RELIGION AND POLITICS:
A COMPLEX GEOPOLITICAL GREEK – RUSSIAN RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract: The paper highlights the complexity, that historically rules the Greek – Russian relation on both, state and Church level, resulting from a multi-lev-eled interaction among actors, whose institutional authority is not clearly defi-ned, whereas spiritual and cultural purposes are interweaving with political aspirations and personal intentions. From an epistemological perspective two distinguishable patterns are demonstrated: a. a pattern showing how religious-cultural and political components interweave in the implemented policy and how cultural particularities are instrumentalized in order to gain direct political results, and b. a pattern of an primarily cultural procedure, developing irrespec-tive of political or diplomatic tensions and discontinuities, while it establishing economic and cultural links of special gravity, generating in a long term a signifi-cant geopolitical effect.

Key words: Greek – Russian relations - Religious tourism - Greek Orthodox Church - Russian Church – Systemic Geopolitics - political & economic geopo-litical pillar

1. Introduction

Following two recently occurred facts, the political discourse about a potential Russian intervention in the Greek financial crisis, as well as the experienced in-crease of Russian pilgrims to Greece, the aim of the present paper is to outline some particularities, ruling the Greek – Russian relations, with regard to the cultural / religious and political pillar of geopolitical influence in the analytical framework of Systemic Geopolitics.¹

To that purpose three different cases are presented and assessed: a. the con-

¹. Within the framework of Systemic Geopolitics power is reflected, as a resultant of four, ontologically distinct pillars: 1. Defensive, 2. Economic, 3. Political, and 4. Cul-tural / Pillar of information.
nection between religious belief and tourism and the development of religious tourism in Greece, b. the attempt of a collaboration between Greek and Russian Church in order to develop the property of the former, and c. The undermining by the Russian Church of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church combined with Putin’s visit to Athos.

2. Religion affecting tourist behaviour: An Orthodox and Jewish exception

2.1. Religious tourism - the socio-political parameters

History has made clear the idea that “pilgrimage” always motivated people to travel, inducing in a sense “touristic” flow, while some scientists even believe that modern tourism was born by the tradition of pilgrimage.2

Religious tourism is being defined as that type of tourism whose participants are motivated either in part or exclusively by religious reasons. It includes the visit to religious ceremonies and conferences, primarily the visit to local, regional, national, and international religious centers3 and it could just as well be a subcategory of cultural tourism.4

The socio-professional structure of organized pilgrims’ groups in Lourdes shows that those independently employed, as well as people of a higher education level, are not well represented. Certain religious activities and forms of expression, for example, the pilgrimage journey, tend to diminish in proportion to a rising standard of living. Pilgrims from the rural areas of France are represented rather heavily. In Hinduism, the high castes (Brahman included) are well represented in contrast to those of the lower castes. Certainly, this differs from site to site. By no means should the pilgrimage structure be seen as a direct reflection of the social structure of the catchment area. The very small percentage of the rural Hindu population who can make a pilgrimage journey in winter is astonishing (Bhardwaj 1973; Morinis 1984).5 Furthermore, religious tourism has a strong affinity to social and group tourism as well. For many tourists today, it is very important to travel with a group of believers who think similarly and who are consequently in the same age division. In developing countries (notably within Christian and Hindu faiths) family groups define the combinations of pilgrims more than friends do (Morinis 1984).6

2. S. Polyzos, “Religious Tourism in Greece and a contribution to the development of the disadvantageous regions”, Research papers, 16 (2010) 9, p. 206
4. Ibid., p. 53.
5. Ibid., p. 63.
6. Ibid., p. 53.
Religious tourism has political aspects as well, since numerous religious sites are at the same time national sites. Guadalupe representing the all of Mexico and the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem for all of Judaism are two examples. August 13 has a similar significance in Fatima, Portugal, when hundreds of thousands of guest-workers from all over Europe return to their homeland. A national meeting takes then place in celebration of all Portuguese living abroad. At many pilgrimage sites in the recent or still totalitarian countries, the oppressed church and population had the opportunity to meet over a pilgrimage journey to discuss religious and national problems. The Saudi Arabian government attempts to keep the pilgrimage to Mecca free of political overtones in an attempt to not further endanger the Islamic world, in the midst of its numerous social issues and crises.7

2.2. Religion as a factor explaining tourist behavior

Investigating the impact of religious affiliations on international tourism flows, Johan Fourie, Jaume Roselló and María Santana-Gallego analysed a dataset of 164 countries as both origin and destination of tourists from 1995 to 2010 and their results indicated that sharing a common major and/or a common minor religion has a positive impact on tourism flows.8

The contribution of religion to the touristic allure of a region has received some attention in the literature, although with sparse formal and quantitative research and a focus mainly on particular case studies of pilgrimage to sacred places. Using a standard gravity model, Fourie, Roselló & Santana-Gallego show that religious affiliation is a significant factor in determining global tourism flows. These large tendencies cannot be explained simply as the result of specific religious attractions or events.9

Their results suggest that, over and above clear religious motives, tourists exhibit a religious affinity in their choice of destination. This supports new evidence which shows that tourists prefer to visit destinations that share some cultural and historical similarities with their home countries.10

As this paper demonstrates using a standard gravity model, religion is, over and above its direct impact in the form of specific events or places of worship, an important determinant of global tourism;11 a powerful factor that has power in explaining tourist behavior, no matter it motivates or constrains the tourist’s destination choice.

7. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 11.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., pp. 9-10.
Their main contribution is their suggestion that cultural bonds may be largely due to religious affiliation. They show that these religious bonds are global and applicable to the five major religions. While it may not surprise us that tourists tend to prefer destinations that practice the same religion as their own country, there is large variation between religions. In particular, other things equal, the more people from a pair of countries that share the Jewish, Muslim or Hindu beliefs, the greater the volume of tourism movements between them.\textsuperscript{12}

In the context of this research, it is significant to note that among the Christians, the religious similarity effect is particularly important in the case of Orthodox Christianity.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & OLSFE & \textsuperscript{2}WFE & OLSFE & \textsuperscript{2}WFE & OLSFE \\
\hline
Distance\textsubscript{i} & -1.516 & \textsuperscript{**} & -1.497 & \textsuperscript{**} & -1.556 & \textsuperscript{**} & -1.533 & \textsuperscript{**} & -1.500 & \textsuperscript{**} & -1.482 & \textsuperscript{**} \\
GDP\textsubscript{p1} & 0.645 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.646 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.649 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.649 \\
GDP\textsubscript{p2} & 0.211 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.205 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.206 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.206 \\
Colony\textsubscript{i} & 0.798 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.814 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.779 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.794 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.292 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.814 & \textsuperscript{**} \\
Language\textsubscript{i} & 1.106 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.091 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.179 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.162 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.797 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.065 & \textsuperscript{**} \\
Border\textsubscript{i} & 1.172 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.193 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.186 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.206 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.079 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.180 & \textsuperscript{**} \\
Relative PPP\textsubscript{i} & -0.294 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.298 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.158 & \\
Currency\textsubscript{i} & 1.281 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.333 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.232 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.282 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.271 & \textsuperscript{**} & 1.330 & \textsuperscript{**} \\
Island\textsubscript{i} & -0.259 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.261 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.216 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.218 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.278 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.280 & \textsuperscript{**} \\
Landlocked\textsubscript{i} & -0.340 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.326 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.344 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.331 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.348 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.332 & \textsuperscript{**} \\
Temperature\textsubscript{i} & 0.066 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.059 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.069 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.069 \\
Temperature\textsubscript{m} & -0.129 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.124 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.131 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.131 \\
Political Stability\textsubscript{i} & 0.149 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.148 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.148 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.148 \\
Political Stability\textsubscript{m} & 0.020 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.024 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.021 & \\
Political Rights\textsubscript{i} & -0.042 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.042 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.043 & \textsuperscript{**} & -0.043 \\
Political Rights\textsubscript{m} & -0.001 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.001 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.001 & \textsuperscript{**} \\
Major Religion\textsubscript{i} & 0.471 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.461 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.927 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.908 & \textsuperscript{**} \\
Minor Religion\textsubscript{i} & 0.109 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.136 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.311 & \textsuperscript{**} & 0.278 & \textsuperscript{**} \\
Similarity & & & & & & & & & & & \\
Diversity & & & & & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\text{Obs} & 125936 & 128271 & 125936 & 128271 & 125936 & 128271 & 125936 & 128271 \\
\text{F-test} & 2096.58 & 137.93 & 2062 & 135.47 & 2115.07 & 139.22 \\
\text{R2} & 0.8359 & 0.845 & 0.8334 & 0.8426 & 0.8372 & 0.8462 \\
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\end{tabular}
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Table 1: Effects of common religion on tourism,
FOURIE, ROSELLÓ AND SANTANA-GALLEGO, p. 17

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., pp. 11-12.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., pp. 11-12.
Fourie, Roselló and Santana-Gallego assume that the reason for this greater religious affinity of Jewish and Orthodox Christian adherents are, perhaps, the existence of greater numbers of religious relics in these countries which inspires larger flows of tourists. To their hypothesis another factor should be added for future research, namely the particular interconnection between the Orthodox Churches and their nation-states and the subsequent exploitation of religious tourist flows aiming power projection and political targets.

2.3. Religious tourism in Greece & the role of the Greek Orthodox Church

An estimated 300-600 million people visit religious sites yearly as part of an $18 billion industry has understandably mobilized the tourist centred Greek economy, trying to profit by the numerous religious sites, which (according to map 1) are surprisingly widespread all over the country.

This geographical distribution of the religious sites is the only remarkable existing statistical fact, since there are no official statistics about fundamental issues of the phenomenon, like visitor traffic or origin, the length of their stay, their age or education.

It has been so far estimated that the big majority of religious tourists visiting

14. Ibid.
Greece from abroad come mainly from orthodox countries of Eastern Europe, while the inland religious tourists are estimated to be over 300,000 a year. Furthermore, compared to other forms of general or alternative tourism, visitors to religious monuments have a different age composition, consisting mainly of older age groups.

Although there has been a positive response of the local communities in this form of tourism - which creates an additional advantage for further development - the general feeling was that cultural heritage was not linked to religion and that especially religious monuments of international recognition, such as Meteora or Patmos, have not been adequately promoted.

Map 1: Geographical distribution of the religious sites in Greece. POLYZOS, p. 218

17. Ibid., p. 217.
18. Ibid., p. 209.
20. Ibid.

Civitas Gentium 8:1 (2020)
This deficit seems to have changed in the last years, since the Greek Orthodox Church has taken serious initiatives, in order to attract religious visitors from the orthodox countries of Eastern Europe, above all from Russia.

These initiatives are being carried out in a technocratic level, promoting in a more professional and systematic way the religious sites. In this framework the Greek Church and the Greek State are cooperating since about 2008 in the direction of promoting the Greek religious tourist sites and developing central and regional cooperation with other orthodox institutions and companies from orthodox countries, above all from Russia. To this purpose, the Greek Church established the Synodical Office of pilgrimage tours and development of religious tourism, whose administration consists of professionals and members of clergy. During the last years, this office has presented remarkable activity, visiting numerous churches in Europe, and participating regularly in international tourist exhibitions. Parallel to the actions of this central ecclesiastic authority, systematic activities by the regional churches (metropoles), focused on the promotion of the local religious sites are recorded.

