

The Face of the Russian Orthodox Church. Metropolitan Hilarion in Exile

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It is strange: the same “experts” who, with great pathos and from a safe distance, have sweepingly condemned the Russian Orthodox Church for its role in the recent escalation of the Ukraine conflict by the Russian war of aggression since 24 February 2022, are largely shrouded in silence regarding the deposition of Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on 7 June 2022: “... and oddly no one in the West seems to care”.¹ Is this a case of inattention or an attempt to preserve the old world view in order to continue to assert the united church front behind Putin? Let us calmly speak about old and new suspicions in a question format. What is needed now is careful research into what actually happened, not only since 7 June, but also before. In some cases, I have consulted the Russian media even more extensively and have asked friends and acquaintances who were and are closer to the events. This task is laborious, but not impossible. The aim is to show what can be known and could have actually been long known. At least one can now again say what no one wanted to hear until now. However, one must not only *be able* to know, but also *want* to know. The time has come to do so.

For curious or impatient readers, the results can be anticipated in three statements:

1. the removal of Metropolitan Hilarion was clearly due to political pressure.
2. Metropolitan Hilarion has never spoken in favour of the war. On the contrary, he clearly condemned the war with indirect statements in the context of his sermons and other media. Due to his strong media presence, this message has reached wide segments of the public.
3. In his relationship with Patriarch Kirill, Metropolitan Hilarion has long held divergent positions, which have become publicly discernible since the inter-Orthodox meeting in Cyprus.

A. The Exile

Let us document the starting point for the new situation as close as possible to the official sources: While it was still 7 June 2022, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church published the decisions of the day. Under protocol number 61² it reads:

Judgment on the Administration of the Diocese of Budapest-Hungary.

DECISION:

1. to dismiss Metropolitan Mark [Golovkov] of Budapest and Hungary from the administration of the Diocese of Budapest-Hungary with gratitude for the work done.

Metropolitan Hilarion [Alfeyev], Metropolitan of Volokolamsk, is appointed Administrator of the Diocese of Budapest and Hungary and relieved of his duties as Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations³, as a permanent member of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church and as Rector of the All-Church Faculty for Postgraduate and Doctoral Studies of Sts. Cyril and Methodius.

[There follows information relating to the successors to the various posts held by Metropolitan Hilarion].

¹ <<https://religiondispatches.org/with-this-largely-overlooked-shakeup-is-the-russian-orthodox-church-looking-to-westernize-yes-and-no/>>. All of the following links were consulted at the end of June/beginning of July 2022.

² <<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5934527.html>>. Where Russian sources are involved, the translations below are mine.

³ A responsibility that he held since 2009.

B. Attempts at interpretation

The commentaries on this decision – in Russia and abroad, ecclesiastical and secular, friend and foe – agree on one point, even if they have ecclesiastical “insider knowledge”: They cannot provide a clear rationale for the decision, and they say so. Some elements, however, are clear:

- 1) *It is clearly a “humiliating demotion.”* As Peter Anderson, the reliable reporter of the life of the Eastern Churches writing from Seattle USA⁴, has pointed out in his regular reports from the beginning, the very form of the Synod decision indicates this: For Metropolitan Mark, the standard formula is appended: “with gratitude for the work done”. In the case of Metropolitan Hilarion, this routine addition is missing – in view of the ritualised protocol form, an overly clear sign of a punitive measure. “This is probably the first time in history that a chairman of the Department of External Church Relations has left that office without a commendation,” says Andrei Kurayev, the deacon who has fallen out of favour in the Patriarchate and is active in the field of journalism.⁵ Words like “purge,” “exile” or even ecclesiastical “spetsoperatsia”⁶ – adopting Putin’s designation of the Ukraine war as a “special (military) operation” – pervade Russian media reports.
- 2) *A strategic secret church plan under the leadership of the patriarch or the metropolitan himself is out of the question.* There are repeated suggestions that Hilarion was sent to Budapest on a secret mission to strengthen the axis with President Viktor M. Orbán, whose veto prevented Patriarch Kirill from being placed on the EU sanctions list. This theory, presented cautiously and without further evidence, probably does not quite convince even its producers. The diocese in Budapest is relatively small and insignificant with eleven active priests and four deacons.⁷ What sign could one want to give to a powerful head of state by sending an impotent metropolitan? Nothing is possible in Hungary that could not have been better done from Moscow. The choice of Budapest could be seen as a kind of last friendly gesture by the patriarch to transfer the metropolitan to a place he is familiar with, since as bishop of Vienna he was already administrator for Hungary.
- 3) *The Patriarch must be fully behind the decision and yet could not have taken it alone.* Formally, the decision on Metropolitan Hilarion’s removal was taken by the Holy Synod. But those who know the situation know that in the Synod – especially in such emblematically important matters – nothing happens against the Patriarch’s vote. As in the state, power in the Church is concentrated in one person. To hear Deacon Kurayev again: “Church life, even more so diplomacy, is directed by one person – the Patriarch himself. The others are the gloves he changes whenever he wants.”⁸ And yet the Patriarch cannot be solely responsible. For the days immediately following the Synod meeting, Metropolitan Hilarion was expected with a Russian delegation for a round table at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, and this was not possible without the Patriarch’s blessing. The trip and programme were fully prepared, as could be learned through Fr. Ioan Sauca, the then acting general secretary of the WCC. Not only was the meeting cancelled at short notice, but also the hastily assembled new delegation from Russia cancelled the announced journey in a rather confused manner. There is no discernible planning behind this, and it would be completely at odds with the patriarchate’s efforts to avoid any reputation-damaging sign of weak leadership.
- 4) In short: *The sudden turnaround can only be explained by a short-term intervention from outside, i.e., from the state. In this case, it can only be due to Metropolitan Hilarion’s attitude towards the Ukraine war.* This interpretation needs to be examined more closely. It can and must remain open here as to whether Patriarch Kirill yielded to this pressure reluctantly or with his own conviction.

⁴ Cf. <<https://www.unifr.ch/orthodoxia/de/dokumentation/anderson/>>.

⁵ <<https://www.mk.ru/social/2022/06/07/andrey-kuraev-vse-vremya-specoperacii-mitropolit-ilarion-sidel-teni.html?ysclid=I4ylutrc3b568107815>>.

⁶ <<https://s-t-o-l.com/material/29210-chem-zapomnilsya-mitropolit-ilarion-alfeev-i-kak-vstretili-ego-otstavku/?ysclid=I4ymdza6ys679856573>>.

⁷ <<http://hungary.orthodoxia.org/papsag/>>.

⁸ <<https://www.mk.ru/social/2022/06/07/andrey-kuraev-vse-vremya-specoperacii-mitropolit-ilarion-sidel-teni.html?ysclid=I4ylutrc3b568107815>>.

