations, they are frequently based on the local politics, personal interests and loyalties of persons in positions of power, who either bring sections of federal legislation into play when convenient or else act without reference to any law. In other words, religious organizations are typically left to the mercy of the regional bureaucrats, while the Kremlin and other federal authorities step into religious affairs only from time-to-time, when the issues involved have some linkage with national politics (for example, the attack on the Roman Catholic Church, and the lobbying of the interests of the Russian Orthodox Church).

How do Russians themselves perceive the issue of religious liberty and what do they think of religious freedom in Russia? Several circumstances are of importance in order to approach accurately this question.

First, as shown in the second section, the phenomenon of "popular religiosity" resulted in a situation when contemporary Russian society can be simultaneously defined as both "Orthodox" and "agnostic." Accordingly, only a small proportion of the population is concerned with or even simply interested in the subject of religious freedom. For instance, in 2002-2004 surveys only 13% of respondents have chosen "freedom of conscience" as one of the most important human rights (Tab. 9).

Tab. 9 Which of the following human rights are most important: you can choose several items? (% of respondents)

| | 2002 | 2004 |
|--|------|------|
| The right for free education, free health service, social support of senior citizens | 70 | 74 |
| Right for life | 52 | 54 |
| The right for a good job | 51 | 51 |
| The right for personal privacy and sanctity of the home | 44 | 45 |
| The right for a “living cost minimum” guaranteed by the state | 35 | 41 |
| Freedom to have a property | 25 | 30 |
| Freedom of speech | 19 | 24 |
| Freedom to obtain information | 12 | 17 |
| Freedom to choose people’s representatives in the legislatures/authorities | 8 | 14 |
| Freedom to move to other country and/or return | 13 | 13 |
| Freedom of conscience | 13 | 13 |

Source of data: [Obshestvennoe, 2004, p.124]

Second, we have also noted a dramatic decline of public confidence in the institutions of state power, and, mass media, and political associations, and, at the same time, the growing popularity of religious organizations, with the Russian Orthodox Church in first place. On the one hand, the popularity of the Orthodox Church in Russia should not be interpreted as a growth of direct clerical influence in the political sphere: only a tiny proportion of Russians support the idea of the participation of the Orthodox Church and clergy in political activities [Dubin,1999]. On the other hand, the latent influence of the Orthodox Church on Russian society is much greater than it may seem. For example, today only about a quarter of the population believes that the current social and political impact of the Church in Russia is substantial [VCIOM, 2003]. However, in the wake of the earlier mentioned conflict with the Roman Catholic Church, almost half the respondents were of the view that if President Putin invited the Pope to Russia but the Orthodox Church were opposed to this, the president should cancel his invitation [VCIOM, 2001]. Most recent sociological studies have also reflected a new tendency in the development of Church’s image in the people’s minds, which is an increasing amalgamation of the notions “to be Russian” and “to be Orthodox” as well as “Orthodox” and “National” [Obshestvennoe, 2002, p.160].

Third, the economic hardships and social polarization (that was unusual for Soviet society) combined with political uncertainty and with the crisis of national identity led by the end of Yeltsin’s epoch to a situation when a vast majority of the population was looking for the restoration of a paternalist society and for a strong state power which would take care of people’s basic needs (which was once the case in the Soviet Union). In

the national survey carried out in 1998, only about one third of respondents believed that “Russia needs a democratic system of administration”, while more than a half were of the view that “Principles of Western Democracy are incompatible with Russian traditions,” and three quarters of respondents were of the view that instead “Russia needs a strong and masterful leader rather than all laws and discussions” (Tab. 10).

Tab. 10 Public Attitudes Towards Principles of Democracy in Russia (as % of respondents, public opinion poll, October 1998)

| | Agree | Disagree | Difficult to answer |
|---|-------|----------|---------------------|
| Russia needs democratic system of administration | 37.9 | 29.7 | 32.3 |
| Russia needs strong and masterful leader rather than all laws and discussions | 73.7 | 17.7 | 8.6 |
| Principles of Western Democracy are incompatible with Russian traditions | 54.8 | 27.1 | 18.1 |

Source of data: sociological survey carried out by Russian Centre for Public Opinion Research (VCIOM), October 1998 (unpublished);

These public sentiments based on the disappointment in the changes of the last fifteen years and on the “romanticizing” of the good Soviet past continue to dominate. In a 2002 national survey, having been asked “Which of the changes that have occurred during last 15 years have been the most important ones?,” by far larger groups of respondents have chosen negative events and tendencies (break-up of USSR, growth of crime, decreasing level of life, declining industrial and agricultural production), and only an insignificant minority mentioned the benefits of the post-Communist epoch (freedom of speech, mass-media and travels abroad; rapprochement with the “West;” possibility to make big money).