Furthermore, since end 2015 the public institutes for vocational training (IEK) in Thessaloniki offers a vocational training program entitled “Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Tours”, in order to train guides, specialized on supporting tour in religious monuments, Christian and Roman, Jewish and Muslim, not only in Greece but also in the Balkans, in Jerusalem and Russia. Expecting have many tourists from Russia and Israel, this training includes also the teaching of Russian.

Political & economic pillar: The attempting to involve Russian in the development of the Church property

Parallel to the touristic collaboration another procedure was carried on, namely a larger plan regarding the development of the immense church property. For this project, the Greek Archbishop Ieronymos initially encouraged the involvement and support of the Russian Orthodox Church. After a meeting with the Russian Patriarch Kyrillos, Ieronymos declared in June 2012 that the two clericals discussed ways of putting the property of the Greek Church to use. The head of the Greek Church mentioned the need to find trustworthy advisors, pointing out that experts coming from the patriarchic milieu or indicated by the Patriarchate of Moscow would be a warranted solution.
One month later, in July 2012, the Russian Patriarchate provided the Greek Church with an amount of over €500,000, in order to reinforce the Greek soup kitchen, promising that this would be only the first part of the Russian help and announcing at the same time the coordination of the Russian and Greek charity organizations, in order to help the Greek people afflicted by the crisis.

However, this process, indicating a stronger Greek – Russian cooperation and led by the two orthodox churches, was interrupted after the summer 2012. Instead of a Russian involvement, the Greek state and the Greek Church co-founded at the beginning of 2014 the «Company for the Development of Ecclesiastic Property», with a managing and advisory team which sought closer connections rather to the western world and market.

In addition to that, since spring 2014 a new tension between the Orthodox Churches of Russia and Greece seems to have emerged, as a result of the Ukraine Crisis. Archbishop Ieronymos’ decision to delay his visit to Moscow, has been interpreted by the Russian side as an action resulting from the western sanctions against Russia. As an immediate reaction, the powerful Russian Patriarch cancelled his long-established presence at the reception of the Greek Embassy on the occasion of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, raising questions about a potential negative impact on the religious tourism cooperation, with Greece being so far one of the popular Russian destination.

However, despite of the bankruptcy of several Russian tour-operators involved in the religious tourism market, the concerns of 2014 seem not to be confirmed, since the collaboration between the two Churches grew in the next two years. At this time, delegations of the Synodical Office of pilgrimage tours and development of religious tourism participated at several Greek – Russian touristic exhibitions, committees, and fora, having even the opportunity to meet the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Cyril.

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29. Ecclesia.gr, Official website of the Church of Greece.
4. Political & religious pillar: The Pan-Orthodox Council & Putin in Athos

The western high guests, heads of states or governments, usually visit Acropolis, showing in this way the importance of Greek thought in the evolution of Western civilization. Instead, during his last visit to Athens, the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, visited with the Russian Patriarch Cyril Mount Athos, a few days before the latter’s deafening absence from the last Orthodox Synod.

4.1. The Russian Church and its followers undermining the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete

The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church took place from 18 to 27 June 2016 in Crete without the Orthodox churches of Antioch, Bulgaria, Georgia and Russia which all called for a postponement that was rejected by the Ecumenical Patriarch.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Churches that attended</th>
<th>Churches that did not attend</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecumenical Patriarchate</td>
<td>Patriarchate of Antioch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriarchate of Alexandria</td>
<td>Church of Russia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patriarchate of Jerusalem</td>
<td>Church of Bulgaria</td>
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<td>Church of Serbia</td>
<td>Church of Georgia</td>
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<td>Church of Romania</td>
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<td>Church of Cyprus</td>
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<td>Church of Greece</td>
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<td>Church of Poland</td>
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<td>Church of Albania</td>
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<td>Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

After decades of a discussion that started in 1902, it was in 1961 that the first...
pan-Orthodox conference was able to meet in Rhodes and launch (officially and definitively) the process of the preparation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church,\textsuperscript{31} which was finally implemented 55 years later.

This unexpected twist has come while the world’s Orthodox churches, the second-largest ecclesial family in Christianity, were supposed to be only months away from their first major council since 787.\textsuperscript{32} Even it has been planned as the first such gathering after so many years, the Council has been beset by controversies – one of the most significant ones being the fact that it is being held in Crete, not in Constantinople, seat of the Ecumenical Patriarch. The plan was to hold the council in Agia Irene, a church-turned-museum in the Topkapi Palace complex where the Council of Constantinople confirmed the Nicene Creed in 381,\textsuperscript{33} but it was relocated under Russian pressure because of the tensions between Moscow and Ankara,\textsuperscript{34} when Turkey shot down a Russian bomber that it said had strayed into its air space while attacking Syrian rebels.\textsuperscript{35} Given the difficult political situation in the Middle East, the Synaxis of the Primates of January 2016 decided not to assemble the Council in Constantinople and to convene the Holy and Great Council at the Orthodox Academy of Crete from 18th to 27th June 2016.\textsuperscript{36}

Already the preparations for the pan-Orthodox council have highlighted more differences between Russian church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, such as:
- The problem, how the 14 member churches should decide major issues. Some leaders favored majority voting but the Russian Church insisted on and won a consensus rule, which meant it retained veto power over any changes to be made.

and early twentieth century by the emergence of new autocephalous Churches, and the challenges the new century threw at the Church, already shaken by the First World War. It was Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras that must have revived the idea of convening a council after the Second World War, by two patriarchal letters addressed to the Primates of the Patriarchal and Autocephalous Orthodox Churches in 1951 and 1952. See: Archbishop Job of Telmessos, “Towards the Council”, \textit{Holy and Great Council, Pentecost 2016}, https://goo.gl/n8WDpN.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} C. Leviev-Sawyer, “Bulgarian Orthodox Church withdraws from Pan-Orthodox Council in Crete”, \textit{The Sofia Globe}, 1 June 2016, https://goo.gl/1QCrrR.
\textsuperscript{36} Archbishop Job of Telmessos, “Towards the Council”.

