

Eastern Orthodoxy, Geopolitics and the 2016 ‘Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church’

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Abstract

In March 2014, at the time of Russia’s takeover of Crimea, the heads of fourteen Orthodox churches convened under the leadership of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the Istanbul-based *primus inter pares* in Eastern Orthodoxy, and announced that a ‘Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church’ would be held in 2016. The Synod, which took place in June 2016 in Crete, was a unique ecclesiastical gathering bringing together competing geopolitical visions of religion, state and power. This article examines the political mobilisation of Orthodox churches by contextualising the holding of the Synod in relation to Russia’s advancement of spiritual security after the end of the Cold War. It provides a textual analysis of Synodical documents and highlights patterns of religious and political structures in the contemporary Eastern Orthodox world.

Introduction

Eastern Orthodoxy is a fellowship of fourteen Orthodox churches mainly situated in Eastern Europe, Eurasia, North Africa and the Middle East, with a worldwide membership of around 262 million, namely: 1. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, Turkey; 2. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, Egypt; 3. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, Syria; 4. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Israel; 5. The Russian Orthodox Church; 6. The Serbian Orthodox Church; 7. The Romanian Orthodox Church; 8. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church; 9. The Georgian Orthodox Church; 10. The Orthodox Church of Cyprus; 11. The Orthodox Church of Greece; 12. The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania; 13. The Polish Orthodox Church; and 14. The Orthodox Church in the Czech Lands and Slovakia. Its origins date back to the first divisions in the Christian world, notably the 1054 split which led to the Orthodox and Catholic branches of Christianity, the 1453 fall of Constantinople under Ottoman rule and the rise of national Orthodox churches in light of state-building processes in nineteenth century Eastern and Southeastern Europe.¹ The intricate relationship, central to the religion, at the state level, between religious and political structures and the daunting linguistic barriers thrown up by its large geographical scope, have made Eastern Orthodoxy one of the least studied and largely misunderstood world religions.

After the end of the Cold War, Eastern Orthodoxy has featured regularly in the mass media. In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel Huntington reinforced the Western imaginary of Eastern Christian churches. To the question ‘Where does Europe end?’ Huntington responded, ‘Europe ends where Western Christianity ends and Islam and Orthodoxy begin’. He argued that the concept of the individual, the promotion of human rights, and the holding of free elections were alien concepts to the Eastern Orthodox world. These assumptions were based on Russia’s trajectory after the fall of communism, when the state began to expand its political influence through religious values. Huntington observed that, together with five other former Soviet states (Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia), Russia was building an ‘Orthodox bloc’ which challenged the construction of a secular European Union. He also placed Bulgaria and Romania in the same ‘Orthodox space’,

foreseeing that, due to the predominant Orthodox culture in both of these countries, the enlargement of the European Union would most likely not include them.²

Throughout the last two decades, Huntington's 'fault lines' have haunted the academic and public policy communities. The post-1992 conflict in the former Yugoslavia, which linked Serbian Orthodoxy to political nationalism, became synonymous with violence, ethnic cleansing and forced displacement. By contrast, the 2013 Euromaidan protests in Kiev saw an attempt to alleviate conflict, with members of the clergy placing themselves between demonstrators and the police. Ukraine has three Orthodox churches competing for national status and a government strongly endorsing an independent church outside Moscow's jurisdiction. In Crimea, the cradle of Russian Orthodoxy, and the Donbass region in eastern Ukraine, non-Orthodox communities faced difficulties in registering with the new authorities. Ukrainian clergymen were forced to leave the occupied territories while the Muslim Tatar community was persecuted. The direct engagement of religious communities with forced displacement has taken a dramatic turn in the post-2011 Syrian conflict. An unprecedented number of displaced people crossed the Aegean Sea, making their journey through predominantly-Orthodox countries of Southeastern Europe.

In March 2014, at the time of Russia's takeover of Crimea, the heads of all Orthodox churches convened under the leadership of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the Istanbul-based *primus inter pares* of the Orthodox commonwealth, and announced that a 'Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church' would be held in 2016. The Synod had been 'in preparation' since 1923 when the Ecumenical Patriarchate advanced for the first time the idea of bringing together Orthodox churches. In 2014, the decision to hold the Synod was historic. Some scholars even claimed that the 2016 Synod could be regarded as a successor to the Second Council of Nicaea, the last major pan-denominational summit of Christian churches, which took place in 787 CE.

