

The Myth of a Russia Besieged by “Cults”: From Ivan Ilyin to the Russian FECRIS’ Campaigns Against Scientology

Massimo Introvigne
CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions)
maxintrovigne@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Emphatic references in Vladimir Putin’s speeches to Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin, who died in exile in 1954, led Western scholars to ask the question why the Russian President celebrates a thinker who, while a critic of Hitler, defined himself as a fascist and admired Mussolini, Franco, and Salazar. The paper argues that, rather than his fascism, what attracts Putin in Ilyin’s thought is the idea of Russia as a victim nation besieged by the West through the propaganda of democracy and homosexuality—and “cults.” With the difference that for Ilyin the quintessential “cult” was Anthroposophy, this narrative is similar to the campaigns against Scientology of what was until 2023 the Russian branch of the European anti-cult federation FECRIS. In both cases, it is alleged that a foreign power (Germany for Ilyin, the United States for the Russian FECRIS) tries to destroy the Russian soul and to excite anti-Russian feelings in Ukraine by using as its agent a “cult,” or more than one. For Ilyin, Germany used Anthroposophy, while for the Russian FECRIS the United States mobilizes Scientology against Russia.

KEYWORDS: Ivan Ilyin, Russian Fascism, Russian Nationalism, Anti-Cult Movement in Russia, Anti-Scientology Campaigns, FECRIS, RATsIRS.

Putin’s Strange Fascination with a “Fascist” Philosopher

On September 30, 2022, Vladimir Putin presided over a ceremony at the Kremlin proclaiming the annexation to Russia of four Ukrainian regions, whose territories his army was partially controlling. He concluded his speech as follows:

I want to end my speech with the words of a true patriot, Ivan Alexandrovich Ilyin: “If I consider Russia my Motherland, then this means that I love in Russian, contemplate, and think, sing, and speak Russian; that I believe in the spiritual strength of the Russian people. His spirit is my spirit; his fate is my fate; his suffering is my grief; his flowering is my joy” (Putin 2022).

Ivan Ilyin (1883–1954, also transliterated as Ivan Il'in) is a name we have been reading in the last few years in daily newspapers and mainline electronic media. We read that, while Eurasianist Aleksandr Dugin is busy self-promoting himself as Putin's alleged intellectual inspirer, in fact the Russian President is much more influenced by Ilyin, a philosopher who died in 1954 and had been almost forgotten until the Kremlin leader started quoting him. Putin personally supervised the repatriation of Ilyin's remains to Russia from Switzerland, where the philosopher had died in exile, and presided at their reburial in Moscow. The 2015 propaganda documentary on Putin directed by Nikita Mikhalkov also insisted on Ilyin's influence. In 2011, Mikhalkov had produced a documentary, *The Russian Philosopher Ivan Ilyin*, whose influence on Putin has also been noticed (Ferrari 2023, 90).

Putin's references went almost unnoticed in the West, until in 2018 Yale historian Timothy Snyder published an article in *The New York Review* (Snyder 2018), claiming that Ilyin's religious "fascism" was essential to understand the politics of the Russian President. Snyder's theory did not go unchallenged. Another well-known scholar of Russia, George Washington University's Marlene Laruelle, answered Snyder by claiming that Ilyin's importance as a source of Putin is not crucial, and that those really influenced by Ilyin are part of one among different factions of Putin's supporters, the one closest to Patriarch Kirill (Laruelle 2018). Director Mikhalkov, Laruelle wrote, is himself part of this faction, so his references to Ilyin in the documentary on Putin are not surprising. With the invasion of Ukraine, the controversy moved from specialized to general media.

There is one point on which I would agree with Laruelle. Apart from its importance, crucial or otherwise, Ilyin's influence on Putin cannot be used to attack the Russian President by attributing to him Ilyin's sympathy for Benito Mussolini (1883–1945), although not for Adolf Hitler (1889–1945: Ilyin disagreed with Nazi anti-Semitism, was threatened by the Gestapo, and moved from Germany, where he had been initially exiled, to Switzerland in 1938 [Tomsinov 2012, 143–46]). On the contrary, Putin constantly insists on the mythology of the Great Patriotic War, i.e. World War II, and Stalin's (1878–1963) key role in defeating the Nazis. Ironically, Ilyin himself popularized the use of the expression "Great Patriotic War," but for him it was the Russian war against Napoleon I (1769–1821). Putin would never use the word "fascism" with

positive connotations, as Ilyin did, although by the end of his life the philosopher regarded Francisco Franco (1892–1975) or António de Oliveira Salazar (1889–1970) as more believable embodiments of “good” fascism than Mussolini (Barbashin and Thoburn 2015; Zemánek 2016, 36).