\textit{Civitas Gentium} 8:1 (2020)
Disagreements over relations to other Christian churches, especially to Catholics who since the Second Vatican Council have been interested in coming closer and allowing intercommunion among believers split since 1054. While Bartholomew shows keen interest, the Russian Church has blocked progress because of its dispute with the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine, which is loyal to Rome. Moscow accuses it of trying to take property and poach believers from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church affiliated with the Russians, something the Greek Catholics deny.

There were also complex questions of authority within Orthodoxy, for example which autonomous member church is responsible for new communities in the diaspora or how to uphold the tradition of one bishop per city in Western countries where there are sometimes several of them according to ethnic backgrounds.37

More specifically, the Church of Georgia raised the issue, criticizing the texts related to contact with the other religious denominations, describing them as guarded, since it advocates a hardline attitude to other religions.

The patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem are in conflict with each other, claiming authority over Qatar. The meditative effort of Bartholomew in order to find a resolution to the conflict between them simply worsened the situation, causing the discontent of the Patriarchate of Antioch.

A big thorn for the Summit was the negative and revisionist attitude of the Bulgarian Church, which announced that it will not participate in the Pan-Orthodox Synod. With this decision, it responded effectively to the request of the Ecumenical Patriarch to return the stolen relics of the Monasteries of Northern Greece by the Bulgarian army, demanding the return of the Bulgarian King’s Samuel bones from the Byzantine Museum of Thessaloniki without barter. The Church of Bulgaria tried also to be agreeable to the Moscow Patriarchate by standing with it on other issues, like questions of regularity, the planning of the Primates’ seats (While the Greek organizers wanted Bartholomew to sit at the head of the table, the Slav Churches criticized this option as a “papal practice” complaining that this is against the principle of parity between the Primates of Churches)38 the participation of observers, as well as questions related to the costs of the Summit.

Finally, the Moscow Patriarchate on the occasion of the cancellation of the participation of Bulgarian Church requested the cancellation of the entire Council, after not participating in this all Orthodox Churches, questioning so

37. T. Heneghan, “Last-minute Politics overshadows historic Pan-Orthodox Council”.
rectly the very Ecumenical acceptance of the Patriarch of Constantinople, as not capable to bridge differences and to conduct a genuine pan-Orthodox Synod.\textsuperscript{39}

In this background, four of the fourteen recognized independent churches were not in attendance at the Cretan gathering. Among them is the largest, the Russian Orthodox Church, with an estimated 160 million faithful out of an around 300-million strong Orthodox world. Other absentees were the Bulgarian and Georgian Churches, and the Damascus-based Antioch Patriarchates, which together represent up to 15 million believers.\textsuperscript{40}

4.1.2. Dispute on the Council’s authority

After the Summit, the Russian Church questioned the authority of the Council which took place in Crete on June 19-26, since the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church claimed that the Council cannot be regarded as pan-Orthodox, and the documents it approved as expressing a pan-Orthodox consensus. Commenting on the results of a Synod meeting the Russian Synod remarked that consensus has always been the underlying principle of the pan-Orthodox cooperation throughout this process, whereas conducting a Council in the absence of assent from a number of Orthodox Churches violates that principle.\textsuperscript{41} It is characteristic, that the Russian side, attempting to question the validity and authority of the Creta Holy Council, uses the word “meeting”, which dissatisfied the participants.

“We haven’t come here for a conference or a meeting, but for a Holy Council”, Senior Orthodox representatives insisted that decisions by the Holy and Great Council will be representative and binding.\textsuperscript{42} Such was the reaction of Patriarch Bartholomew, who ensured on the day of his arrival in Crete through his spokesman that even without some key players such as the Russian patriarchate, the worldwide Orthodox Church has begun its historic move toward unity in Crete, but it is still a Pan-Orthodox meeting and its decisions will be binding. He also appealed personally to the absent to reconsider, even at this very last moment, and honor their signatures and come to Crete.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} RT, “Divided Unity: Why Russian Church is missing largest Orthodox gathering in Crete”, 20 June 2016, https://goo.gl/3xBGjL.
\textsuperscript{43} P. Kenny, “Pan-Orthodox Council goes ahead without Russians; decisions ‘will

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4.2. Putin in Athos: Questioning the Western culture

In the background of the aforementioned conflicts, Vladimir Putin joined (in May 2016, accompanied by Patriarch Kirill), the celebrations at the monastery of St. Panteleimon to mark 1,000 years of monks at Mount Athos during his Athens’ visit.

Putin was the first Russian head of state to visit Mount Athos in 2005 and 2016 was the first time that the heads of the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church visited Athos together, stressing that the church and state in today’s Russia stand together, following the Byzantine model of “symphonia”, a close cooperation of the divine and earthly powers, which runs contrary to the Western notion of separation between church and state. Furthermore, the anniversary was commemorated with dozens of exhibitions, conferences and church services to highlight modern Russia’s leading role in what has come to be known as Orthodox Christian civilization.