According to leaked information, he did not tolerate any discussion at the Synod meeting, but commented on the decision with two words: “Tak nado” – “So it is necessary”.⁹ Against this background, the reserved, figurative comments of Metropolitan Hilarion himself during the farewell words to his Moscow parish of Our Lady “Joy of All the Afflicted” on Bolshaya Ordynka after the liturgy for Pentecost Sunday on 12 June 2022 take on special weight: “Many people ask me these days – why, for what? I will not go into details now, in fact, I myself do not know many details. I was told that this decision was not connected with any shortcomings in the activity of the Department of External Church Relations, nor [with shortcomings] in the All-Church Postgraduate School or this parish church, or other church institutions that I headed. And it was said only that this is required by the current socio-political situation. That the road made a very sharp turn, I didn’t fit into it and ended up on the side of the road. But it’s better than if I drove into a ditch, my car would roll over and explode,” the Metropolitan said. He went on to say that there was no need to dramatise these events because “in the life of every clergyman there can be ups and downs, and promotions in the so-called career, and demotions.” “All this is temporary, and this is not why we serve the church. I have never sought high appointments, or membership in the Synod, or any privileges, and I will never grieve that I have lost them.”¹⁰

C. Background

1. Hilarion and the war

Well, a hierarch of the Russian Church has been deprived of power. But the war in Ukraine continues. How is one to know that this development has anything at all to do with Metropolitan Hilarion’s inner attitude and his outward actions on the Ukraine question? Was he not loyal to the highest degree to his patriarch and also to Putin? What reason should there even be to demote him?

A recently published statistic for 2021 on the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and their presence in the mass media, including television channels, reveals an astonishing picture: according to this data, Metropolitan Hilarion provided 53% of all church content in the media, followed by Patriarch Kirill (22%), Vladimir Legoyda, Chairman of the Synodal Department for the Church’s Relations with Society and Mass Media (14%), Metropolitan Tikhon (Shevkunov), Bishop of Pskov and presumably spiritual father of Putin (6%).¹¹ So, regardless of what Metropolitan Hilarion said, he was and is far more the face of his Church than even the Patriarch. Needless to say, media presence is the currency of public influence. Since 2005, the Moscow Patriarchate has had its own television channel “Spas”¹², which, in addition to information from the Patriarchate, also includes a programme of education in faith and religious-moral values. Patriarch Kirill is predominantly featured on this programme. On the other hand, Metropolitan Hilarion founded his own personal and church information channels, including the “Jesus Portal”¹³ with up to half a million followers and/or subscribers. Metropolitan Hilarion also created the weekly interview programme “Church and World” on the television network Rossiya 24, a state channel close to the government. There, the audience could ask the Metropolitan questions.

Isn’t that typical of the Metropolitan? So he used his media power in a context loyal to the regime and thus discredited himself. Why has he not used his public influence to speak clearly and publicly against Putin?

⁹ <<https://diak-kuraev.livejournal.com/?skip=60>>. Note to 8 June 2022.

¹⁰ TASS news agency report: <<https://n.tass.ru/obschestvo/14891597>>. The entire liturgy can be followed at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=6nZSKtCC22g&f>>. In the media these words are taken up without contradiction or correction.

¹¹ <<https://t.me/s/russica2?q=%D0%98%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD>>.

¹² <www.spastv.ru>.

¹³ <<https://jesus-portal.ru>>.

As a result of the extensive scientific examination of the functioning of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, we now also know from Western experience, for example with the “Third Reich,” how limited the possibilities for action are under such conditions. Yes, there is the possibility of public protest or emigration, Christians know the path of martyrdom. Those who have chosen it have been silenced. Since 4 March 2022, increasingly stricter laws against “fake news” and against “discrediting the Russian armed forces” have been in force in Russia, which already puts the use of the word “war” for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, dubbed a “special operation,” subject to heavy fines and up to 15 years in prison in case of “serious consequences”. Yes, one could and can choose this path, but one cannot demand it from the comfortable perspective of Western desks. The Metropolitan has very consciously chosen a different path. In his letter to the Faculty of Theology of the University of Fribourg Switzerland on 3 March 2022, he writes: “If one wants to achieve real results, this is usually not done through public declarations, but through daily hard and laborious and exhausting work. This work has intensified considerably in recent days and will continue until the conflict is over ...”. At least with regard to historical experiences, one may ask whether this kind of historical obedience may not even be the more effective testimony.

Was this work really as “hidden” as the Metropolitan is accused of being? The “exile” after less than four months suggests that the “language” chosen by Metropolitan Hilarion was all too easily understood. Let us take an early example: on 29 January 2022, Metropolitan Hilarion’s interview broadcast included a question about “rumours of a possible war between Russia and Ukraine”. The answer begins: “Both as a representative of the Church and as a citizen, I am very concerned and affected by what is happening around us, as well as by the statements that are being heard from various sides,” and concludes with the balance sheet critically directed at Russia: “In Russia there are politicians who remind us that our country has never lost any war, and that consequently it is true: ‘Whoever comes to us with the sword will perish by the sword.’ Let us remember, first of all, at what price Russia has won such wars. The price was millions of human lives. Secondly, let us remember that every war brings untold calamity upon the people. So we must remember how unpredictable the outcome of every war is. Can we assume that Russia won the First World War? Let us think of the enthusiasm with which Russia entered the war, the patriotic feelings that accompanied the Russian Empire when it entered that war. Could anyone imagine then that Russia would collapse three years later? For all these reasons, I am deeply convinced that war is not a method to solve pent-up political problems. Therefore, politicians and all of us must do everything in our power to avoid an escalation of the conflict.”¹⁴

Yes, but that was almost four weeks before the Russian invasion of Ukraine began. Apparently the Metropolitan did not speak like that after 24.2.!

The programme was indeed broadcast on 29 January. But the transcription of the interview was put by the Metropolitan on the official website of the Department of External Church Relations and is still available there.¹⁵ The relevant excerpt about the war remains accessible on Youtube.¹⁶ It is entitled: “Metropolitan Hilarion: The Price of War – Millions of Lives and Countless Calamities for the People.” Let’s pick out some of the most concise comments by viewers, all posted after the war broke out: “How hard it is to be an intelligent and educated person. God bless you!” – “Metropolitan Hilarion is a hero of our time. He said it right, someone had to say it.” – “The Metropolitan has said true words, he is like a peacemaker, and that is how a shepherd should be, thank you very much!” – “War is a continuation of politics. It always has been and always will be. And of course it is a way of solving problems.” – “That’s who should be negotiating, not all these gangs” – “He was one of the few in the Russian Orthodox Church who wasn’t afraid to say NO to war!” – “Under capitalism and imperialism, to which

¹⁴ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8ry6En5xhI>>.