Ilyin’s mythologization of the Russian White Army who fought against the Bolsheviks as “God’s own army” is a different matter (Sharipov 2008; Tomsinov 2012). Just as he repatriated and reburied Ilyin’s remains, Putin also took to Moscow and reburied with great honors the body of the White leader General Anton Denikin (1872–1947), who had died in 1947 in the United States. Although he has rehabilitated Denikin, Putin has stopped short of embracing Ilyin’s position that in the Russian civil war the Whites represented the site of God and the Reds the site of Satan. Putin’s position corresponds more to a significant scene in the celebrated 2008 Russian movie *The Admiral*, directed by Andrei Kravchuk (Kravchuk 2008). As summarized by Rosita Šorytė,

After one of Kolchak’s last battles, Orthodox priests come to bury the dead. One priest asks another whether they should also bury the atheist Reds, rather than the Christian Whites only. The answer is that they should all be buried together. White or Red, they are all sons of Mother Russia (Šorytė 2020, 20).

Finally, Ilyin was a monarchist, and more than a nostalgic one (Poltoratsky 1979). He theorized that only monarchy would guarantee a third way government, somewhere in the middle between corrupted Western democracies and the excessively authoritarian forms of fascism epitomized by Nazi Germany (Zernov 2007). Ilyin believed that,

The principles of organicity, unity and the idea of monarchy corresponds much more to spirituality than the idea of a republic, because a republic is revolutionary and leading by its very character, essence, and mental foundation to the disintegration of the state unit into parts, into fragments, into particular interests (Zemánek 2016, 37).

Putin has several monarchists among his close friends and political associates but does not dream of restoring the Czarist monarchy. Although a monarchist in theory, Ilyin might have agreed in practice. In his final years, he came to the position that, although he remained

a deeply convinced monarchist, at the same time he was able to appreciate the positive aspects of the republic and republican legal consciousness. In addition, he recognized that there could not be a monarchy as a universal form of government suitable for all. Its restoration in Russia cannot be sought for at all costs, because the essential condition for

the establishment of a monarchy is an appropriate form of legal consciousness (Zemánek 2016, 37–8),

and that level of consciousness was unfortunately lacking among Russians. Putin would not disagree today. For him, one Czar in the Kremlin is enough, and his name is Vladimir Putin.

Whose “Fascism”?

All this does not mean that Ilyin’s influence on Putin or at least his circle is not real or is unimportant. Perhaps the debate has focused excessively on Ilyin’s fascism. As an Italian, I am reluctant to call “fascist” phenomena far away from the original Mussolini movement, but in the case of Ilyin he used the word himself. He visited Italy in 1925 and wrote appreciatively about how a fascist country was taking shape (Tomsinov 2012, 131). More important than his admiration for Mussolini is the fact that “fascism” for Ilyin was an ideal category, referred to a political system that privileged spiritual over materialistic values, and hierarchy over democracy. Ilyin’s

analysis of fascism is interesting in the context of his criticism of democracy and totalitarianism. He perceives it as a reaction to the emergence and rise of Bolshevism, the widespread chaos, and the risk of a left-wing totalitarianism (in this regard, one can find analogous features with the later conception of the historian Ernst Nolte [1923–2016]), and as the mobilization of state-forming right-wing forces at a time of threat to the existence of the state and the nation. In this sense, Ilyin considers fascism a necessary and essentially healthy phenomenon. In his opinion, fascism sought just socio-economic reforms of an anti-socialist character and grew out of a healthy national-patriotic feeling (Zemánek 2016, 36).

However, according to Ilyin, a genuine “fascism” should avoid, as in his opinion Franco and Salazar were doing more effectively than Mussolini, the “mistakes that may lead to his defeat.” In this context, Ilyin mentions:

- 1) a hostile attitude towards religions and churches;
- 2) the creation of a right-wing totalitarianism as a centralized and idealistic state-form;
- 3) the formation of a single-party system, leading to the development of corruption and demoralization;
- 4) extreme nationalism and militant chauvinism, “megalomania” of the leaders;

- 5) introducing socialist elements in social reforms, and a tendency to nationalize the economy;
- 6) idolatrous Caesarism combined with demagoguery, servility, and despotism (Zemánek 2016, 36).

If we take away the word “fascism,” we find the apology of the same system combining authoritarianism with a non-socialist economy and cooperation with religion among many Russian ideologists and leaders, including Putin. On this, Ilyin would not even be particularly original. However, there are other features of his thought that have been rarely discussed in the Western debate about Ilyin, although they have received more attention in Russia.

Russia as a Christ-Like Nation

For Russian historians of philosophy, Ilyin is not an obscure character. He is the most influential Russian non-Marxist philosopher of the 20th century. Many Russian interpreters of Ilyin focus on his highly technical works on Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), which consecrated him as a leading philosopher. However, increasing attention is being paid to his more political writings, the one Putin, who is not a philosopher and lacks the tools to appreciate Ilyin’s approach to Hegel, is referring to in some of his speeches.

There are two features of Ilyin’s philosophy that may appeal to Putin, his views of Russia and of the enemies of Russia. A key concept for Ilyin is fatherland, as he explained in the lectures “The Fatherland and Us” and “Three Speeches on Russia,” delivered in Germany in the 1920s after he had been expelled from Soviet Russia and deported on one of the famous “philosophers’ ships” (Sokhryakov 2004).

