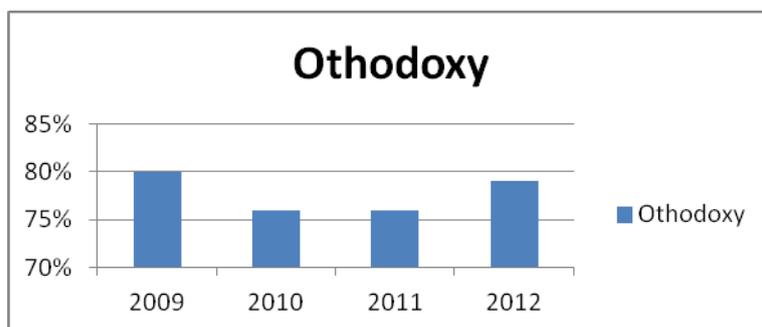


**Orthodox Church in Russian Public Discourse: values.**

(Public Sphere, Freedom of Speech and Framing Public Dialogue)

Nowadays Russian Orthodox Church (hereinafter ROC) is can be understood as a very important institution. It has a great credibility from majority of Russian citizens and also from the state. Close church-state relations give it power to form the public sphere, whereas the Church provides ideological foundation through which it constructs social behavior, common values and social reality in general. However, what values system it forms and how it influences on the Russian relations with Europe?

Through the last several years there were significant changes in Russian political life and Russian public sphere. Together with the process of centralization Russian Government has build close church-state relations. The starting point for the last phenomenon was in time of President Yeltsyn, who established positive relations with the ROC. The crucial here was that the President of the secular state started to shown on the Orthodox services, which was broadcasted through the Federal Mass Media. This way the Head of the state sent the message to the public with the meaning of agreement/union between the state and the church. For instance, in 1996 during the inauguration of Boris Yeltsyn together with the Prime Minister and the speakers of both chambers of Parliament there was the patriarch Alexy II on the stage, where Yelsyn was giving his sworn. The meaningful event confirms the common Russian myth that “power is given from God”. This myth has not only historical roots, but also it was determined by socio-political conditions of the period. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, religiosity of the society was growing. On the place of communist values and worldview came “traditional” Russian values. Thus, the majority has chosen the orthodoxy as a closest system of values: “Religion, the Orthodoxy has become an integrating symbol that unites different ideological positions. Democrats-Westerns are for religion. Firstly, because they are against communism; secondly, they are seeking for the support in Russian past and that is mainly the period of 1905-1917; thirdly, they know that West respects religion, American President give the sworn on the Bible. Anti-westerns, nationalists are also for religion, because the Orthodoxy is the foundation of the Russian identity, it’s the national faith. Even atheists, as we see, has become atheists “for themselves” and more or less for religion. In one word, all are for religion.” By 2002 nearly 50% of Russian citizens recognized themselves as orthodox. Nowadays this number is nearly 80% according to the Levada Center (*Scheme 1*).



