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Manufacturing Religious Pluralism: Politics of Religion and Media Discourse in Contemporary Russia

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The slightly provocative title of this article refers mainly to the processes of the development of a new collective social identity in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The question I would like to put up for discussion concerns the emergence of religious pluralism after ‘perestroika’ and its specifics in contemporary Russian society by analysing the role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the Russian politics of religion and its presence in the contemporary media.

During the last twenty years, the well published political and economic changes in Russia have provoked the processes of generating and negotiating cultural meaning. These processes dealing with the dramatic events of the Soviet past and the post-Soviet present have often referred directly to religious affairs. Even more, religion often played an eminently important role in the development and negotiation processes of a new collective or national identity in post-Soviet Russia. The changes in the sphere of religion are, therefore, significant for the change of self-affirmation of Russian society after ‘perestroika’. The word ‘perestroika’ means ‘restructuring’ or reforming the economic and political systems. As this ‘restructuring’ of the social order was initiated and promoted by the Soviet government itself under General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, the transformation of the religious sphere was from the very beginning characterised by tensions between religion and politics or rather, by the mutual attempts of the post-Soviet State and the ROC to instrumentalise each other for their own aims.

Naturally, these political and economic developments strongly influenced the religious sphere in Russia. In the first part of the 1990s, this situation was characterised by a religious awakening. Not only traditional religious denominations but also new religious movements and all sorts of small religious groups and associations underwent rapid growth and gained in popularity at all levels of society. These developments caused many observers to speak about the end of secularisation in Russia and even about a ‘Russian religious renaissance’. In contrast to this, others were of the opinion that there was no religious awakening or renaissance in Russia, because ‘the main reason for the interest in religion was not positive confessional values, but a rejection of the former authoritarian ‘compulsory ideology’ and efforts to uphold one’s own spiritual autonomy and the autonomy of one’s so-called *Weltanschauung*’.¹

Since the beginning of the 1990s, a free market has been established in Russia. Not only has the economic system been liberated from state regulation, but freedom of expression and the

¹ Lev N. Mitrokhin, ‘Religioznaia situatsiia v sovremennoi Rossii’, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 11 (1995), pp. 79-81, especially p. 80.

negotiation of public opinion also became possible. The concept of 'glasnost' (which literally means 'the fact of being public') quickly obtained a high reputation not only in the Soviet Union, but worldwide. The *free market* and *freedom of expression* are key concepts in understanding the emergence and development of religious pluralism in contemporary Russia.

As a result of the new legislation on religious freedom, a free *market of religions* emerged in the first part of the 1990s. In the beginning, this religious market was not regulated by the post-Soviet government. The religious sphere of society at the moment could probably be depicted in terms of a radical, liberalistic (brutal), *laissez-faire* economy. At this time, observers also spoke about the emergence of a new religious pluralism in Russia.

In the academic study of religion, the concepts of a 'religious market' and 'religious pluralism' often appear together. For example, Peter L. Berger — an American sociologist of religion—defines the historically given religious pluralism in the USA as the starting point for his religious market model.² According to Berger, religious pluralism appears where the de-monopolisation of religion has already occurred or is in the process of occurring. This means that religion (or more precisely, every particular religious system) has lost its position of being the only, comprehensive, and naturally accepted mediator of symbolic integration in a particular society.³

A crucial point is, however, that this kind of historically developed religious pluralism — as Peter Berger discovers in the history of religions in the USA — has never existed in the religious history of Russia. The equal rights for various religious traditions in America are the result of a long historical development, whereas in the recent history of Russia and especially of the Soviet Union, religions were deprived of all rights including the right to existence. The preconditions for developing a religious pluralism in Russia are different to those in the USA and Western Europe. This simple fact has often been overlooked or ignored: *the emergence of the religious pluralism in Russia is by no means only a bottom-up process.*

The suppression and consequent liberation of religion from the restrictive state regulation after the collapse of the Soviet Union have eventually created seemingly similar conditions for the further development of various religions in Russia. However, in fact, the ROC has always had much more symbolic power at its disposal than any other traditional or new religious community in Russia. The dominant position of the ROC has been strengthened not least because of the public celebration of the thousandth anniversary of the Christianisation of Russia in 1988.