Tab.11 Which of the changes that have occurred during last 15 years have been the most important ones (2002)?

| | % of respondents responded “yes” |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Break-up of USSR | 55 |
| Growth of Crime | 53 |
| Decreasing level of life | 49 |
| Declining industrial and agricultural production | 44 |
| Disappearance of “deficit” (scarce, shortage) on various goods | 42 |
| Declining public moral | 39 |
| Negative, pernicious influence of “Western” culture | 25 |
| Re-establishment of private property | 21 |
| Freedom of speech, mass-media and travels abroad | 18 |
| Rapprochement with “West” | 17 |
| Possibility to make big money | 16 |

Source: [Obshestvennoe, 2002, p.19]

Accordingly, in the same survey a relative majority of respondents (39 %) have indicated their desire to return to the past and to live in the USSR under times of Leonid Brezhnev (Tab. 12).

Tab. 12 If you would have a possibility to begin your life again, where and when you would prefer to live (2002)?

| Place and time | % of respondents responded "yes" |
|---|----------------------------------|
| In USSR under times of Leonid Brezhnev | 39 |
| In Russia under Putin | 23 |
| In another country | 17 |
| In Russia before 1917 | 5 |
| In the years of Gorbachev's "perestrojka" | 3 |
| In USSR under Krushchev | 3 |

Source: [Obshestvennoe, 2002, p.20]

The amazing - and stable - personal popularity of President Putin among Russians (63% in 2004, as seen in Tab.6) fits into these popular disappointments and aspirations. While only 16% of Russians believe that Putin actually manages successfully the problems of the country, 40% continue to hope that "Putin in the future will be able to solve country's problems" and 41% simply do not see anybody else that they can rely on (Tab. 13).

Tab. 13 Why many people trust President Putin (% of respondents)

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| Putin has proved that he actually manages the problems of the country successfully | 14 | 21 | 15 | 16 |
| People do not see anybody else that they can rely on | 34 | 31 | 34 | 41 |
| People hope that Putin in the future will be able to solve country's problems | 43 | 44 | 46 | 40 |
| Don't know | 9 | 4 | 5 | 3 |

Source: [Obshestvennoe, 2004, p.47]

Under the three circumstances described above, the popular attitudes towards various "other" (than Orthodox Christianity) religions have experienced significant changes during the 1990s. In brief, the period of the late 1980s and early 1990s was symbolized both by the general passion for "religion" per-se and by an essential interest in the foreign religious missionaries and in the different new (in the context of Russian culture) religious movements. The distribution of colorful religious booklets and certain practical benefits (free courses of foreign languages offered by some religious missions, for example) have played some role in the attraction of people's attention. Yet, it was the opening of political borders after decades of the isolated existence behind the iron curtain which has resulted in public interest in everything (religion included) coming into Russia from abroad, especially from the "West".

By the mid 1990s, this situation changed significantly. The growing negative public attitude towards the so-called non-traditional religious organizations and foreign missionaries became evident. For example, although in a national survey in 1997, 96% of Russians agreed with the general principle of freedom of personal choice of belief [VCIOM, 1998], only 40% of respondents supported the full legal equality of all religions and churches. Moreover, 28% of the population stood up for direct restrictions on the activity of non-traditional religious organizations in Russia [Mtchedlov, 1998].

These transformations in public attitudes in the religious sphere would be difficult to explain unless they are seen as a part of the general growth of the anti-Western sentiments in Russia in the late 1990s. For example, in 1996 48% of Russians were of the view that ‘Western’ culture has a negative impact on the situation in Russia”, and in 2002 this proportion increased up to 67% [Obshestvennoe, 2002, p. 160].

The ideological strategy carefully orchestrated by Putin’s administration aimed at creation of an image of a strong country which has its own unique way of development: “Russia as neither Europe nor Asia.”

While appealing to a majority of the population, this concept has also led to the flat rejection of the Western principles of democracy by many. In a 2000 survey, responding to the question “Does the “Western” model of society suit Russia?”, over two thirds of respondents were either simply skeptical about the possibility of using Western principles of democracy in Russia or have even said that it contradicts the traditional style of life in Russia.