¹⁵ <<https://mospat.ru/ru/news/88917/>>. In the week from 27 June to 1 July, the website of the Moscow Patriarchate’s “Department for External Church Relations” was blocked for several days; a “hacker attack” was indicated. After the site was functional again, it should be noted that subsequently the English translation displayed earlier is no longer available, although its <URL> can still be identified via internet search engines.

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_BSmT-ZGzW8>.

Hilarion subscribed, crises and wars are inevitable. And this is what the great Lenin warned against!" etc. As can be seen, critical voices of the supporters of war are not missing among these comments. The very fact that the Metropolitan was present with his broadcast in the "lion's den" and also reached people loyal to the regime gave him the opportunity to be heard in the midst of the fog of propaganda. One should not forget that a critic of the Ukraine war not only opposes Putin, but also meets with incomprehension in broad circles of the population.

But the Metropolitan still received a high order from President Putin on 2 February 2022 and accepted it in a very state-compliant manner!

Anyone who knows a little about the Russian cultural area knows how widespread the system of orders and certificates ("gramota") is in the state and the church. Higher dignitaries receive a medal on round birthdays or special occasions almost routinely and with a certain gradual increase. It is a means of promoting state and church cohesion that no one who is familiar with this system takes overly seriously. Equally ritualised are the words of thanks, the speeches given on such occasions. In the case of the order that Metropolitan Hilarion received, Putin was not the initiator, but in this case responded to a recommendation of the state "Cultural Advisory Council," in which architects, composers, visual artists, and other cultural bearers are members. The almost unanimous recommendation of Hilarion's award shows his high recognition also as a composer and conductor in the space of society. Especially if Metropolitan Hilarion wanted to preserve his possibility for further independent action, he had to react to the award at this time, before the beginning of the war, in the way he did.

Hilarion's language of implicit resistance is not exhausted in his initial statement on the war. I pick out two further examples: In his television programme "Church and World" on 20 March 2022, the Metropolitan responded to a question – no doubt deliberately pre-filtered – about Rasputin, pointing to the ambiguous image of this Siberian itinerant preacher with his profound influence on the Tsarist family. Among other things, he said: "We know that much of the advice Rasputin gave the Tsar was correct. The Tsar mostly did not listen to this advice, but if he had followed it, the fate of Russia might have been different. Rasputin, for example, was an ardent opponent of Russia entering the war and warned the Tsar that Russia entering the war would have disastrous consequences for the whole country. The Tsar did not listen to him, and Russia entered the war. Russia had every chance of winning militarily, but other factors came into play and in the end, we lost not only part of the Russian territories, but Russia as such. A new totalitarian state has been established in the vastness of Russia, and there is nothing left of the old, great Russia that lived for many centuries, except of course the Russian Orthodox Church."¹⁷

In his first sermon in Budapest on Sunday, 26 June 2022, Metropolitan Hilarion did not omit his clear words either. On the occasion of the feast day of "all Russian saints," the Metropolitan mentioned in his sermon a whole series of saintly figures since the baptism of Rus' under Saint Prince Vladimir. Among others, he spoke at length about Metropolitan Philip of Moscow (1507-1569), "who was not afraid to stand up to the terrible tyrant [Ivan the Terrible] who shed innocent blood, and who, at the ambo of the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Moscow Kremlin, instead of blessing the terrible Tsar, rebuked him sternly, saying: 'Even the children of Hagar and the pagans have justice and truth, but in our Russian land there is no mercy', for which he paid with his own life and was strangled by the Tsar's oprichnik [bodyguard]," Metropolitan Hilarion said. The video has since found over 30,000 viewers on Youtube alone.¹⁸

¹⁷ This interview can also be found transcribed on the Patriarchate website, so it has been made permanently accessible: <<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5910413.html?ysclid=l4ykfb2610629775245>>. The television broadcast can be accessed via the following link: <<https://smotrim.ru/video/2393664>>.

¹⁸ <[https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy4a4bYz-NA__;!!Dc8iu7o!yJVvQRFsq6nHKOnTL453-scQ2gQv_bPYKdhB2cJeMBFgUSGnviLBKGMjMwdd_v1ymMNgD0d7NzutjKG8g89s0PGlIcfvOoyExrvG\\$" \t>](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy4a4bYz-NA__;!!Dc8iu7o!yJVvQRFsq6nHKOnTL453-scQ2gQv_bPYKdhB2cJeMBFgUSGnviLBKGMjMwdd_v1ymMNgD0d7NzutjKG8g89s0PGlIcfvOoyExrvG$)>; the video is also accessible on the Jesus Portal: <<https://jesus-portal.ru/life/video/obrascheniya-mitropolita-ilariona/na-nashey-zemle-net-miloserdiya-o-podvige-russkikh-svyatykh/>>>.

2. Hilarion and Kirill

There is still the unforgivable silence of Metropolitan Hilarion towards Patriarch Kirill, whose closest collaborator he was as head of the “Department for External Church Relations” of the Moscow Patriarchate. Why could he not, at least here, express his different view of things more clearly?

We spontaneously evaluate other contexts according to our own standards. In the West, it has become natural for parishes to criticise their pastor or bishop and for all Catholics to criticise the Pope on any given occasion. In Orthodox churches, especially in the Russian Orthodox Church of the present day, it is quite unthinkable for a member of the higher hierarchy to speak publicly against the patriarch, especially if he is his direct superior. In such cases, he is immediately deposed – or an ecclesiastical schism ensues. The Western world seems to forget that Russia, after more than 70 years of oppression and persecution of the Church, has only for the last 30 years re-entered a “freedom” which required, virtually out of nothing, a new construction of ecclesiastical life, from the external reconstruction of church buildings to the much more difficult internal construction of a reflective world of faith, following the period when any public proclamation of the Gospel or even theological education was completely forbidden. Inevitably, in the spiritual vacuum of the “new world,” faith was misused as a kind of “substitute ideology.” A Russian critic of the Church expresses his concern: We have no “Russian idea,” nothing by which to orient ourselves.¹⁹ It is tempting for the Church to offer this “idea” without being able to guarantee or even sufficiently facilitate the transformation of hearts. Inevitably, old party cadres passed into new posts in society and the Church, with or without “conversion.” Inevitably, a generation is (too) short to build a “civil society” and raise a mature “people of God” in this world of extreme contrasts between a few highly civilised big cities and the still economically, scientifically, and culturally less developed Russian expanses.