This was probably the first and last symbolic support allotted to the ROC by the Soviet regime, which was interpreted as the first official recognition of the Church. Subsequent steps followed. There were, for example, public appearances of the head of the State and other statesmen in the churches, which were widely followed by the mass media. This was commonplace on Russian television in the 1990s. Most of Russia's well-known politicians, including those who

² Peter L. Berger, 'A Market Model for the Analysis of Ecumenicity', *Social Research* 30 (1963), p. 85f.

³ Cf. Peter L. Berger, 'Ein Marktmodell zur Analyse ökumenischer Prozesse', in Joachim Matthes, ed., *Internationales Jahrbuch für Religionssoziologie. Band 1: Religiöser Pluralismus und Gesellschaftsstruktur* (Köln und Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1965), pp. 235-249, especially p. 248.

formerly supported an atheistic world view, seemed to become Orthodox.

It is no secret that the Soviet ideological system provoked the state functionaries to blindly follow the party politics. The moment the system collapsed, a kind of ideological vacuum appeared and one was all of a sudden in search of new world view foundations. It is only natural that many turned their eyes to religion. Professor Lev Mitrokhin, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, formulated this point in his article of 1995 as follows: ‘The new world view had to meet at least three requirements: 1) to be an opposite one [to the former atheistic world view] and to symbolise a complete “burning of bridges”; 2) to be integral and universal and to be able to guide people in the whole diversity of everyday life; and 3) to have followers who are ready to implant it in public opinion with conviction and persistence. In the current situation, this [sought-after] world view could be only religion.’⁴

It is perfectly clear that this religion could only be Russian Orthodox Christianity as the dominant one in public perception because of its historical role, which was now strongly promoted by the government and advertised by the media. In spite of its symbolic dominance in society, the ROC had to position itself in the new religious market, not least because of the aforementioned religious laissez-faire economy of the early 1990s. The televised appearances of the president in Church and of the patriarch in the Kremlin could be interpreted as an attempt at indirect advertising. Also, various other media productions such as feature films, documentaries, and talk shows have constantly emphasised the role of the ROC in the Russian State and society in their history and presence since the middle of the 1990s. The discussions about the implementation of a new school subject called the ‘Basics of Russian Orthodox Culture’ can also be interpreted as an attempt to ensure the dominant position of the Church in the Russian religious market.

Now, if there is a dominance of one religious tradition supported by the State, how can there be religious pluralism? Or more precisely, what kind of religious pluralism would it be? I would like to draw on the concept of pluralism developed by the German scholar of religious studies Kocku von Stuckrad, who is currently professor for the study of religions at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. According to his concept, we have to distinguish between notions of ‘plurality’ as the mere existence of different kinds of phenomena and ‘pluralism’ as cultural organisation of the differences between them.⁵

In my view, a specificity of the Russian case is that religious pluralism or organisation of differences among various religious traditions coexisting in the Russian Federation has not historically developed as it has in Europe and the USA, but has rather been constructed by the post-Soviet government. This contemporary religious pluralism in Russia is at least partly a top-down process, which can be illustrated by examining changes in the legislation on freedom of conscience and worship which occurred in the middle of the 1990s.

The former legislation — the law of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic ‘On Freedom of Religion’ passed on 25th October, 1990 — put an end to the ideological rule of militant

⁴ Lev N. Mitrokhin, ‘Religioznaia situatsiia v sovremennoi Rossii’, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 11 (1995), pp. 79-81, especially p. 80.

⁵ Kocku von Stuckrad, *Was ist Esoterik? Kleine Geschichte des geheimen Wissens* (München: Beck, 2004), p. 19.

scientific atheism; it lifted all restrictions on worship activities and simplified the procedure for registration of religious organisations. Religious freedom became not only possible; religion was also generally released from state control. The situation changed, however, when a new federal law ‘On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations’ was passed on 26th September, 1997. This new legislation distinguishes between traditional and nontraditional religions, foreign missions, religious organisations, and sects. The preamble of the text emphasises furthermore ‘the special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia’s spirituality and culture’. According to civil and human rights activists, the enactment of this law was an unambiguous violation of the Constitution caused by state politics: ‘In fact, this law reinforced religious discrimination and legalised the “possibility of participation” of “appropriate religious organisations” in the activities of state authorities.’⁶

These developments indicate that in the early period of practicing religious freedom, the ROC was looking for not only symbolic but also ‘technical’ support from the State, which was eventually granted to the Church in 1997 with the adoption of the new federal law ‘On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations’. Furthermore, this new legislation ended the laissez-faire economy of the religious market. Now, the State seemed to be interested in soft regulation and light management of religious affairs.