Tab. 14 Does the “Western” model of society suit Russia? (2000, % of respondents)?

| | |
|---|----|
| This is a universal model of society, which can be fully applied in Russia | 4 |
| This model of society can be adjusted for Russia’s conditions | 15 |
| It is unlikely that “Western” model of society can be developed in Russia | 30 |
| The “Western” model is not suitable for Russia and it contradicts the style of life of the Russian people | 37 |
| Don’t know | 13 |

Source: [Obshestvennoe, 2002, p.159]

Surprisingly, only 15 years after the demolition of the iron curtain, the idea of cultural separation from the rest of the world has made an appeal to at least half of the population. In the same survey, when asked “Is it important for Russia to “join” world culture and to adopt the life style of the majority of developed countries”, over half of respondents have replied either that “it is not important” or “we should not strive for this purpose at all” [Obshestvennoe, 2002].

Tab. 15 Is it important for Russia to “join” world culture and to adopt the life style of the majority of developed countries (2000)?

| | % of respondents |
|---|------------------|
| Yes, it is important | 38 |
| No, it is not important | 31 |
| We should not strive for this purpose at all. | 20 |
| Don't know | 11 |

Source: [Obshestvennoe, 2002, p.160]

The increasing popularity of the idea of Russia's unique way of development has also resulted in the rise of xenophobic sentiments which became obvious in the late 1990s. For instance, during 1998-2004 the proportion of those who entirely or partly support the slogan “Russia for Russians only” increased from 46% to 59%, while the share of the opponents of this idea declined from 32% to 25% (Tab. 16).

Tab. 16 How do you feel about idea “Russia for Russians only” (% of respondents responded)?

| | 1998 | 2002 | 2004 |
|--|------|------|------|
| I support it entirely | 15 | 17 | 22 |
| It will be good to realize it, but within certain limits | 31 | 38 | 37 |
| I feel negative: this is a real fascism | 32 | 28 | 25 |
| I don't care or never thought about it | 22 | 17 | 17 |

Source: [Obshestvennoe, 2004, p.141]

Accordingly, in the religious sphere, the beginning of the third millennium has been symbolized by a new tendency: an increasingly negative popular perception of not only “non-traditional” or “foreign,” but all “other” (than Orthodox Christian) religions. In the all-Russian survey in September 2002, 51% of Russians supported the actions of state authorities directed against the Roman Catholic clergy in Russia. In a public opinion poll in Moscow in March 2002, half of the respondents were of the view that Islam is a religion which is hostile to Orthodox Christianity. [Obshestvennoe, 2002, p.148].

The future of religious tolerance and inter-religious relations in Russia is a difficult and controversial question. In a largely agnostic society, most people do not think in “religious categories.” Therefore being asked straight-forwardly about their feelings with regard to the followers of various religions Russians demonstrate reasonably high level of tolerance (Tab. 17).

Tab. 17 What are your feelings with regard to the followers of the following religions (% of respondents, 2004)

| | Sympathy and/or respect | Fear and/or hostility | Contradictory feelings or don't know |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Orthodox Christians | 83 | 0 | 17 |
| Catholics | 75 | 6 | 19 |
| Protestants | 62 | 11 | 27 |
| Muslims | 59 | 17 | 24 |

| | | | |
|----------------------|----|----|----|
| Jews | 57 | 15 | 28 |
| “Oriental” religions | 58 | 13 | 29 |
| Atheists | 62 | 13 | 25 |

On the other hand, in the multicultural society religion can serve as one of the criteria and a label to distinguish between “good us” and “bad them.” Accordingly, in Russia the sudden expressions of religious intolerance can always be associated with the growing inter-ethnic tensions (Tab. 18 and 19).

Tab. 18 Do you agree that ethnic minorities have accumulated too much power in Russia (% of respondents)?

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| | 2004 |
| “Yes” or “rather yes” | 47 |
| “No” or “rather no” | 44 |
| I do not know | 8 |

Source: [Obshestvennoe, 2004, p.139]

Tab 19 Do you agree that the influence of Jews must be limited in the state administration, politics, business, legislation and education system (% of respondents)?