Metropolitan Hilarion is a powerful threshold figure in these processes. He belongs to the first generation that was allowed to study in the West and learn foreign languages. He grew up with the experience of the Soviet Union. Those who want to know the Metropolitan’s deeply rooted political will for freedom can look back to the well-documented event while Hilarion was a young monk, deacon, and priest in Lithuania, where he entered the Holy Spirit Monastery in Vilnius in 1987. Peter Anderson reports, “On January 13, 1991, known in Lithuania as ‘Bloody Sunday,’ the Soviets attempted to suppress by force the new independence movement in Lithuania. The events culminated in the Soviet forces (members of the Pskov Division and the KGB Alpha Special Forces) taking control of the Vilnius TV tower and the Radio and Television Committee Building at approximately 2 a.m., Sunday morning. A large crowd had gathered to protect the TV tower. Soviet tanks and troops attacked the crowd, and fourteen persons were killed either by gunfire or by being crushed by tanks. Hundreds were injured. The TV broadcast abruptly ended. The last TV images were of a Soviet soldier rushing towards the TV camera. However, a half-hour later, transmission unexpectedly began from a small TV studio in Kaunas where appeals were made for help. The appeals were picked up by a Swedish TV station and relayed from Sweden to the world. One of the persons who spoke on the Kaunas station that day was the young rector of the Russian Orthodox Annunciation Cathedral in Kaunas. He spoke in Russian and urged Soviet troops not to fire on unarmed persons. On the twentieth anniversary of ‘Bloody Sunday,’ the mayor of Kaunas, Andrius Kupcinskas, recognized the actions of Metropolitan Hilarion on that day and awarded him the ‘Decoration of Jonas Vileisis’ for his courageous actions. On January 11, 2010, Metropolitan Hilarion met with the speaker of the Lithuanian parliament (Seimas), Irena Degutiene, who also thanked the Metropolitan for his actions in January 1991.”²⁰

Metropolitan Hilarion has the experience of life in the West, he has countless friends here, and he knows how to move confidently on the international stage. This is not the case for Patriarch Kirill, who would have liked to study in the West but was not allowed to do so because he was needed for the rebuilding of the Church in Russia. He lives in a post-Soviet inner world, and identifies in a shortcut

¹⁹ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySXZfVn27b8>>.

²⁰ <<https://www.unifr.ch/orthodoxia/de/dokumentation/anderson/>> (cf. News from June 7th, 2022). Cf. the report on the page of the Department of External Church Relations: <<https://mospat.ru/en/news/56159/>>.

fashion the Soviet system's "importation" from the West of Marxist atheist ideology with the current "secular" world, which also appears to him as a world without God and therefore destructive of the human soul and human coexistence.²¹ Metropolitan Hilarion, on the other hand, is a "global player" with clear criteria of discernment regarding the opportunities and limitations of the Western world.

Are there indeed signs that Metropolitan Hilarion noticeably and recognisably distanced himself from Patriarch Kirill's stance on the Ukraine war?

In view of the political circumstances, one must also draw attention to what the Metropolitan did not say and do. Given his great public influence, it was expected of him, and would have been easy for him, to go along with the Patriarch's religious, even "metaphysical" justification of the war in his own way and to propagate it in the media. The independent news portal "OrthodoxTimes.com" already noted on 5 March: "The – usually – prolific Metropolitan Hilarion, with the website of the DECR in 12 (!) languages, has not made 10 days after the Russian attack on Ukraine, the slightest statement about the war"²² and repeated on 27 May: "For a long time after the invasion, *he had made no statement on the issue of war*".²³ Under the circumstances, his silence as such is extraordinarily "telling." "The pressure to declare war is as high in Russia as it is in the West for the supply of arms,"²⁴ writes a Western commentator. The Chief Rabbi of Moscow apparently had to leave Russia because he was not prepared publicly to legitimise the war.²⁵ The theory of the "Russkiy Mir" ("Russian World" or "Russian Peace"), which has meanwhile been much criticised in the West and which derives a political unity under Russian leadership from the religiously unified cultural area consisting of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, is also not shared and not used in its political functionalisation by Metropolitan Hilarion.

With a certain amount of attention, differences of assessment between Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Hilarion could already be observed for some time. For the more distant past, I will limit myself to two key questions with which I have dealt in particular within the framework of my own documentation and research and which I know well through exchanges with experts:

The granting of autocephaly by the Patriarchate of Constantinople to a newly established "Ukrainian Orthodox Church" in Ukraine has a long history.²⁶ It is at least due to the lack of a pan-Orthodox agreement on the procedure for granting autocephaly. Such an agreement had become possible in the preparation for the Pan-Orthodox Synod. The Moscow Patriarchate pleaded for the granting of autocephaly by the mother church to the respective daughter church. Constantinople, on the other hand, demanded the exclusive right to grant autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. A compromise text was drafted and provided for all already autocephalous churches to sign the Tomos, i.e. the official document, but with a ranking between the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which "decides," and the other "co-deciding" churches. While the Patriarch refused to give his consent, thus causing the topic to be removed from the agenda, Metropolitan Hilarion advocated the adoption of this compromise, not the least to avoid the foreseeable conflicts in Ukraine.

The absence of four of the fourteen Autocephalous Churches from the 2016 Orthodox Synod in Crete continues to be seen by the Patriarchate of Constantinople as a boycott led by the Moscow Patriarchate under the leadership of Metropolitan Hilarion. A careful analysis of the chronology, on the other hand, clearly shows that the Orthodox Churches of Bulgaria, Antioch, Georgia, and Serbia (the Serbian church later decided to participate after all) had already made their decisions first and independently, and precisely for this reason the Moscow Patriarchate proposed further preparatory

²¹ Cf. Kyrill, Patriarch von Moskau und der ganzen Rus', Freiheit und Verantwortung im Einklang. Zeugnisse für den Aufbruch zu einer neuen Weltgemeinschaft (= Epiphania 1), Fribourg Schweiz 2009.

²² <<https://orthodoxtimes.com/metropolitan-of-vologolamsk-goes-on-with-diplomacy-remains-silent-about-the-war/>>.

²³ <<https://orthodoxtimes.com/successor-vologolamsk-distances-himself-from-patriarch-kirill-of-moscow/>>.

²⁴ <<https://weltwoche.ch/story/sein-schweigen-missfiel-den-maechtigen/>>.

²⁵ <<https://www.msn.com/de-ch/nachrichten/international/moskaus-oberrabbiner-nicht-mehr-im-amt/ar-AAZjKAj?rc=1&ocid=winp1taskbar&cvid=aeb6d2d3738f4deedae79a7d167340ad>>.