In this regard, it makes sense to apply the theory of Rodney Stark and Laurence Iannaccone to the Russian religious context. In my view, there are some propositions in this theory that can be proved taking the religious sphere in Russia as an example. American sociologists insist that ‘to the degree that a religious economy is unregulated, it will tend to be very pluralistic’ and vice versa. By ‘pluralistic’ Stark and Iannaccone mean ‘the number of [religious] firms active in the economy: the more firms having a significant market share, the greater the degree of pluralism’.⁷ This seems to have been the case in Russia in the 1990s: at the beginning of the post-Soviet era, as there was practically no regulation of religious activities, there was an increase in the number of various religious groups on the market. After 1997, their number has significantly decreased. In this sense, religious pluralism in Russia at the beginning of the twenty-first century was noticeably contracted. I would not say that it completely disappeared, but it is nowadays — as is my first proposition — essentially constructed and then softly managed and controlled by the government.

According to Stark and Iannaccone, ‘the capacity of a single religious firm to monopolise a religious economy depends upon the degree to which the State uses coercive force to regulate the religious economy’.⁸ In the case of Russia, this degree seems to be not very high at present. However, it does not have to be high because the symbolic dominance of the ROC is culturally widely accepted. There are therefore voices against the ‘clericalisation’ of society in Russia. A prime example is the ‘Open letter from the ten members of the Russian Academy of Sciences to

⁶ Sergei Burianov, ‘Gosudarstvennaia politika RF v sfere svobody sovesti na rubezhe tysyacheletii’, *Pravo i politika* (2000).

⁷ Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, ‘A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the “Secularization” of Europe’, *Scientific Study of Religion* 33, no. 3 (1994), pp. 230-252, especially p. 232.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

President Vladimir Putin'. This letter, in which ten notable scientists express their concerns about rapid clericalisation of Russian society, was published on 22nd July, 2007. The letter was intended to warn both society and the government about the growing influence of the Russian Orthodox Church and its expansion into many fields of social life, particularly into the state education system, which is strictly prohibited under the Russian Constitution.

I would like to cite once again Stark and Iannaccone who emphasise that 'to the degree that a religious firm achieves a monopoly, it will seek to exert its influence over other institutions and thus the society will be sacralized'. By *sacralized*, they mean 'that the primary aspects of life, from family to politics, will be suffused with religious symbols, rhetoric, and ritual'.⁹ The open letter from the ten academicians is only one example; there are many others in contemporary media productions, in which various aspects of Church and State interaction can be traced.

Admittedly, the talk about the 'clericalisation' or 'sacralisation' of Russian society is often exaggerated, but some kind of implicit ideological union between State and Church can still be observed. With Anastasia Mitrofanova, one can even speak about a 'politicisation' of the ROC.¹⁰ This process has often been based on the idea of 'symphonia' between Church and State as used to be the case in the Byzantine Empire symbolically represented by the two-headed eagle. It is confusing enough that many theorists of modern theocracy still believe in the possibility of a realisation of this utopia.¹¹

The primary example here is a documentary created by Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov), the abbot of Sretensky Monastery. This film called *The Fall of an Empire—The Lesson of Byzantium* draws parallels between today's Russia and the Byzantine Empire, emphasising that present-day Russia is the Byzantine Empire's spiritual successor. The movie was broadcast on 30th January, 2008 on the state-controlled TV channel, Rossia, provoking huge media feedback and public controversy. It therefore seems appropriate to make at this point a quick digression concerning the contents and message of this documentary.

The movie presents the history of the Byzantine Empire in an overview that stretches from its very beginnings to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, emphasising the developments of the last few centuries before the town was forced by the Turks and searching for an explanation of the fall of the great empire after more than a thousand years of its existence. But if we look intently, we will see that the story is not about Byzantium, but rather about contemporary Russia. 'The lesson of Byzantium' is nothing more than a lesson for Russia — the 'spiritual successor' to the Byzantine Empire. The film draws parallels with today's Russia so obviously that there is no doubt about it: the uniqueness of Byzantium as a huge territory between East and West, multinational population governed by authoritarian power, and most importantly, Orthodox Christianity as its major religion and ideological power.