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| | 2004 |
| “Yes” or “rather yes” | 49 |
| “No” or “rather no” | 41 |
| I do not know | 10 |

Source: [Obshestvennoe, 2004, p.139]

5. Some Concluding Remarks: Where Russia is Heading?

In the previously cited article, Lawrence Uzzell arrives at the conclusion that today Russia “is reviving the old habit of treating every social institution, whether secular or religious, as if it were an extension of the state.” [Uzzell, 2004]. In this context, current conditions of religious liberty in Russian society are characterized by three most distinctive features:

- 1) After the short period of the situation of the “free religious market” regulated only by the natural competition between various churches, Russia returned to the historically more familiar pattern of different treatment of various religious organizations by the secular authorities: support for some and discrimination (direct or indirect) against the others;
- 2) Today the mainstream national leaders of Russia’s major religious communities and organizations are not only incapable or afraid but also unwilling to criticize the policies of state authorities on any issues the Kremlin considers important. In return for their ultimate and unquestionable loyalty the Russian state discriminates in favor of these mainstream leaders both against other (“new,” “foreign,” etc) religions and against rivals within their own religious communities.

3) "Religious freedom" is seen by the Russian state authorities not as a fundamental and unconditional principle, but rather as something which can be granted or taken back depending on circumstances.

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Attachment 1 Religious Communities registered by the state in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (01.01.1991) and in Russian Federation (01.01.2004) (*)

Above - the absolute number; Below (Italic, in brackets) - the share (%) of religions and churches in the total of religious communities.

| | Russia, 1991 | Russia 2004 | Changes in 1991-2004: 1991=100% |
|--|--|--|--|
| Total number of all religious communities | 6.650 <i>(100.0)</i> | 21.664 <i>(100.0)</i> | 326 |
| Orthodox (Eastern Christian) Churches | 3.772 <i>(56.7)</i> | 12.006 <i>(55.4)</i> | 318 |
| including: - Russian Orthodox Church - Patriarchate Moscow - Communities of Orthodox Old Believers | 3.442 <i>(51.8)</i> 265 <i>(4.0)</i> | 11.525 <i>(53.2)</i> 284 <i>(1.3)</i> | 335 107 |
| Roman Catholic Church | 34 <i>(0.5)</i> | 248 <i>(1.1)</i> | 729 |
| Protestant Churches and Denominations, including: - Baptist Churches (incl. Evangelical Christians) - Pentecostal Churches (including Charismatic Churches) - Church of Jehovah's Witnesses - Adventist Churches (Seventh Day Adventists mainly) - Lutheran Churches - Presbyterian Church - Methodist Church - New Apostolic Church - Church of Christ | 1.853 <i>(27.9)</i> 991 <i>(14.9)</i> 300 <i>(4.5)</i> 92 <i>(1.4)</i> 185 <i>(2.8)</i> 177 <i>(2.7)</i> 1 <i>(0.0)</i> 2 <i>(0.0)</i> 0 <i>(0.0)</i> 0 <i>(0.0)</i> | 4.924 <i>(22.7)</i> 1.677 <i>(7.7)</i> 1.531 <i>(7.1)</i> 386 <i>(1.8)</i> 646 <i>(3.0)</i> 219 <i>(1.0)</i> 176 <i>(0.8)</i> 105 <i>(0.5)</i> 81 <i>(0.4)</i> 26 <i>(0.1)</i> | 266 169 510 420 349 124 17600 5250 n/a n/a |
| Islam | 914 <i>(13.7)</i> | 3.537 <i>(16.3)</i> | 387 |

| | | | |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Judaism | 34 <i>(0.5)</i> | 267 <i>(1.2)</i> | 785 |
| Buddhism | 16 <i>(0.2)</i> | 192 <i>(0.9)</i> | 1200 |
| Other Religious Organizations, including: | 27 <i>(0.4)</i> | 490 <i>(2.3)</i> | 1814 |
| - Hare Krishna (International Society for Krishna Consciousness),- Baha'i World Faith | 9 <i>(0.1)</i> | 80 <i>(0.4)</i> | 888 |
| - Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) | 1 <i>(0.0)</i> | 20 <i>(0.1)</i> | 2000 |
| | 0 <i>(0.0)</i> | 50 <i>(0.2)</i> | n/a |

(*) **“Religious Communities”** = places of regular public worship + administrative centers of religious organizations + monasteries + religious brotherhoods +theological educational institutions

Sources of data: a) 1991 - annual report of “Council for Religious Affairs attached to the Council of Ministers of the USSR” (“Sovet po delam religij pri sovete ministrov SSSR”), unpublished; b) 2004 - Ministry of Justice of Russia, department for affairs of public and religious organizations: statistic of state registration of religious organizations (unpublished).

http://reviews.cnet.com/Nokia_3560_cellular_phone_AMPS_D_AMPS/4014-6454_7-30569127.html?cmd=add&tag=bc&zip=94709