²⁶ Cf. Hallensleben (ed.), Orthodoxe Kirche in der Ukraine – wohin?, *ibid.*

meetings. While Metropolitan Hilarion supported participation in the Crete Assembly, Patriarch Kirill pushed through the cancellation of Russian participation. In general, situations were repeated in recent years in which a rather mediating and compromising attitude of the Department for External Church Relations, headed by Metropolitan Hilarion, met with an uncompromising harshness in the decisions of the Patriarch.

It was only under the conditions of war that these differences became apparent and escalated, as will now be shown.

D. Escalations

1. Ukraine

A discovery made incidentally during research was an article by the Estonian journalist and documentary filmmaker Andrey Karaulov from 2019, after the establishment in Ukraine of the new ecclesiastical structure called the “Orthodox Church of Ukraine” through the granting of autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The journalist, considered – not uncritically – close to Putin, predicted on 19 January 2019, two weeks after the signing of the “Tomos,” the imminent resignation of Patriarch Kirill on the model of Pope Benedict XVI. “Knowing Putin, he will never forgive Patriarch Kirill for today’s statement by Filaret²⁷,” because “such things as the loss of Russian influence by the Church in Ukraine will not be forgiven”.²⁸ Even if this prediction did not come true, the article by a journalist who knows Putin well and has made several documentaries about him shows that the Church is – or better: was – interesting to the Kremlin leader not least as a safeguard for the political sphere of influence. Although Kirill did not resign as patriarch, there are increasing voices testifying to Putin’s clearly dwindling respect for him. Guests at the celebrations for Patriarch Kirill’s 75th birthday on 20 November 2021 report how Putin kept the assembled invitees from home and abroad waiting for several hours and then disappeared without a greeting after a tersely delivered speech – a public humiliation rather than a tribute to the patriarch.

Without question, Kirill is under pressure to ensure unity with Ukraine on the ecclesiastical side. From this point of view, the recent declaration of independence on 27 May 2022 by the Synod of the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine is even more disastrous for the Patriarch than the autocephaly of a nationally oriented “new” Church in 2019. Metropolitan Hilarion knows that the “Ukraine war” did not begin on 24 February 2022, but – at the latest – in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the armed conflicts in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, called Donbass. Even before 24 February, this conflict claimed well over 10,000 lives.

In his letter to the Faculty of Theology in Fribourg, Metropolitan Hilarion wrote on 3 March 2022: “Since 2009, when I was appointed head of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, and especially since 2014, when the conflict in eastern Ukraine began, I have invested a lot of effort and energy to bring about reconciliation and peace between the Russian and Ukrainian people and also helped many Christians in Ukraine to survive. This includes financial as well as legal and humanitarian aid. Some of this work has been done jointly with the Swiss Embassy in Moscow, some in partnership with Christian humanitarian organisations.” The very mention of the “Russian” and “Ukrainian” peoples separately signals a recognition of national autonomy that Putin is currently questioning. At an international conference on “Russia – Ukraine – Belarus: A Common Civilizational Space?” on 1 June 2019 at the University of Fribourg, Metropolitan Hilarion explicitly affirmed this attitude on behalf of his Church: “We do not question the national self-determination of the three Slavic peoples, nor the state borders of independent states. But we will continue to advocate the

²⁷ According to the article, Metropolitan Filaret declared himself definitely “Patriarch of Kyiv and All Rus’-Ukraine” on this day.

²⁸ <<https://realtribune.ru/news-news-1525?ysclid=I4ym6u073f785910354>>.

preservation of the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church, which guarantees the spiritual unity of all Orthodox believers within its borders, regardless of their nationality or ethnicity.”²⁹

Metropolitan Hilarion commented on the decision of the Ukrainian Synod of the Moscow Church as quickly as the following day, 28 May 2022, in his capacity as head of the Department for External Church Relations. He emphasised not the conflict but the justification of the position of the Ukrainian Church led by Metropolitan Onufry: the decision “confirmed the status that this Church has had since 1990, when it received the ecclesiastical charter of self-government from His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and all Rus’ [...] With yesterday’s decisions, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has once again proven that it is fully self-governing, that its ecclesiastical centre is not in Moscow but in Kyiv, and that it is not administratively, financially or in any other way dependent on Moscow. The unity between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the other local Orthodox Churches that are not on the path of schism, remains. We will continue to strengthen this unity. We will continue to pray for our one holy Orthodox Church.”³⁰ The Metropolitan signalled his understanding and stressed that the Ukrainian Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, in view of its current distress, must emphasise its independence in order to remain able to act within the country.³¹ He thus did everything to maintain and strengthen the bridge of unity with this Church. The tone of the Holy Synod on 29 May and on 7 June during the same session which decided on the deposition of Metropolitan Hilarion was different. Here, in harsh canonical language, there is an unrealistic demand for precisely the procedure of review of new statutes by Moscow, which the Ukrainian Church no longer recognises.³² As late as 4 June 2022, three days before his deposition, Metropolitan Hilarion explicitly emphasised in his TV programme “Church and World” that he did not see any schism (raskol) in the attitude and decision of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.³³

To assess the attitude of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, an interview with Metropolitan Melety of Chernivtsi and Bukovina on 27 June 2022 for the French-speaking Orthodox is instructive. The head of the Department of External Church Relations in Kyiv rejects the idea of schismatic behaviour on the part of his church. According to the canonical order, the priests commemorate their bishop, the bishops commemorate the leading metropolitan (Onufry) and the church primate continues to commemorate Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, but in an analogous way as autocephalous churches ordinarily do. According to Metropolitan Melety, the Ukrainian Church has an “autocephalous statute,” but not (yet) an “autocephalous status,” which is a possible next step, but at present neither requested nor proclaimed. Quite clear is Melety’s attitude towards the Ecumenical Patriarchate: Metropolitan Onufry mentions Patriarch Kirill in the liturgy, but not Patriarch Bartholomew. “The attitude did not change because the reason for the interruption of Eucharistic communication was not removed. Even today, our Primate does not mention the heads of those local churches that recognised schismatics”³⁴ and on this basis established a new “autocephalous” Church in Ukraine. He also puts into perspective the reports of Ukrainian Orthodox congregations converting to the Autocephalous Church of Ukraine: many so-called “conversions” took place purely on paper and under pressure from local authorities, while the vast majority of congregations and priests remained faithful to their Church. His concern is the pastoral challenge of the congregations of Ukrainian refugees abroad, which should be supported with the necessary expertise by the Western side.

²⁹ Barbara Hallensleben (ed.), *Orthodoxe Kirche in der Ukraine – wohin?*, *ibid.* 130-131.

³⁰ <<https://mospat.ru/ru/news/89324/>>, taken up by <<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5931283.html>>.

³¹ <<http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5932691.html>>.