In that direction, President Putin’s brief public speeches in Athos, enlightened crucial strategic elements and political intentions:

In Karyes, the administrative center of Athos, addressing the Athonite conciliar authorities including the Holy Kinot Putin upraised the “…very important and necessary act (that) is undertaken on Holy Mount Athos. This act is about the preservation of the moral traditions of our society. To a considerable degree, you are a source of this well-being and grace”. Addressing then the Greek President and members of the Holy Kinot, Putin invoked once again the cultural dimension of the Russian - West conflict, stressing the exceptional role that Athos plays in the preservation of Orthodox spiritual values, counting on building a stronger relationship with Mount Athos…as we revive our patriotic values, historical memory and traditional culture.

Beyond the clear attempt to question West European cultural values, speaking at Russian St. Panteleimon Monastery (the Russian Patriarch Kyril was present) Putin referred directly to the historical Greek - Russian historical rivalry, with regard to conflict on the population dominance, as well as to the leading role that Russia seeks to play in the inside of the Orthodoxy:

45. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
“As the Patriarch just said, Russian Athonite monks had to live through difficult
times in the 20th century. In fact, out of several thousand monks who lived here
in 1913, only dozens were to remain here later, and eventually only a few. The
first visit of Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and All Russia in 1972 actually marked
the beginning of St. Panteleimon Monastery’s revival. It was indeed very difficult
to travel over here from Russia at that time, and even more difficult to go from
here to visit our country. Today, a multitude of believers from Russia and other Slavic
countries come to your monastery to venerate the Athonite shrines. It is
important to continue doing everything to ensure that this little corner of Russia
on Mount Athos continues to foster the spiritual strength of all Orthodox believ-
ers. I would like to thank you, Your Reverence, and the brethren for the warm
hospitality extended to our compatriots. You show us an example of commitment
to the principles of humanity, goodness and justice. These traditional ethical and
cultural values are a moral benchmark and support for all of us, crucial for keep-
ing peace, making Russia stronger, and preserving the unity of the Russian Or-
thodox Church”.48

With his speech at the Russian Monastery, referring in particular to believers
from Russia and other Slavic countries and to Russia’s strengthening, Putin seemed
to be sending a double message: firstly, his support to the Russian intention to
expand in other buildings, for which they quarrel with the Patriarchate and the
Holy Community, including the Monastery of Iviron, a scete of St. Andreas in
Karyes, belonging to the Monastery of Vatopedi and that of the Prophet Elijah.49
Moreover, this statement clearly surpasses the cultural-founded argumentation,
implicating the implementation of historic Pan-Slavic visions.

At this point it must be remarked that the cited speech was held in front of a
pure Russian audience and that this content has not been presented by the Greek
media. Both are to explain by the fact, that the manifestation of such visions
wouldn’t receive a favorable response in Greece, where an anti-Slavic attitude
is historically established, not only among the supporters of the pro-western
parties, but also among the traditionalists, eastwards orientated Greeks, who
condemned the expansionist targets of the Slavic or Pan-Slavic movement.50

The aforementioned two Greek – Russian conflicts, namely the Greek opposi-
tion to the Pan-Slavic visions and the quarrel for the population composition in
Athos are going to be briefly presented in the next part.

48. Ibid.
49. HuffPost Greece, Newsroom “Ο Πούτιν στο Άγιον Όρος: Κίνηση υψηλού συμ-
βολισμού, με πολιτικές και γεωστρατηγικές επιδιώξεις- Ο Εφραίμ, ο Βελόπουλος και
4.3. The Greek-Russian conflict for Athos

"The Greek government … contrary to the guarantees of the League of Nations, kept introducing with impunity a series of legal and administrative measures in contravention of the Treaty of Lausanne. The Greek authorities took every step to stem the flow of Russian monks to St Panteleimon monastery … Athos started to turn into an association of exclusively Greek monasteries."\(^5^1\)

This was the preamble of a short article by Metropolitan Iuvenaly of Krutitsk and Kolomna entitled “The Mutual Relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and Athos in the Twentieth Century”, contributed at a conference entitled “Moscow-Athos: A Millennium of Spiritual Unity”, which was hosted in October 2006 by the Moscow Patriarchate. The bishop delivered this text (which coincides with Putin’s viewpoint, that was expressed in Athos 10 years later) as his keynote speech at the opening ceremony, but the editorial board thought it best not to give it such prominence.\(^5^2\)

Russia’s relationship with Athos has never been straightforward. It has been a mixture of conflict, contradiction, envy, and rivalry on the one hand; and inspiration, mutual support, and spiritual regeneration on the other. Over the last 300 years the Holy Mountain did indeed veer towards both Hellenization and Russification.

Tensions between the Russian and the Greek Athonite communities have in the past been exacerbated by their sharply contrasting ethnic and political characteristics. Ethnic tensions resulted from the various differences between the Russian Athonite population, coming from the remote north, beyond the Black Sea, and the Greek majority in many fields, e.g. Russian Athonite architecture, food, church singing, nineteenth-century iconography, vestments, and even liturgical tradition. The Holy Mountain has always been at the heart of the Hel-

\(^5^2\) The metropolitan representing the Ecumenical Patriarch spoke next in the opening ceremony. He prefaced his speech with the acerbic observation that according to protocol he should have been asked to speak before any Russian metropolitan. To make matters worse, about half-way through Metropolitan Iuvenaly’s speech the simultaneous translation into Greek inexplicably ground to a halt. Many of the Greek delegates were shocked by what they considered as hostility on his part. After dinner on the same day in the Daniilov Monastery Hotel they discussed whether to boycott the rest of the conference, but it was decided that the metropolitan’s inhospitality was due to characteristically Russian bluntness and tactlessness, which were unfortunate but would have to be put up with. Greek displeasure was firmly but discreetly voiced more publicly subsequently, although this is not evident in the published articles. See Ibid., p. 162.
lenic world. This was not the case with Serbs, Romanians, and Bulgarians, who have have blended in with relative ease to the Athonite world because they are close neighbours of the Greeks; they have a common background of the mainly rural Mediterranean peoples.