The Synod took place in June 2016 on the island of Crete, however, one week before the official opening, four churches (the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Patriarchate of Antioch, the Georgian Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church), despite attending the preliminary meetings and being closely engaged in its preparation, refused to attend. The discordant note was evident one month later, when a number of clergy in the Russian Orthodox Church declared that a 'true' pan-Orthodox Synod could only be held in Moscow, a narrative reminiscent of the Cold War period. By focusing on the political mobilisation of Orthodox churches, this article argues that the 2016 Synod demonstrated the interconnectedness between transnational religious alliances on security and geopolitics in the Eastern Orthodox world. It applies a textual, qualitative analysis of Synodical documents to offer insights into religious structures, political power and social hierarchies in contemporary Eastern Orthodoxy.

Eastern Orthodoxy and Spiritual Security

The relationship between religion and security is highly contested in international relations with religion often regarded as a 'national security enigma'.³ The theory of security, also known as the securitization theory, shifts the focus from offensive/defensive realism (threats, control, military capabilities and forces) to the study and implementation of discourses.⁴ Religion plays not only a role in societal cohesion but also determines actors' preferences, building international alliances, diplomacy and more widely the nature of international society.⁵ Religion projects a societal security dimension and acts as a transnational security framework which endorses authority, mobilisation and geopolitical ambitions.⁶ Religion is directly linked to the concept of 'sustainable security' which places emphasis on the promotion of strategies in relation to insecurities. Chris Seiple *et al* argue that '*sustainable security* [is] defined not merely as the absence of imminent threats to physical safety but also as the presence

of the conditions (socio-economic, political, psychological and spiritual) necessary for long-term stability and well-being'.⁷ Religion is thus one of the main factors of security, closely linked to other issues such as climate change, resources competition, economic and cultural marginalisation, and military technology.⁸

While most scholars in international relations have focused on the securitisation of Islam in the context of the post-1979 Iranian Revolution and 9/11,⁹ there is virtually no research on the securitisation of Eastern Orthodoxy. The religious and political structure of Eastern Orthodoxy enables a unique form of geopolitics which takes into account the security and insecurities of not only local religious actors but, more importantly, of state authorities.¹⁰ Throughout the Eastern Orthodox world, the fall of the Iron Curtain was followed by a strengthening of relations between the religious and political leadership. For example, in 1990, church leaders became members of national parliaments. Churches benefited not only from state recognition in working closely with the political authorities but also enjoyed significant property restitution and financial support. In Greece, in 2014, the Church retained its extensive property ownership despite protests that finance raised through property sales could be used towards overcoming the economic crisis. The extent of financial changes was evident, in Bulgaria, in 2016, when the Church officially became the second largest land owner, after the state.

The most dynamic interplay between Orthodoxy and security has been evident in Russia, with the Church being described by Marcel H. Van Herpen as 'the Kremlin's secret weapon'.¹¹ As Christopher Marsh has argued in an article published in 2014, this relationship is particularly evident in the following examples: '1. Assigning protector-saints to the Strategic Rocket Forces and individual tank battalions; 2. Using religious symbols in official and unofficial military/security capacities; 3. Constructing chapels on the premises of Russian governmental agencies; 4. Involving the Patriarch in the inaugural ceremonies of presidents Yeltsin, Putin and Medvedev'.¹² Most importantly, the Russian Church has access to draft legislation prepared for the Duma and legal provisions pertaining to the state-building process. The Church and the Russian Foreign Ministry work together on various issues from appointing clergy abroad to dealing with judicial cases and organising joint events.¹³ Marsh's examples, all of which are at the national level, supplement those with a geopolitical, international impact such as: 1. The consecration of the Saint George Chapel at the Khmeimim Syrian airbase in September 2016; 2. The rise of a small paramilitary group known as 'the Russian Orthodox Army' in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Despite using this terminology, the paramilitary group is not supported by the Moscow Patriarchate; 3. The blessing by Russian clergy of tanks and trucks crossing from Russia into eastern Ukraine and Crimea; 4. The advancement of 'traditional values' and the *Russkiy Mir* (Russian world) in developing the Eurasian Economic Union; 5. The building of Orthodox centres in the West advancing Orthodox-state relations, such as the inauguration of the Russian Cultural and Spiritual Centre in Paris in 2016; 6. Visits by high ranking clergy in the name of cultural and political diplomacy in the Western world, including Patriarch Kirill's trips not only to Britain, France and Italy but more widely to Latin America and, for the first time, to Russia's scientific station on the Island of Waterloo in the Antarctic (2016-17); 7. The use of Saint Seraphim of Sarov's relics in Russia's space programme publicising the uniqueness of Orthodox spirituality and the image of Russia as a world superpower at the International Space Station in 2016 and 2017.