³² Cf. <<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5934527.html>>, note No. 58, paragraph 3. Cf. The first statement of the Synod on 29 June 2022: <<http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5931476.html>>.

³³ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxOAFmJAJxM>>.

³⁴ <

2. Cyprus

The Inter-Orthodox Meeting in Cyprus from 10-15 May 2022 to prepare for participation in this year's World Council of Churches General Assembly in Karlsruhe was obviously a milestone in the estrangement between Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Hilarion. For the Patriarch, the meeting was to become an occasion to justify Russian military action in Ukraine. Metropolitan Hilarion, as part of the five-member Russian delegation, worked towards the unanimously adopted final report, which states, among other things, with explicit reference to Ukraine: "During our deliberations, there was an expression of grave concern over the armed conflict in Ukraine that has already claimed many people's lives. The participants in the meeting have been unanimous in condemning the wars and call upon all the parties involved in the conflicts to do everything within their power for the urgent establishment of peace and for ensuring safety in Ukraine, Russia, Europe, and the whole world. We also condemn systematic campaigns of disinformation that promote divisions and hatred. In this time of great hardships, we are called to lift up fervent prayers to Christ the Saviour so that hatred may not take hold of human souls and hearts, but, instead, love and fraternal communion may return to the brotherly peoples in anguish".³⁵ During the meeting, the Metropolitan stressed that the Russian Orthodox Church should not be judged solely on the basis of Patriarch Kirill's statements.

Increasingly, his will to distance himself from the Patriarch's positions, even publicly and within the framework of official mandates, can be seen. This is evidenced by Metropolitan Hilarion's official visit to Archbishop Chrysostom of Cyprus³⁶, who not only condemned Russia's war against Ukraine, but also, in the view of the Moscow Patriarch, stood outside the Church's *koinonia* by his commemoration of Metropolitan Epiphany as head of the new autocephalous Church in Ukraine during the liturgy. The Metropolitan spoke in a similarly conciliatory manner shortly before his removal about the four Churches that have recognized the autocephaly of the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine (Constantinople, Alexandria, Cyprus, Greece): "I think we should not regard them as enemies".³⁷ In his last interview programme "Church and World" before the synodal decision, he stressed on 4 June 2022 that the internal church conflicts should be distinguished from the current warlike conflicts. In his view, they are of a provisional nature and will be overcome sooner or later. He cited the reconciliation with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad as an example.³⁸ He expressed the hope that after "temporary difficulties" "a pan-Orthodox or inter-Orthodox solution will be found which will allow the healing of the wounds inflicted on the body of world Orthodoxy and restore full communion between the Churches".³⁹ The Orthodox Times report concludes: "This 'turning point' took place mainly in the period following the preparatory assembly of the WCC [in Cyprus]. Sources accessible to [Orthodoxtimes.com](https://www.orthodoxtimes.com) report that Metropolitan Hilarion adopted a very moderate stance in Paralimni [Cyprus] and showed exceptional moderation in discussions with delegations from all churches."⁴⁰

3. Among enemies

For a long time Metropolitan Hilarion has also had enemies. He lived in an unheard-of area of tension: Condemned by the West as an arch-conservative hardliner, while in the context of the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian society, he was by far too liberal, too ecumenical, too Western for many. Under the new political conditions, the polarisation escalated. Even such self-evident activities of a

³⁵ The report is accessible at <<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/report-of-the-inter-orthodox-pre-assembly-consultation>>.

³⁶ <<https://mospat.ru/en/news/46303>>.

³⁷ The original Russian texts can no longer be found, so that the documentation in Western press agencies is used. Here the quotations are according to "Orthodox Times": <<https://orthodoxtimes.com/kirill-dismisses-hilarion-from-president-of-the-decr-and-metropolitan-of-volokolamsk/>>. These texts were also adopted by Nikolaj Thon in his contribution to KNA-Ökumenische Informationen, No. 24, 14 June 2022, pp. 3-4.

³⁸ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxOAFmJAJxM>>.

³⁹ The translation follows: KNA-Ökumenische Informationen, *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ <<https://orthodoxtimes.com/kirill-dismisses-hilarion-from-president-of-the-decr-and-metropolitan-of-volokolamsk/>>.

head of the Department for External Church Relations as visiting the embassies of various countries, even to settle visa issues, were seen as “conspiring with hostile states.” The willingness to answer questions in Western media apparently also became disastrous for him, especially the interview segments in the Austrian TV programme “Kreuz und Quer” entitled “Ukraine: Church dispute and fratricidal war” on 24 May 2022.⁴¹ The metropolitan made himself available for this interview, although he was cast in a rather negative light throughout the programme. What else was on the “blacklist” that led to his current exile in Budapest can hardly be ascertained at present. It did not take much more than three months for the Metropolitan to become *persona non grata*.

E. Perspectives

The “Kreuz und Quer” programme concludes with Metropolitan Hilarion saying that he feels transported back to the times of the Iron Curtain. The clichés of the “evil Russians,” which had been thought to have been overcome, seem to have been confirmed and deepened.

1. Intelligentsia vs. yoke of history

Now the curtain has a tear. A high-ranking representative of the world of “evil,” who is not simply an individual figure, but stands for a large community of his church and wants to continue to be nothing but its faithful servant, has himself become a “victim” of this other world. He has crossed the neat border – without a visa – and now, in the midst of the European Union, does not agree with the simple logic of “us against the Russians” after all. What to do with him? Well, perhaps the first step would be to rethink: we were wrong about this person. We have condemned him in the same breath as Patriarch Kirill – and he has tried everything at the same time to do his best to bring a little more light and truth in the midst of a world of untruth. It is one of the worst violations of human rights to damage publicly and permanently a person’s reputation. Under the rule of law, it is even an offence worthy of punishment. Yes, in times of confusion and delusion one can be mistaken, that is forgivable, but from the moment of better insight there is a responsibility for a sign of regret and a contribution to overcoming the damage.