A more striking difference setting the Russians apart from the Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, and Romanians was political. The Russian empire repeatedly defeated the Ottomans and, until 1829, the Russians alone on Athos represented an independent Orthodox nation. Especially in the nineteenth century, the Russians were seen to enjoy special privileges from the Athonite Turkish civil authorities, who seemed to respect them more than anyone else.

Both ethnic and political differences were exacerbated by overcrowding on the Holy Mountain. Before the latter half of the nineteenth century the Russians had coexisted more easily with the Greeks, and perhaps as well as any other ethnic group on Athos: there had never been many Russians present (their numbers probably did not significantly exceed 200 at any one time) and the Greeks had been in the majority. When the Russian Athonite population dramatically increased from the end of the Crimean War (1856), the Greeks for the first time in centuries found themselves faced with the prospect of being in the minority.53

The Russians penetration was facilitated by the poor economic situation of the monasteries that forced them to accept the rich offerings of Russian pilgrims,54 mostly rich Russian merchants, who bought from the non-Russian ruling monasteries hermitages (kellia) and converting them into thriving cenobitic houses, several of which were as wealthy and populous as some of the ruling monasteries themselves. Given that the establishment of new monasteries was prohibited, a solution was the conversion by the 1860s of over sixty hermitages into overcrowded Russian cenobitic houses.55

In 1896, the Mt. Athos kelliots united and founded an organization, “The Brotherhood of Russian Kelliots”. The organization aimed to protect the rights of the kelliots in their struggle with the major Greek monasteries. Soon the Brotherhood managed to attract the favorable attention of the Russian royal family and support from the ambassador in Constantinople, Zinoviev, as well as the influential director of the Russian Archaeological institute in Constantinople, T. I. Uspenskii. The Brotherhood kept a hospital in Thessaloniki and a monastic school in the Ottoman capital. While the kelliots enjoyed support from some diplomats and high officials, the Russian Holy Synod did not look on them favourably. It was easier for church authorities to deal with big monasteries than

53. Ibid., p. 165.
55. N. Fennell, The Russians on Athos, p. 164.
with independent settlements. The Synod feared that the legal disputes between smaller Russian settlements and large Greek monasteries would continue for decades and cause serious difficulties. The Russian Holy Synod therefore issued decrees against the kelliots’ and monks’ letters requesting economic support, which had been sent throughout Russia, but despite these measures, the kelliots continued their activities. From the reports of the employees of the embassy and the consulate in Thessaloniki we can find that they usually sympathized with the kelliots and stressed that with some rare exceptions they were pious people who cared only about saving their souls. This provides an example of the contrast between the actions of the Russian Foreign Ministry and the Holy Synod; here, the Russian government proved more supportive of monks on Mt. Athos than did the Russian Orthodox Church.56

When the Russian community was at its height, it represented half of the total Athonite population of some 10,000 monks.57 The increasing number of Russian monks and pilgrims on Mt. Athos prompted the Russian government to appoint a representative to control the situation. Up to 1889, Abbot Makarii fulfilled this role, but after his death, the question about appointing a leader to supervise the flood of pilgrims arose again. Government officials in St. Petersburg, who were afraid of creating on Mt. Athos the same conflict and complicated situation that they had at the Russian spiritual mission in Jerusalem, did not support opening a Russian consulate on Mt. Athos or sending an ecclesiastic representative there. Lora Gera remarks that based on the inconsistent instructions of the Russian Foreign Ministry government one can see that the Russian government had no clear policy when it came to Mt. Athos;58 Nevertheless, St. Petersburg consistently tried to limit the flow of money to Mt. Athos that Russian monks, especially kelliotes (inhabitants of the small cells that belonged to the big monasteries and that could therefore, never be regarded as Russian property) collected throughout Russia.59

57. N. Fennell, The Russians on Athos, p. 164. Other sources refer to 3.000-3.500 Russian monks, being the majority at the beginning of the 20th century.
58. The government exhibited no definite position regarding the usefulness of the Russian presence there at all. The Russian embassy in Constantinople as well as the consulate in Thessaloniki sent numerous inquiries to the Russian Foreign Ministry concerning Mt. Athos, but never received concrete answers. Many of the diplomats strongly opposed investing further in Russian Mt. Athos (an idea posed earlier by the Metropolitan of Moscow, Filaret Drozdov) because they saw little benefit returning to Russia, both materially and spiritually. Ibid., 87-88.
59. L. Gerd, Russian Policy in the Orthodox East, pp. 87-88.
At the beginning of the 20th century, the fears concerning the Russian expansion on the Holy Mountain and its final transition into Russian hands are reflected even in the report of the Bulgarian agent in Thessaloniki60 and that was 60. I travelled from monastery to monastery around the whole Mt. Athos peninsula and it seemed to me that I’m travelling around Russia. Continually on the quays, in the monasteries, in the cells, in the centre of the kaza [the administrative district of Mt. Athos], in forests and on roads you meet Russians and more Russians, both monks and laity. Their number is increasing from day to day ... in five or six years the number of Russians will have doubled or tripled. Nobody doubts that in a few years only Russians will inhabit the whole of the Holy Mountain. The Russians, but

*according to the Russian monk Isaiah
**according to the Russian pilgrim Vasily Barsky
†according to the Greek historian Gerassimos Smyrnakis

Mount Athos: predominant nationalities (and significant minorities) of the ruling monasteries (including sketes and other dependencies) at different points in time.