A close link between religion and security is commonly present in Russian governmental documents. The 2015 'Russian Federation National Security Strategy' approved by Presidential Edict 683 on 31 December includes unusual terminology with regard to religion and security. The document presents eight 'threats to state and public security', namely: '1. intelligence and other activity by special services and organizations of foreign states; 2. the activities of terrorist and extremist organizations [...]; 3. the activities of radical public

associations and groups using nationalist and religious extremist ideology [...] -- including through inciting “colour revolutions” - and destroying traditional Russian religious and moral values [...]; 4. the activities of criminal organizations and groups [...]; 5. the use of information and communication technologies; 6. criminal offenses [...]; 7. corruption; and, 8. natural disasters [...].’ The order and hierarchy of these security threats is particularly striking. Thus, in third place, activities related to religion are on a par with preventing ‘colour revolutions’, granting them more importance than tackling ‘criminal organisations’ and ‘corruption’. The document goes further to examine ‘The long-term national strategic interests’ of the Russian Federation. In this section, issues related to religious and spiritual values are given a more prominent position than the ‘national economy’ and ‘consolidating the Russian Federation’s status as a leading world power’; however, according to the order of this section religion is less important than ‘strengthening the country’s defence’ (in first place), ‘political and social stability’ and ‘raising living standards’.¹⁴

What do the terms ‘religion’ and ‘spiritual’ mean in the 2015 ‘Russian Federation National Security Strategy’? In this document, the word ‘church’ is entirely absent, however, the word ‘spiritual’ is used twelve times while the word ‘religion/religious’ nine times. A similar pattern is visible in Ukraine’s 2003 ‘Law on National Security’, with the words ‘spiritual/spirituality’ present four times, the word ‘churches’ once, and the word ‘religious/religion’ four times. In the 2009 ‘National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia’, the word ‘spiritual’ is missing, however, the word ‘church/churches’ appears four times with the word ‘religious/religion’ twenty-two times. The 2007 ‘National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia’ uses the word ‘spiritual’ five times; the word ‘religion’ is entirely absent, while the strategy includes a specific reference to ‘support the spiritual, moral, social and cultural activities of the Armenian Apostolic Church’. However, all of these references to religion and spirituality are in contrast to the 2015 ‘National Security Strategy’ of Romania, where the words ‘spirituality’ and ‘church’ are completely missing, while the word ‘religious’ is present only three times. None of these documents includes a definition of the words ‘spiritual’ or ‘religion’.

The only document which makes a clear connection between ‘spiritual values’ and their national impact is the ‘Russian Federation National Security Strategy’. The subchapter on ‘Russia and the Modern World’ states that,

‘Traditional Russian spiritual and moral values are being revived. A proper attitude toward Russia’s history is being shaped in the rising generation. We are seeing the consolidation of civil society around the common values that shape the foundations of statehood such as Russia’s freedom and independence, humanism, interethnic peace and accord, the unity of the cultures of the Russian Federation’s multi-ethnic people, respect for family and faith traditions, and patriotism’.

This extensive use of the word ‘spiritual’ indicates the value attached to concepts of religion and security in Russia.¹⁵ Despite other countries using similar terms in their national security strategies, promoting ‘spiritual security’ denotes a close link between religion and geopolitics. The concept of ‘spiritual security’ thus has a broader meaning which relates not only to protecting the modern state-building process, state institutions and church-state relations but more importantly to advancing Russia’s image in international affairs and its recognition as a world power.