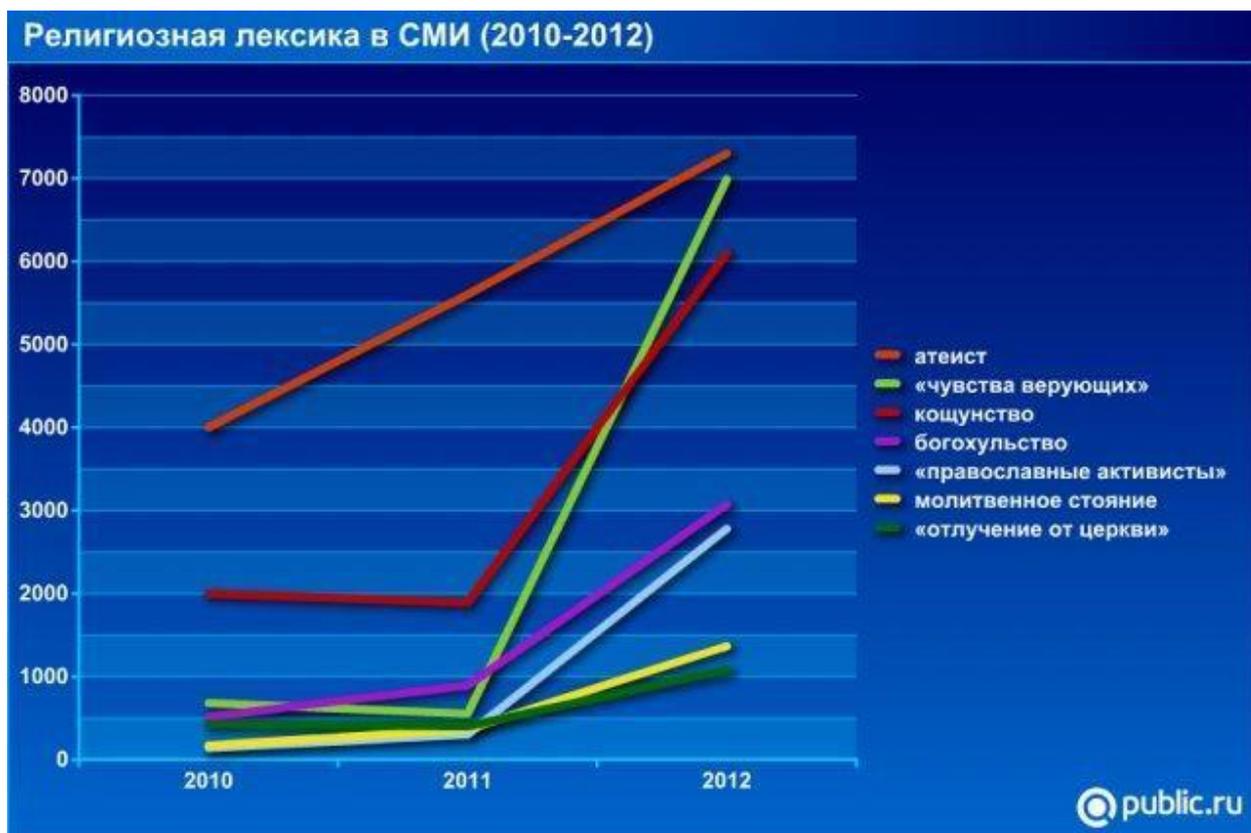
This way there was formed a new wave in appealing to religion. Steadily in social life has come the belief that “Being Russian means being Orthodox” no matter the nationality or confession the person has. As Orthodoxy started to be understood more as cultural phenomenon and common cultural foundation for Russia. Another commonly shared idea that has been spread out from the 2000-s is that the Orthodoxy has a special meaning for Russia; that it always was a symbol of unanimity and self-identification.

By the 2000-s the state recognized positive tendency between the social support/credibility and social position of the Church. The state started to incorporate the Church into Governmental structures, started the building process of the close church-state relations and performing it to the public. That reflected crucially on the Federal law #125 “On freedom of conscience and religious associations”, which officially established the “special role” of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russian history, its spiritual and cultural development with respect to all other religions. The law has become a legal foundation to the Church to act more than just a religious organization or official institution. It underlined the important historical role of the Church, its traditional sense to Russian people. That strengthen Church’s position within the society and gives legal way to act latently from the face of state. It reflected in presence of the church in social reality and in Media Sphere, where its presence was also steadily growing. As for the social reality main state officials was always shown through main Federal channels on an orthodox holidays and services. The officials, including the President and the Prime-Minister, was openly showing to the society their “religious identity”, establishing this way the “right identity” to others. Moreover, sometimes the patriarch was given diplomatic functions on the international arena, which is nonsense if we remember that Russian Federation is a secular state according to Constitution. As fsor the Media Sphere, the references to the ROC were increasing, as the meanings of the messages were more and more representing the official state position. For example, having a look on the major informational agencies in Russia, such as RIA-novosti and ITAR-TASS, we will notice that from the 2000-s the references to the ROC were increasing