⁹ Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁰ Anastasia V. Mitrofanova, *The Politicization of Russian Orthodoxy: Actors and Ideas* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2005).

¹¹ Cf. Andrei V. Loginov, *Vlast i vera: gosudarstvo i religioznye instituty v istorii i sovremennosti* (Moskva: Bolshia rossiiskaia entsiklopedia, 2005); Evgeni N. Salygin, *Teokraticheskoe gosudarstvo* (Moskva: Moskovskii obschestvennyi nauchnyi fond, 1999); Zhan T. Toshchenko, *Teokratija: fantom ili realnost?* (Moskva: Academia, 2007).

*Byzantium was a unique state which differed from both the East and the West. Everyone recognised this fact; some were exhilarated by it, others hated this independence, while others felt oppressed by it. Be this as it may, Byzantium's difference from the rest of world was an objective reality. First of all, Byzantium was the only country in the world that stretched over a huge territory between Europe and Asia, and its geography was already a large contributing factor to its uniqueness. It is also a very important fact that Byzantium was a multinational empire by nature, in which the people felt the state to be one of their highest personal treasures. This was entirely incomprehensible to the Western world, where individualism and personal self-will had already been raised to the status of sacred principle. Byzantium's soul, and its meaning of existence, was Orthodoxy—the unspoiled confession of Christianity, in which no dogma had essentially changed for a thousand years.*¹²

There are also many smaller points, which make the analogy even closer, but I am not going to list them all here. Rather, I would like to call attention to the way how the ‘main reason’ for the decline of the ‘second Rome’ is stressed in the documentary. Apart from the exterior enemies, and economic crises, and some internal blemishes such as the corruption of the bureaucracy and the backwardness of the institutions and the army from which Byzantium was suffering, Orthodox faith has been betrayed — as Archimandrite Tikhon, the narrator in the movie, accentuates. Byzantines betrayed their spiritual tradition by entering into an ecclesiastical union with Rome in 1274 and once again in 1439. This is a crucial point in so far as Orthodoxy, as it is represented in the film, was a kind of ideological basis, which united people of different nationalities and formed the Byzantine identity that distinguished inhabitants of the empire from their pagan or barbarian neighbours.

*Amongst the higher ranks of government were representatives of all peoples in the Empire—the main requirements were their competence and dedication to the Orthodox Faith. This provided Byzantine civilisation with incomparable cultural wealth. The only foreign elements to the Byzantines were people who were strangers to Orthodox morals and to the ancient Byzantine culture and perception of the world. For example, the coarse, ignorant, money-grabbing Western Europeans of the time were considered barbarian by the Romans. For one hundred years, the Byzantines warred with this temptation and did not allow themselves to be broken. ‘We are all Romans — Orthodox citizens of the New Rome’, they proclaimed.*¹³

These barbarians were the Western people, the ‘crude, ignorant Scandinavians, Germans, Franks, and Anglo-Saxons’, who ‘dreamt of only one thing: invading and robbing, robbing and invading’. The betrayal of their own tradition by the Byzantines began when their own ‘wealth of experience was cruelly mocked and criminally disregarded in favour of foreign opinion’, as is stressed by Archimandrite Tikhon.

¹² Tikhon Shevkunov, director, *Gibel Imperii: Vizantiiskii Urok* (2008), sequence 1 (43:29-44:45), off-screen commentary.

¹³ *Ibid.*, sequence 2 (31:04-31:34 and 33:02-33:19), off-screen commentary.

But just what was this invasive opinion? Whose views did the Byzantines begin to value? Who was able to so influence their minds that they began to commit such suicidal mistakes, one after another? It is hard to believe that such enormous reverence and dependence could have developed with regard to that same once-barbaric West, which had for centuries so enviously and greedily looked upon Byzantium's wealth, and then coldly and systematically grew fat upon its gradual dissolution.¹⁴

Exactly this following of 'foreign opinion' led the great empire to its fall. It was the ecclesiastical union with Rome that notably dealt 'the final and most devastating blow to Byzantium'.