The idea of ‘spiritual security’ dates back to 1992 and Russian legislation of national security. The term was first employed to emphasise ‘spiritual values’ in opposition to the Soviet atheist form of security. The concept acquired a new interpretation during the Putin regime (1999-present day) and has regularly been presented as opposing traditional patterns of church-state relations in modern Western Europe. The realms of religion and politics have been delineated in the West as part of the separation of religion and state. This is not the case in

Eastern Orthodoxy. Due to the ways in which Eastern Orthodoxy is structured in autocephalous (independent) ecclesiastical units in the construction of sovereign nation states, churches remain involved not only in human and social security but also provide a link to international security by building alliances, conveying diplomatic messages and projecting state power.

In Eastern Orthodoxy, transnational boundaries are diffuse and involve both religious and state interests, promoting a thin line between the 'spiritual' and 'sustainable' types of security. For example, in 2015, the Patriarchate of Antioch, despite the ongoing war in Syria, engaged in a dispute involving an Orthodox community in Qatar. In 2013, the Romanian Church severed relations with its counterpart in Jerusalem due to a property dispute; through the direct support of the Romanian government, ecclesiastical relations were restored. There has been constant tension between the Russian Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate regarding recognition of new Orthodox churches and church property in both Eastern and Western Europe. In 2003, Igor Ivanov, the Russian Foreign Minister visited the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Budapest, the oldest Orthodox church in Hungary, at a time when its ownership was disputed between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In 2004, the Hungarian Court confirmed Moscow's jurisdiction over the Cathedral in Budapest. Other examples of the nexus between Orthodoxy and security have been evident in the ways in which the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegro Orthodox Church condemned Montenegro's intention of joining NATO. There have been regular meetings between Serbian and Russian top clergy, not only protesting against military forces in the former Yugoslavia but also in addressing religious disputes in relation to the Serbian community in Macedonia. In 2015, after Metropolitan Hilarion visited Skopje, where he met both religious figures and state officials, Archbishop Jovan, head of a local church who had asked for closer ties with the Belgrade Patriarchate rather than a national Macedonian church, was released from prison and went to Russia rather than Serbia.

The 'Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church' (18-27 June 2016)

The decision to hold the 'Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church' can thus be considered as the result of a close relationship between Eastern Orthodox churches, security and geopolitics. The direct involvement of Orthodox actors in building alliances, conveying diplomatic messages and, more importantly, projecting state power were prominent in agreeing the agenda and negotiating the final texts. The stakes were high. If adopted by all churches, the Synod would have had the possibility of rewriting not only a number of significant ecclesiastical jurisdictions (the canonical territory of churches) but the ways in which states and security would be defined along Orthodox lines. Issues concerning religious missions, diaspora, autonomy/autocephaly and diptychs (the order of priority of the churches in their liturgical commemoration) meant that the Synod represented not only the gathering of fourteen churches but also the recognition and establishment of new religious communities outside traditional centres of religious power. It was no surprise that these issues remained contentious through the process of finalising the agenda.

The 2016 Synod, therefore, took place amid dramatic religious and political tension in the Eastern Orthodox world with regard to structures of influence and authority. Notably, although the announcement to hold the Synod came in March 2014, at the time of Russia's takeover of Crimea, no Orthodox churches condemned its annexation. The Istanbul meeting (6-9 March 2014) agreed that an Inter-Orthodox Committee under the leadership of Metropolitan John Zizioulas from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, one of the leading Orthodox theologians, should meet and finalise the agenda. Initially, the Synod was scheduled to be held in Istanbul in Saint Irene Church, near Topkapi Palace, where the Second Ecumenical Synod was held in 381.¹⁶ However, after Turkey shot down a Russian military plane in November

2015, increasing political tension between the two countries, the location was moved to the Orthodox Academy in Crete, an unusual setting with no particular historical symbolism for the history of Eastern Orthodoxy, but largely chosen to accommodate the Russian clergy.