Source: Graham Speake & Metropolitan Kallistos Ware: Mount Athos: Microcosm of the Christian East, Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2011, p. 10

Civitas Gentium 8:1 (2020)
a situation which led to countermeasures by the Greek government. In 1883, a delegation of a theologian and historian, professors N. Damalas and P. Pavlidis, arrived from Athens. They proposed several ways to strengthen the Greek position on Mt. Athos. Firstly, they proposed that the patriarch be convinced to resist the pressure of Russian diplomacy and to act independently. They also proposed strengthening Greek education on the Holy Mountain in order to encourage the monks to protect the rights of the Greeks, and sending a Greek consul from Macedonia to Mt. Athos at least once a year to support the nationalistic sentiments of the monks. The Greek delegation further suggested that Greek pilgrimages to Mt. Athos be organized, to counterbalance the Russian ones which totaled as many as 4,000 pilgrims a year. Finally, the project proposed a scheme to grant Athonite monks British citizenship in order to benefit from British protection. If this latter point should prove difficult, continued Damalas and Pavlidis, “we should encourage the arrival of more monks who are English citizens, for example from Cyprus.” Though this plan was never realized, it testifies to Greek concern about Russian influence on Mt. Athos as well as the British influence on Greek policy at that time.

But, also The Greek consul to Thessaloniki, G. Dokos, who visited Mt. Athos in 1887, wrote a lengthy report to the Greek minister of foreign affairs, Stephanos Dragoumis, analyzing the situation on the Holy Mount from the point of view of Greek national interests. In his report, Dokos paid special attention to the Russian threat, and suggested that the leasing of buildings in Mt. Athos’s capital, Karea, should be prohibited. He also believed that the stationing of diplomatic representatives there would be expedient. “We must have able people in every monastery,” stressed Dokos. “By systematic work from one center we can neutralize the activities of the Russian monasteries, which are well protected. The Russian monks have one purpose in mind: they are organized with military discipline and serve [Russian] political centers abroad.”

A new era in the life on Mt. Athos began with the Balkan Wars. In November 1912, the Greeks annexed the Holy Mountain. A Greek army detachment of 800 soldiers formed a garrison; the Bulgarians also sent 70 soldiers to protect their monastery. While the Greek inhabitants of Mt. Athos regarded this as a liberation making possible a resurgence of their influence, the Slavs were rather anxious about their future. The status of Mt. Athos was a matter of international discussion at the London Conference of 1912-13. Russia categorically insisted also the Greeks and Bulgarians suppose that soon the Mt. Athos peninsula will politically be governed by Russia as well. Economically it has been in Russian hands for a long time. All the rich Greek monasteries receive their incomes from Russia which controls the receiving and distribution of these revenues. See Ibid., pp. 89-90.

61. Ibid., p. 86.
on the internationalization of Mt. Athos under the protectorate of the six Orthodox states (Russia, Greece, Serbia, Romania, Montenegro and Bulgaria). The first goal was to neutralize Greek supremacy, and the second, to protect the rights of the monks native from each Orthodox state. Had the Greeks succeeded in dominating Mt. Athos, all the contentious issues would have been resolved in favour of the Greeks, and not the Russians. In the Russian plan of a protectorate, not surprisingly, international control of the Orthodox states over the Holy Mountain would ensure Russia’s dominance.62

Beyond the diplomatic procedures both communities mobilized in favor of their interests. When the monks on Mt. Athos learned of the Russian plans to internationalize and establish a condominium, the seventeen Greek monasteries sent their delegates to the Athens government and to the London Conference with a petition to unite Mt. Athos with the Greek kingdom. At the same time, the Russian monks addressed another petition to the London Conference demanding the neutralization of Mt. Athos under the protectorate of Russia and the Balkan states. In their petition, they asked that one representative for every 250-300 monks be sent to the central council; that civil and criminal matters be separated from spiritual ones; that the present rules on possession of landed estates be abolished and that these estates remain in Russian hands after the leases expired rather than being returned to their Greek owners.63

From 1913 to 1917, the Russian population on Mt. Athos halved from 4100 to 2460. After 1917, when Russians lacked the opportunity to visit Mt. Athos and the government no longer supported the monasteries, Russian monasticism on the Holy Mountain ceased until the end of the 20th century.64

Up until the Revolution of 1917, the Russian government did not recognize Mt. Athos as part of the territory belonging to the Greek kingdom. We may definitely speak about the final union of Mt. Athos with Greece only in 1926, when the Greek government issued a law that all monks of the Holy Mount should be Greek citizens. Thus, the long discussions on the international status of Mt. Athos ceased immediately when Russia ceased its diplomatic pressure.65

At this point, it should be remarked that the Russian demographic increase in Mount Athos started at the mid-19th century, an era when the Russian Slavistic or pan-Slavistic66 imperial aspirations came into conflict with the Greek Megali

62. Ibid., p. 94.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., pp. 97-98.
65. Ibid., p. 97.
66. Theoklitos Farmakidis (1784-1860, a distinguished representative of the Greek Enlightenment and leading theological-political figure) sanctioned these differentiated terms: The term Pan-Slavism, reflecting the unification of all Slavic countries
idea (Great idea), a Greek irredentist vision (arising also in the mid-19th century) which aimed to reunite all historical Greek byzantine lands into one state with the capital in Constantinople. This coincidence, combined with the above briefly presented, reasonably subjects the Greek – Russian dispute for the control over Mount Athos to the wider framework of the conflict between Pan-Hellenismus and Pan-Slavismus.