The Metropolitan is not concerned with himself. In his position, he could have easily – to use Bonhoeffer’s words – “got out of the affair.” In his letter to the Faculty of Theology in Fribourg, the Metropolitan inserts a sentence that has no bearing on his communication as such and yet reveals his heart more than anything else: “I feel it is God’s blessing to be involved in this work,” i.e. to save lives, to help those who are suffering, to end the conflict. If one wants to venture an interpretation of the events on this deeper level, then the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer are indeed appropriate: “The talk of heroic demise in the face of inevitable defeat is basically very unheroic, because it does not dare to look into the future. The ultimate responsible question is not how I heroically pull myself out of the affair, but how a coming generation should continue to live. Only from this historically responsible question can fruitful – if temporarily very humiliating – solutions emerge. It is much easier to hold out for a cause in principle than in concrete responsibility.”⁴²

Russia has experience with enduring the hopelessness of history, and it has experience with the know-it-alls called “Intelligencija”. Sergii Bulgakov, who was also sentenced to exile in 1922, put his life on the line in a historical hour and takes stock: “The other side of the maximalism of the intelligentsia is historical impatience, lack of historical sobriety, the desire to produce a social miracle, and the practical rejection of the theoretically proclaimed evolution. The discipline of ‘obedience’, on the other hand, should contribute to the formation of historical sobriety, self-control and perseverance; it teaches to bear the burden of history in the yoke of historical obedience, it educates one to be down-to-earth, to have a feeling of attachment to the past and to be grateful to this past [...] The hero creates history according to his plan, starts history out of himself, as it were, and in doing so considers the existing as

⁴¹ <<https://religion.orf.at/tv/stories/3213260/>>.

⁴² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung*, Gütersloh 151994, p. 14.

material or as a passive object of his influence. In the process, historical continuity in feeling and will is inevitably torn apart.”⁴³

Since the beginning of the war, there has been no lack of proclamations of principle that cost nothing. They called for Metropolitan Hilarion’s “heroic demise.” These voices may be right in their diagnosis, but they risk losing touch with history and moving nothing. They stir up imagined antagonisms instead of standing by real people. Metropolitan Hilarion has remained in obedience to history – at a high cost to himself, but also at a high gain to those who were and are associated with him. The Russian Orthodox Church has a face that does not wear the grimace of war.

2. “Politics” vs. trust

Metropolitan Hilarion looked for allies in the West. He wanted to communicate the incomprehensible in a space of trust and keep the Iron Curtain permeable. He wanted to persuade the Western European churches not completely to destroy their bridges with Russia and to establish alternative ways of solidarity. His response to the letter of 8 March 2022⁴⁴ from the President of COMECE (Commission of the Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union), Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, to Patriarch Kirill precisely describes this struggle: “Relations between the West and Russia have reached an impasse. This has led to the loss of mutual trust and the ability to listen to each other. In this situation, it is important to renounce the rhetoric of ultimatums, to create channels of dialogue and to organise official and unofficial negotiations that can contribute to a just peace. As Christians, we are called to promote this cause through our prayer and work.”⁴⁵

For a moment, let us not dismiss these words as rhetorical phrases, but let us reckon – even hypothetically – that they could be meant seriously. Speaking in the words of Bonhoeffer and Bulgakov, the Metropolitan asked that Christians, as Christians, take a risk and enter with him into the “yoke of history,” taking on the burden of history with humbling sobriety, including the possibility of failure. A trip to Switzerland, including a meeting with the President of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (CCEE), ended on 28 March 2022 at Geneva airport, where Metropolitan Hilarion was deported like an illegal migrant because a European country – without his knowledge – had blocked his Schengen visa. Who has taken anywhere near as much time, energy, initiatives as the Metropolitan to hold real talks with Russia from the West? Who was prepared to seek and create spaces of trust, even if a massive tension of strangeness had to be endured in them?

One must clearly admit: Metropolitan Hilarion is asking for the impossible. In the current situation of the inhuman war of aggression, there is no longer any reason or space for trust in the Russian state. A naïve trust may even have encouraged Russia’s war. Trust has become a rare, precious, priceless commodity. Politically, spaces of trust can probably only be sought and reshaped after a clear condemnation and ending of the war of aggression and annihilation. It takes years, perhaps generations, to rebuild broken and abused trust. Political negotiations proceed not on the basis of trust, but on diplomatic grounds to achieve the greatest possible containment of the damage. Hilarion is not speaking as a politician to politicians. He speaks as a Christian to Christians. What he calls for cannot be demanded, but only daringly searched for and given.

3. Pope Francis and the “We”

Pope Francis is the voice of the Catholic Church that has, to a considerable extent, maintained the “we” towards Russia. It is not a naïve “we” that justifies and forgives everything, but first of all the deeply Christian “we” of the common confession of sins: “When the Second World War was over, everyone

⁴³ Sergij Bulgakov, *Die zwei Städte. Studien zur Natur gesellschaftlicher Ideale* [1911], Münster 2020, 470-471 (my own translation).

⁴⁴ <<https://www.comece.eu/eu-bishops-president-appeals-on-moscow-patriarch-kirill-intercede-with-russia-to-stop-the-war-in-ukraine/>>.

⁴⁵ <<https://www.comece.eu/war-in-ukraine-metropolitan-hilarions-response-to-comece-letter-to-moscow-patriarchate-en/>>.

felt relieved: Never again war! [...] Seventy years later we have forgotten all about it [...] The model of war has reasserted itself [...] We are in love with wars, with the spirit of Cain. It is not by chance that at the beginning of the Bible there is this problem: Cain's spirit of killing instead of the spirit of peace [...] I am sad. We are not learning. May the Lord have mercy on us, on all of us. We are all guilty!"⁴⁶

Pope Francis vigorously condemns war, but so far has not issued a condemnation of Putin, or even of Russia as a whole. When he went to the Russian embassy near the Vatican on 25 February 2022, the day after the war broke out, he did so not to protest but to get a first-hand account of what was happening. Had he wanted to signal a political protest, he could have summoned the ambassador. The video conference between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill, in the presence of Cardinal Kurt Koch and Metropolitan Hilarion on 17 March 2022, was guided by an effort to maintain a bridge of conversation. The form of this conversation was already the limit of "public" efforts after less than a month of warfare. The agreed communiqués remained discreet. Western voices immediately accused the Pope of allowing himself to be functionalised by the Russian Patriarch. Then, in an interview with the "Corriere della sera" on 2 May 2022, Pope Francis revealed details from the conversation: the Patriarch had explained the "reasons for the war" to him for 20 minutes at the beginning of the conversation. "I listened to him and said: 'I don't understand anything about that. Brother, we are not state clerics and we must not speak the language of politics but the language of Jesus. We are shepherds of the same holy people of God. Therefore, we must seek ways of peace and stop the weapons'. The Patriarch cannot make himself Putin's altar boy."⁴⁷

The Department for External Church Relations, headed by Metropolitan Hilarion, felt compelled to issue a statement which found no reception in the West and is therefore documented here:

"It is regrettable that Pope Francis, one and a half months after his conversation with Patriarch Kirill, chose an inappropriate tone to convey the content of that conversation. Such statements are unlikely to contribute to a constructive dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, which is especially necessary in these times. [...] Of course, we live in different information fields: The Western media have not reported, or have hardly reported, some of the facts to which I would like to draw your attention.