Discussions with a view to agreeing the agenda indicated a polarisation of churches in line with the interests of the main religious actors. Ukraine, which has three Orthodox churches, was regularly included on the ‘unwritten’ agenda of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church, the two main Orthodox players. President Poroshenko’s call for a unified national Ukrainian Orthodox Church which would stand in opposition to the Moscow Patriarchate was not officially supported by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the only church which has the authority to grant autocephaly in the Orthodox commonwealth. The polarisation between Orthodox factions was visible in 2015 when the Bulgarian Orthodox Church sent a letter to President Poroshenko condemning the discrimination of the Russian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate. The letter went against diplomatic protocol as heads of churches are required to express their positions via diplomatic channels in their own countries rather than by directing contacting the heads of other states. By sending the letter, the Bulgarian church acted as an international state actor with its own geopolitical ambitions, in this sense supporting the ‘spiritual security’ model advanced by Moscow.

The agreed topics to be discussed at the Synod related closely to the ways in which states engaged with the concept of security. Initially, the Synod was due to discuss ten themes which were agreed at the First Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference held at Chambésy, Switzerland between 2 and 8 November 1976, namely: 1. Orthodox Diaspora; 2. Autocephaly and its manner of proclamation. 3. Autonomy and its manner of proclamation; 4. Diptychs. 5. The new calendar. 6. Impediments to marriage 7. Adapting church dispositions concerning fasting 8. Relations between the Orthodox Church and the rest of the Christian world 9. Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement. 10. The contribution of local Orthodox Churches to the ideals of peace, freedom, brotherhood and love among people and the removal of racial discrimination.¹⁷ The agenda was revised at the Synaxis of primates held in Chambésy, Switzerland between 21 and 28 January 2016 which decided that each church would be represented by 24 bishops and six advisors and that only six topics would be discussed, namely:

‘(1) The Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Contemporary World, (2) The Orthodox Diaspora, (3) Autonomy and its Manner of Proclamation, (4) The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments, (5) The Significance of Fasting and its Application Today, and (6) Relations between the Orthodox Church and the Rest of the Christian World’.¹⁸

The order in which these topics were listed was important as it emphasised the three most controversial issues directly linked to security, namely the mission of the church, diaspora and autonomy. The draft documents were discussed among clergy and lay scholars highlighting possible misinterpretations. The Orthodox Theological Society in America set up a special project on the Synod supported by Fordham University with academics regularly contributing to debates.¹⁹ In Greece, a group of theologians affiliated with the Thessaloniki-based Centre for Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies ‘Metropolitan Panteleimon Papageorgiou’ noted that the section on ‘Peace and the Aversion of War’ included a reference to ‘military manoeuvres’ at times of conflict and state security, which could be interpreted as supporting the position of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine.²⁰ Furthermore, the documents on diaspora and autonomy proved problematic. ‘The Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Contemporary World’, was widely criticised by lay scholars, many arguing that it read as a reminder of Cold War propaganda rather than as a new interpretation of Orthodoxy’s engagement in the world.²¹

Ukraine seemed to be key to the final agenda. At the Chambésy meeting in January 2016, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow was accompanied by Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev, the head

of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under Moscow's jurisdiction, which put direct pressure on the other church leaders to recognise his authority in Ukraine. With only a few weeks before the official inauguration of the Synod, a number of churches aligned themselves into a distinct bloc. On 1 June, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church issued a synodical decision stating that it would not attend the Synod due to 'thematic and organisational changes'.²² The Bulgarian 'thematic changes' were linked to the view put forward during discussions in April 2016 condemning the possibility of making reference to the term 'Church' as a distinct ecclesiastical entity for religious communities outside the Orthodox world.²³ In practice, this meant that no other Christian communities were entitled to be called 'Church', a position endorsing Orthodox anti-Westernism and the uniqueness of the 'spiritual security' model advanced by Russia. On 6 June, the Patriarchate of Antioch in Damascus declared that due to a number of unresolved jurisdictional issues with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and due to the fact that its leadership did not sign the communiques of some Inter-Orthodox meetings, the Church would also refrain from attending the Synod.²⁴ On 10 June, the Georgian Orthodox Church declared that due to the absence of the Bulgarian and Antioch Patriarchate, it would also not attend the Synod.²⁵ As a result, on 13 June, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church issued a statement that it took note of the refusal of the three churches and decided to follow the same course, condemning the Ecumenical Patriarchate for continuing with the Synod despite their absence. In the following weeks, the Serbian and Romanian Orthodox churches oscillated between the Moscow and Ecumenical patriarchates and agreed at the last minute to send representatives to Crete. Support for continuing with the Synod was particularly strong from lay structures, with a letter attracting the signatures of over 1,300 academic scholars.²⁶