In order to highlight once more the ruling non-linearity, it should be remarked, that in the Greek anti-Slavic front two opposing philosophical and political direction met: east-orientated followers of the Rom-Greek-Orthodox Great Idea seeing in Russia a competitor for the ruling over byzantine areas and Constantinople, as well as west-orientated social groups, opposing Pan-Slavism driven by their commitment to the European idea.67 The same complex relations occur on the Russian side, when looking for example at the surprising opposition of the Russian Holy Synod against the enlargement of the Russian element in Mount Athos, i.e. the expanding kelliots, as described above, believing that it would be easier for them to deal with big monasteries than with independent settlements church authorities.68

5. A synthetic approach - Conclusions

Approaching all the aforementioned synthetically, initially the complexity should be highlighted, that historically rules the Greek – Russian relation on both, state and Church level, a complexity resulting from a multi-leveled interaction among actors, whose institutional authority is not clearly defined, whereas spiritual and cultural purposes are interweaving with political aspirations and personal intentions.

This complexity is well demonstrated twice: in part 3 of the present paper, where an obvious political intervention cancelled a strategic ecclesiastic cooperation with great political significance and economical effect, as well as in the case of the of Patriarch Kirill’s absence from the Orthodox Council in Crete, (part4) which, according to I. Mazis, is easily interpretable, once: a. the essence of Russian Christian spirituality has been put on rectification and reconstruction of Russian State and of Russian national identity, as well as at the service into a big Slavic nation, and Slavism, referring to the unification of all Slavic nations within the Ottoman Empire. See G. Metallinos, Politics and Theology, p. 236. Farmakidis also placed the outbreak of the Pan-Slavic movement right after the foundation of the Greek state and the signing of Adrianopole Treaty (1829). See G. Metallinos, Ελληνισμός μετέωρος. Η ρωμαϊκή ιδέα και το όραμα της Ευρώπης, pp. 168-183.
68. L. Gerd, Russian Policy in the Orthodox East, pp. 91-92.
of founding the Russian political reality on the Christian Orthodox values, and b. the Holy Ecumenical Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete was judged, rightly or wrongly, by the Kremlin as subjected to strong pressures from the other side of the Atlantic. This act has to be understood within the unfolding Russian strategy (given the absolute numerical dominance of the Russian Church within the Orthodox world and the strongly support of the New Kremlin to the Russian Church) to use such a powerful weapon, belonging to Geopolitical Pillar of Culture, as Orthodoxy, in order to win cultural and ideological domination over the unstable space that in process of geopolitical power redistribution in S/E Mediterranean.69

Assessing the Russian planning with regard to Greece in specific, following particularity should be taken into account, namely that many structural differences from the Western cultural, economic and political establishments did not prevent Greece’s early entry in the core of the Western European family.70

This apparently contradictory state is the fundamental argument of those who speak of a split identity of modern Greeks, indicating of a heterogeneous symbiosis of 2 traditions: the east-oriented religious and political traditions of Byzantium and the 400 years of Ottoman rule, and the tradition of the European Enlightenment.71

As part of this dipole, the eastern influences can be particularly recorded in the sphere of institutional organization and of political behavior, such as the personification of the institutions. Further eastern influences are the state control over the church and the State-Church relationship in general, the formlessness of the roles, the individualistic conception of the public sphere, which has also a religious background, the conception of law as a privilege and the hostility to reforms.72

But on the other hand Greece is recognized as the home of classical culture, which in turn was an important part of Western civilization.73 The Greeks have today adopted a uniquely western way of life and standard of living, they share the Western political-liberal values, they have placed themselves in all major conflicts against the forces of totalitarianism, and have taken much faster than its Balkan neighbors, a European course.

70. A. Stogiannos, “Sketching Greek structural peculiarities from the point of view of Systemic Geopolitics”, Lecture held in Leipzig [in German] in the framework of the present program, 25 August 2014.
72. Ibid., p. 67.
Within this more general framework, the complexity of Greek – Russian political and religious relations has to be dynamically analyzed in the framework of more historical fundaments, operating parallel or dissimilar, supportive or undermining for the Greek – Russian political and religious relations:

a. an innate sympathy among the Orthodox population after the schism of 1054, resulting from the need to act against the Western Church, despite the clashes and schisms on an institutional level

b. the particular closed relationship between Orthodox Churches and their states as a relict of a byzantine tradition. This connection affects historically the political conditions and the relationships between the churches, therefore ecclesiastical diplomacy becomes a vehicle for the implementation of political targets.

c. the effect of the national movements in the Balkan region, that led to the creation of several “ethnic” Churches, that tried to distance themselves from the Patriarchate of Konstantinopel, residing on a Turkish territory and governed by a Greek speaking hierarchy.

d. the synodical structure of the Orthodox Church, which facilitated the secession of many churches from the influence of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

e. the (unilateral ?) widespread Greek conception that there is a very close relationship between the Orthodox Christians as the “blond race”, was the great hope of enslaved Greeks:

f. the clash between the Greek and Russian imperial ideologies (Megali Idea and Pan-Slavism respectively), a development which was also reflected in the relations between the two Churches.

g. the long Soviet communistic period, which shifted the discussion from a cultural to an ideological level.

h. the role of Turkey, as a historical rival of both countries, but also a country hosting Orthodoxy’s spiritual base, the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Finally, from an epistemological perspective the following should be formulated: The comparative approach of the presented cases demonstrates two distinguishable patterns: firstly, a pattern showing how religious-cultural and political components interweave in the implemented policy [church property and Putin’s visit in Athos, frequently changing interstate relations] and how cultural particularities are instrumentalized in order to gain direct political results; secondly, a pattern of an primarily cultural procedure [the scientifically proven, religious similarity effect of Orthodox Cristian adherents], which is developing irrespective of political or diplomatic tensions and discontinuities, while it establishes economic and cultural links of special gravity, generating in a long term a significant geopolitical effect.

The above distinction is fundamental in order to establish the adequate analytical categories, to avoid oversimplification and methodological insufficiency.