The final and most devastating blow to Byzantium was the ecclesiastical union with Rome. Formally, this was the submission of the Orthodox Church to the Roman pope for purely practical reasons. One after another aggressive attack by foreign nations forced the country to make the choice: either to rely on God and their own strengths, or to concede their age-long principles upon which their state was founded and receive in return military and economic aid from the Latin West. And the choice was made. In 1274, Emperor Michael Paleologus decided upon a root concession to the West. For the first time in history, ambassadors of the Byzantine emperor were sent to Lyon to accept the supremacy of the pope of Rome. A new union signed in Florence, in what was now a completely mad hope for help from the West, did not change a thing. For the Byzantines themselves, this was a new moral blow of great magnitude. Now, not only the emperor; but even the holy patriarch shared the faith of the Latins.¹⁵

However, the hope of Western help was an illusion. Roman Catholics betrayed the Byzantines, who, according to the documentary, betrayed their faith. The picture of Judas kissing Christ strengthens this on the visual level: 'The promised help from Europe, of course, did not arrive.'¹⁶ The fall of Byzantium is visually accompanied in the movie by Christianity leaving the destroyed Constantinople in form of the four evangelists represented according to Orthodox tradition as the lion, bull, eagle, and man.¹⁷ The final sequence of the movie represents the small Russian Orthodox Church as the last stronghold of Orthodoxy.¹⁸

The main message of the movie is simple: 'The greatest treasure of Byzantium was God'. And the narrator of the documentary stresses that 'Russians comprehended Byzantium's greatest treasure!' and became the spiritual successors to Byzantium. The lesson of the fall of the empire is very clear: If Russians betray Orthodoxy, they will suffer the same fate. The political stability and wellbeing of the country, even its very existence, depends on allegiance to the principles of

¹⁴ Ibid., sequence 3 (42:50-43:27), off-screen commentary.

¹⁵ Ibid., sequence 4 (52:48-53:38 and 59:28-59:48), off-screen commentary.

¹⁶ Ibid., sequence 5 (1:02:05-1:02:35), off-screen commentary.

¹⁷ Ibid., sequence 6 (1:05:06-1:05:57).

¹⁸ Ibid., sequence 7 (1:09:00-1:10:18).

Russian Orthodox tradition. This message has a large range of implications and tries, in my view, to justify the politics of xenophobia.

I am not going to criticise the ideological background of the movie, however. I just wish to show how important media products can be in constructing and negotiating a cultural identity and what a large role the religion can play in this case. The analysis of such media products and their reception in other forms of media and by various strata of society is a forthcoming task in the study of religions in Russia.¹⁹

It is well known that Russian Communism has often been claimed to be a ‘religion’,²⁰ or to be precise, a ‘civil religion’. The question is, therefore, whether a new kind of civil religion on the basis of Russian Orthodoxy is crystallising in Russia after the fall of the Soviet regime. Admittedly, the concept of a ‘civil religion’ as was developed by Robert Bellah²¹ is hardly applicable to the current religious context in Russia, but attempts at mutual appropriation by Church and State lead to the assumption that there is at least a tendency to instrumentalise the ‘traditional religion of Russians’ for the construction of a new national identity or even to use it as a basis for a new official ideology. The above mentioned public and televised participation of state leaders in church services as well as movies like *The Fall of an Empire* seem to imply just that. In the meantime, a public ceremony without the presence of an Orthodox priest is nearly inconceivable. Cooperation between Church and State is flourishing at various levels: in the army, at school, and in other public arenas.

The public and political significance of the ROC has been increasing enormously since ‘perestroika’, and this process seems to be continuing further. This leads to the fact that the notions of ‘Orthodox’ and ‘Russian’ are sometimes used interchangeably. Sociological surveys in the recent years have shown the paradoxical result that in Russia, there are more Orthodox people than people who believe in God.²² Of course, this applies primarily to north and central Russia where the ROC has historically been effective. The religious situation in Buddhist or Muslim parts of Russia would surely be different (but not completely dissimilar).