Patriarch Kirill also pointed out that the conflict began in 2014 with the events on the Maidan in Kyiv, which led to the change of the Ukrainian government. In particular, he pointed to the events in Odessa and their aftermath: 'In this city there was a peaceful rally of Russian-speaking residents defending their right to use their native language and culture. Representatives of Nazi groups attacked this peaceful gathering: they started beating the demonstrators with sticks. People began to seek refuge in the nearby trade union building. At this point something terrible happened: the building was locked and then set on fire. People tried to escape by jumping from the second or third floor and, of course, fell. Those who got to the windows and didn't dare jump out were shot from below. We watched all this practically live on television. This terrifying lesson from Odessa influenced the decision of people in south-eastern Ukraine to defend their rights.'

Patriarch Kirill recalled that at the end of the Soviet era, Russia was assured that NATO would not move an inch to the east. However, this promise was broken and the former Baltic Soviet republics also joined NATO. This results in an extremely dangerous situation: NATO's borders run only 130 kilometres from St. Petersburg, and the flight time of the missiles is only a few minutes. If Ukraine had been accepted into NATO, the flight time to Moscow would also be only a few minutes. Russia could not and should not allow this under any circumstances.

⁴⁶ <<https://www.vaticannews.va/de/papst/news/2022-04/papst-franziskus-reise-malta-pk-ukraine-krieg-putin-russland.html>>.

⁴⁷ <https://www.corriere.it/cronache/22_maggio_03/pope-francis-putin-e713a1de-cad0-11ec-84d1-341c28840c78.shtml>; German version in "Vatican News": <https://www.vaticannews.va/de/papst/news/2022-05/papst-franziskus-interview-putin-corriere-della-sera.html>>.

In conclusion, the Patriarch stressed: 'Of course, this situation is connected with great pain for me. My flock is on both sides of the confrontation, they are mostly Orthodox people. Some of the people who are in confrontation belong to your flock. Therefore, irrespective of geopolitics, I would like to ask how we and our churches can influence the state of affairs. How can we contribute to the pacification of the warring parties with the sole aim of promoting peace and justice? In the present circumstances, it is particularly important to avoid further escalation.' Pope Francis' response was correctly reproduced by Vatican News Service in a report on 16 March."⁴⁸

The Patriarch's remarks name real experiences and real concerns, even if they in no way legitimise war. Where can we listen together to these experiences and look for ways out?

4. Back to Metropolitan Hilarion

Metropolitan Hilarion is not a "dissident" as some in the West would dismissively use the term in order not to have to question their own world view. Real dissidents themselves have a somewhat ironic mockery prepared for this attitude.⁴⁹ Hilarion is and remains a Metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Church with the aim of being faithful to the consecration of his life for the glory of God and the salvation of humankind. As a hierarch, he is and remains subject to the rules of the Church and cannot say and do anything he wants, even outside of Russia. Much could be said about his great achievements in the field of theology, music, journalism, documentary films, and the teaching of the faith to broad church circles. Until his exile, he insisted on being a "pastor" of a local church in Moscow, despite his high offices. Not the least of his achievements there was his support of an active youth movement. He does not conceal the fact that he tried to maintain good relations with the state. Only in this way did it become possible, for example, to achieve recognition of theology as a subject at state universities – a step that even goes beyond the restoration of the situation before the Russian Revolution, at which time theology, called "bogoslovie," was limited to church academies and seminaries.⁵⁰

In the end, Metropolitan Hilarion did not make a change in his views and objective, but he adapted the chosen methods to the circumstances – and thus had to accept the decision of 7 June. The time of public proceedings in an official role before public media has obviously come to an end. In this respect, I have sympathy for the position of Cardinal Kurt Koch, who rules out another meeting between Pope and Patriarch during the continuation of the war: "If a renewed meeting of Pope and Patriarch were to take place at a moment when acts of war are still taking place and Patriarch Kirill were to stick to his untenable justification of the war, it would be exposed to serious misunderstandings. For it could be misunderstood as the Pope's support of the Patriarch's position, which would severely damage the Pope's moral authority."⁵¹ Perhaps the tragedy lies far deeper: our contemporary world of absolute media transparency makes every other form of communication impossible – or meaningless – or suspect. Thus the "system" offers an exonerating dispensation – not being able to seek alternative communication in any situation, it follows that one is not required to seek such an alternative communication. In any case, the Metropolitan's request for trust and for alternative spaces of listening to each other has not found resonance.

Perhaps now is in fact the time primarily for humanitarian aid, given in such a selfless way in East and West, proving the priority of human destinies over the battles of ideas. But Christians should feel that the spiral of violence, despite all of the justification for defence, cannot be overcome by even more arms production, arms delivery and arms use alone. In this regard the Metropolitan in the "Kreuz und Quer" broadcast had warning words: "Now there are two information spaces. We hear one version of

⁴⁸ <<https://mospat.ru/news/89214/>>. In this case too, the English version of the text still quoted by Peter Anderson on 7 May 2022 has since been deleted from the website of the Department of External Church Relations.

⁴⁹ Cf. Alexander Sinowjew, *Homo Sovieticus*, Diogenes Verlag: Zürich 1987.

⁵⁰ Cf. <<https://www.unifr.ch/orthodoxia/de/news/news/20291/bogoslovie-oder-teologia-tagungen-und-begegnungen-in-moskau?>>.

⁵¹ <<https://www.die-tagespost.de/kirche/aktuell/kardinal-koch-kritisiert-patriarch-kyrill-art-229928>>.

events in Russia, and people in the West hear a completely different version. I think the two sides of the conflict have to find a way to hear each other. If they do not hear each other, and that is the case at the moment, then the conflict will not only deepen, but it can also become a global conflict. Because our world has turned into a powder keg."⁵² It will then not affect America first, but Europe.

Whatever happens, the Russian Orthodox Church will go through a shock comparable to the destruction under the Soviet regime. From now on, there will be a need for people in East and West who will contribute to the external and internal rebuilding and who will shape a common future, a policy based on and in the service of the hard-won new trust. We have not talked too much to each other, but far too little. What is coming will be something new, something impossible from a human perspective, which can only take shape through the power of faith and the Spirit of God. Let us hope that the prophetic words of Metropolitan Melety, which fully correspond to the spirit of Metropolitan Hilarion, will come true as a result of our prayer and commitment: "I wish for reconciliation between our peoples and states after the end of the war. Today it seems unrealistic, just as reconciliation between Germans and Poles, between Germans and French, seemed unrealistic after the Second World War. However, this reconciliation took place. And it happened, by the way, with the active participation of the Christian denominations of these countries. I hope that the time will come when the same reconciliation will take place between our peoples".⁵³

⁵² <<https://religion.orf.at/tv/stories/3213260/>>, towards the end.

⁵³ <