The decision of the four churches not to attend the Synod, despite taking part in the preparation process in the previous years, was coupled with geopolitics, and in particular the religious situation in Ukraine.²⁷ Political overtones became public when five days before its official opening, 245 members of the Ukrainian Parliament voted in a resolution asking the Ecumenical Patriarchate to approve an independent national church on its territory, outside Moscow's jurisdiction.²⁸ The Synod decided not to address the Ukrainian request and none of its documents made reference to international ecclesiastical disputes. The Ukrainian Parliament's resolution was unprecedented. It demonstrated the determination of Ukrainian political actors in securing an independent church by timing their decision to coincide with the Synod. The presence of the Russian Church at the Synod would, most likely, have impacted upon the advancement of 'spiritual security', as church hierarchs, faced with a large number of mass media outlets across the world, would have had to have to address publicly the religious divisions and the military conflict in Ukraine.

Furthermore, the absence of Russian hierarchs suggested that the meeting with Pope Francis at Havana airport in Cuba just a few months earlier was a more strategic event than the Synod. By meeting the pope, the Kremlin offered an alternative image of itself. The soft power of the patriarch-pope meeting may entail effective geopolitical advantages with particular reference to reducing Western sanctions against Russia.²⁹ The decision to withdraw from the Synod was presented by the international mass media as a 'national' affair, relating exclusively to the four churches. The national characteristic paralleled similar developments in Europe taking place at the same time, in particular the unexpected results of the Brexit referendum.³⁰ Religious solidarity in Bulgaria, Syria and Georgia showed the long arm of Moscow's geopolitics. The actions of the Russian Orthodox Church, indicated that 'spiritual security' was no longer a national issue but could mobilise religious actors abroad advancing Russian foreign policy and geopolitics.³¹

Following the meeting in Crete, the Synod issued eight documents published in Greek, English, Russian and French, namely: 1. 'Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church'; 2. 'Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church'; 3.

authorities, Orthodox churches act as security providers, either at the society or at the political level, promoting their own geopolitical interests and following those of their state governments.

Russia's advancement of spiritual security after the end of the Cold War has been connected not only with state survival and transformation within the international state system but, more importantly, with its self-projection as a world power. The advancement of the idea of *Russkiy Mir*, coupled with the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the issue of clarifying its canonical territory are key factors in defining Russia's current geopolitics. The promotion of spiritual security in Russia at the expense of sustainable security has an impact on the sacralisation of politics in the Eastern Orthodox world. The relationship between Orthodoxy and security has highlighted the thin line between religion and geopolitics in the region, and the ways in which churches engage in both 'sustainable' and 'spiritual' types of security. Ultimately, state regimes have the final word on which type of security is the most appropriate in relation to religion.

Religion, state interests and diplomacy form an intricate relationship in the Eastern Orthodox world. The 2016 Synod confirmed that Eastern Orthodoxy is no longer confined to fourteen Orthodox churches but has a wider geopolitical dimension. The diversity of Eastern Orthodoxy and the close link between spiritual security and state politics are key factors regarding how future religious structures develop. Despite not on the official agenda of the Synod, the recognition of a national Ukrainian Church, the plight of Orthodox communities in the Middle East, and the migration of refugees affected the decisions adopted by the meeting. While it remains unclear if the 2016 Synod will be recognised as a counterpart to the first century Ecumenical Councils which defined the organisational structure of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, its impact will be evident in the ways in which states engage with Orthodox churches. The Synod proved to be not merely a 'church' matter but, more importantly an assessment of 'lands', 'organisations' and 'institutions', denoting the engagement of worldwide Orthodoxy with international affairs.

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