rapidly: in 2013 the patriarch Kirill takes the 8<sup>th</sup> place in the rating of references in Mass Media. This rating shows whose position and opinion is important. As for the ROC, for the beginning of the 2000-s the references were retelling the all visits of the patriarch to different orthodox countries with no mentioning of fact in internal relations and the role of the church there. From the 2004 informational agencies started to show more the relations between the president and the patriarch. The meaning of the messages changed: there were more evaluations of the facts from everyday life, the evaluation of the ROC's role in the society, the role of the state for Russian future, the evaluation of the role of the close church-state relations for Russian unique civilization, the critique of European values, which were seen wrong and opposite to the true Russian values, and the role of the orthodoxy in fight with terrorists (in most of the references there was a message the spiritual renovation of the society is the only way against terrorism). From the 2008 all the messages about the Church were having absolutely evaluation and ideological meanings. Thus, we can say that the state and the Church in Russia have a close union and work together on forming Russian contemporary social reality.

As said above starting from 2004 the motive in Media Sphere was changing. The ROC provided its own system of evaluations and continues to work on it and today. The main theme there was: *the Russian Orthodox Church is responsible for renovation of values system, this is the only path for unique Russian civilization*. Through the Mass Media it started to appeal to the “right” and “true” Russian values what caused the use of religious and Orthodox vocabulary in Media Sphere everyday life. To the 2010 people has started to use more such words and utterances as “atheist”, “blasphemy/the scorner”, “judgment of God”, etc (see Scheme 1). Moreover, there has fast incorporated in everyday life the term “feelings of believers” that now have connotation of “church protection”, “orthodox protection”.

*Scheme 1.*



The system of common right Orthodox values takes its root in the idea of spiritual Renaissance: the strengthening of the moral health of society, civic peace and agreement, national interests, patriotism, etc. All these values together provide patriarchal social system to be built. And they are interpreted in Media Sphere as opposite to European values system. In 2004 The orthodox Church commented a lot on the topic of the European Constitution. The vivid example of the tendency was the article in ITAR-TASS from 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2004 in the heading of which was a construction “to remind Europe about Christian roots”. The construction has a negative meaning and messages the public that Europe has lost Christian values, which is the same to lose morality itself. This negative meaning at the same time shows Russia and the Church in a better way as they always remember and Christian values and, moreover, are ready to keep them and protect. Upon the fact that utterance was given because European Constitution does not reflect importance of Christian roots, which is a foundation of European civilization. Whereas the word ”civilization” has additional association with Russian civilization, which is, on the contrary, unique and has Christian roots. Thus, Russian civilizational roots and values differ from Europeans which are not like Russians. And that puts Europe on the opposite side in public consciousness. In other words, this only utterance says: Russia is on the right way and Europe has chosen the wrong path. Another vivid example of this trend connects with Pussy Riot’s case. In Russian social reality and Media Sphere this case was huge scandal that causes the new wave

of the ROC activeness in forming discourse. Among other messages on the topic in Mass Media there was a steady idea that it was a part of “somebody’s campaign against the Church (read: against Russia)”. And that campaign was organized from “the West” and paid from “the West”. That idea was systematically sent to the public and now it is fixed as something natural.

These are only few examples of how the ROC forms the public discourse in Russia. Moreover, close church-state relations give it a power of monopoly nomination which makes the Church to control public discourse. Through it the ROC reproduces and transforms social reality. In case of Europe, with the help of Mass Media it constructs negative attitude to Europe and oppose it to Russia. That prevents dialogue and integration between Russia and Europe. Of course, it does not influence the diplomatic level of relations. However, it influences the commonly shared opinion within the society.