The above mentioned results of sociological surveys imply, however, that religious participation in the Russian Orthodox Church is actually quite low. This again corresponds to the

¹⁹ If we investigate the constructions and negotiations of cultural meaning in terms of media discourse by using different methodological approaches to the different levels of analysis, we will need a unifying perspective or a theoretical frame that combines the results and makes visible our efforts to understand the dynamics of cultural phenomena. Such a perspective could be cultural hermeneutics as I suggested (cf. Vadim Zhdanov, ‘Ansätze zu einer religionswissenschaftlichen Kulturhermeneutik’, in Christoph Ernst, Walter Sparr, and Hedwig Wagner, eds., *Kulturhermeneutik: interdisziplinäre Beiträge zum Umgang mit kultureller Differenz* (München: Fink, 2008), pp. 473-487) or the ‘discursive study of religions’ approach recently proposed by Kocku von Stuckrad (Kocku von Stuckrad, ‘Discursive Study of Religion: From States of the Mind to Communication and Action’, *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 15, no. 3 (2003), pp. 255-271).

²⁰ Cf. e.g. Michail Ryklin, *Kommunismus als Religion: Die Intellektuellen und die Oktoberrevolution* (Frankfurt am Main und Leipzig: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2008).

²¹ Robert N. Bellah, ‘Civil Religion in America’, *Daedalus (Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences)* 96 (1967), p. 1-21.

²² Kimmo Kääriäinen and Dmitrii Furman, eds., *Novye tserkvi, starye veruiushchie – starye tserkvi, novye veruiushchie: religiia v postsovetskoj Rossii* (Moskva, Sankt Petersburg: Letnii sad, 2007), p. 41.

proposition of Rodney Stark and Laurence Iannaccone. According to their theory, 'to the degree that a religious economy is competitive and pluralistic, overall levels of religious participation will tend to be high. Conversely, to the degree that a religious economy is monopolised by one or two state-supported firms, overall levels of participation will tend to be low'.²³ This is exactly the case in the Russian religious arena. Even if the sociological data show relatively high rates of nominally Orthodox people, actual participation in services and other church activities is quite low.

However, the presence of religion in the contemporary Russian media landscape is enormous. Media play an eminent role in the spreading of religious messages and in the societal negotiation of it. The topics extend a long way from civil religious contexts to something which can be described as 'popular religion' while drawing on Hubert Knoblauch's theory.²⁴ It is, however, important to stress once again that various media productions dealing with religious topics are geared for the most part towards the traditional religion of Russian Orthodox Christianity. This tendency seems to have stabilised throughout the last ten years and is perceived every now and then as something very natural at different levels of society. This sometimes leads to protests as the above mentioned 'letter of ten academicians' demonstrates.

The first proposition I made above was that religious pluralism in Russia is constructed and managed by the State. The second but probably even more important proposition is the observation that these developments has become so 'natural' that their consequences are regarded in public perception as a matter of course. Taking religious pluralism under the domination of the ROC for granted means, furthermore, that this became a natural part of the cultural discourse on religion in contemporary Russia.

This becomes especially clear in the newest media productions and can be illustrated by a number of fictional or documentary films. There are a lot of films on religion and how it relates to the State and society. These films, however, depict mostly only Russian Orthodox priests and believers. There are not many films dealing with other traditional religions in Russia such as Islam or Buddhism. The relationship between the ROC and the Russian State is often presented as historically tense and dramatic but always as leading to some kind of harmonious and fruitful cooperation.

Nobody seems to force filmmakers to reproduce this discourse. That means, in my opinion, that this discourse has become self-perpetuating and therefore a consistent, natural part of the discursive setting in contemporary Russian culture and society. The manufacturing of religious pluralism under the hegemony of Russian Orthodoxy is obviously a very successful construction which appears to have stabilised throughout the last ten years. That is, it was able to become a natural part of the living cultural discourse.

I would like to conclude with the definition of 'religion' as an object of academic research by Kocku von Stuckrad. According to him, the object of study in my discipline is 'the way religion is

²³ Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, 'A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the "Secularization" of Europe', *Scientific Study of Religion* 33, no. 3 (1994), pp. 230-252, especially p. 233.

²⁴ Hubert Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion: Auf dem Weg in eine spirituelle Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2009).

organised, discussed, and discursively materialised in cultural and social contexts'.²⁵ Religious pluralism is a form of organisation of religious discourses, which is inconceivable without its materialisation in different media discourses. The interweaving of religion and politics and its role in the process of constructing national and religious identities can be traced only by an accurate analysis and comparison of these discourses.

²⁵ Kocku von Stuckrad, 'Reflections on the Limits of Reflection: An Invitation to the Discursive Study of Religion', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 22, no. 2 (2010), pp. 156-169, especially p. 166.