Each of us, Ilyin said, has three fathers in increasing order of importance: our biological father, our spiritual father in the (Orthodox) Church, and God. The fatherland is defined by the combination of these three relationships. Since spiritual relationships are more important, where we physically are is less crucial than where our spirit is (Ilyin 2023, 3–57). As he wrote in 1926 in “The White Idea,” the Russian White emigres had carried Russia with them and could be more Russian in Berlin or Paris than Stalin was in Moscow, since they had a “spiritual Kremlin” in their hearts (Ilyin 1926, 9).

By the time he collected lectures of 1926 and 1927 in “Three Speeches on Russia,” published in Sofia in 1934 (see Il’in 2023, 3–57), Ilyin had re-introduced in the concept of fatherland a territorial element, defined as the areas reached by Russian ancient national culture and marvelous language. He also took a stand against any idea of Ukrainian (or Baltic) independence, although he was certainly not the only émigré thinker to do so (Il’in 2023, 59–83).

By meditating on the Great Patriotic War, which as mentioned earlier for him was the war against Napoleon I, he described Russia as a “Christ-like” nation that periodically passes through cycles of self-sacrifice, death, and resurrection. Russia is on the side of God, and there are only two paths open to humans in an age of revolutions, toward God and against God. By saving itself and returning to its past glory (and territory) Russia will save humanity as a whole. Ilyin also wrote about chivalry, and fantasized about a new order of chivalry that would embody Russian values and take them to the world (Sharipov 2008; Il’in 2023).

Ilyin, Freud, and “Cults”

The Russian messianic project, Ilyin believed, was not without obstacles. Certainly, he saw the Bolsheviks as evil, but they were not the only enemies of Holy Russia. An interesting episode in his life happened in 1914, when Ilyin went to Vienna seeking the help of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), who at that time had as a patient a fellow Russian aristocrat, Sergei Pankejeff (1886–1979), whom he called the Wolf Man. After his experience as Freud’s patient, Ilyin spoke highly of psychoanalysis and tried to propagate it in Russia.

But why did Ilyin need Freud? The answer involves music, esotericism, homosexuality—and “cults.” Ilyin, who was interested in music, had become best friends with composer Nikolai Medtner (1880–1951) and his brother, musical critic Emili Medtner (1872–1936). According to Russian and Western scholars of Ilyin, including Magnus Ljunggren, the philosopher’s infatuation with both Medtners might have led him to discover his latent homosexuality, although he was married with a female philosopher colleague (Ljunggren 2014, 119).

The Medtners had been friends with famous novelist Andrei Bely (1880–1934) but broke with him when he converted to Rudolf Steiner’s (1861–1925) Anthroposophy. A pamphlet war for and against Anthroposophy followed, which

even led Emili Medtner to a nervous breakdown. Medtner’s theory was that there was a conspiracy inspired by the Westerners, particularly by Germans, who used Anthroposophy and other “cults” to corrupt the Russian spirit and prepare Russia’s military defeat (the Russian word used was “секта” [sekta] but it should be translated as “cult,” not as “sect,” which has a more benign meaning in English). Ilyin sided with the Medtners, and helped Emili write his anti-Anthroposophical tirades (Ljunggren 2014, 117). This is yet another significant difference between Ilyin and Dugin. Ilyin rejected all “esoteric aberrations” as “cultic” and inimical to the true Russian spirit. Dugin has been influenced at least by one esoteric school, traditionalism, particularly as presented by Italian right-wing esotericist Julius Evola (1898–1974: Sedgwick 2011).

In this controversy some characters played an ambiguous role, such as symbolist poet Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949). He had defended against accusations of being part of the Western-cultic conspiracy composer Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915), who was heavily influenced by Theosophy and, when he lived in Brussels, became a close friend of painter and prominent Theosophist Jean Delville (1867–1953). Scriabin and Delville should have become part of an international project about Prometheus with Lithuanian painter Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911), who also had Theosophical interests, but the project was interrupted by Čiurlionis’ illness and death (Jumeau-Lafond 1996, 33; Introvigne 2014, 101). As for Ivanov, after Scriabin’s premature death in 1915, he came closer to Emili Medtner, which greatly enraged Ilyin, who was perhaps jealous. It was not untypical for men with hidden homosexual pulsions to claim, as Ilyin did, that homosexuals were part of a broader anti-Russian conspiracy. He accused them of having infiltrated and dominating Russian Symbolist milieus (Ljunggren 2014, 117).

Freud may have cured Ilyin of the most pathological aspects of his obsession for homosexuals and for “cultic” conspiracies involving Anthroposophy, and Theosophy. However, Ilyin remained both homophobic and intolerant of religious perspectives other than the Russian Orthodox one. He was also an avid reader of books about Masonic conspiracies. When he was accused by the Gestapo in Nazi Germany of being a Freemason, Ilyin answered indignantly that he had fought against Freemasonry for all his life. He regarded Freemasonry, he said, as “the most dangerous anti-Russian organization in the world” (Tomsinov

2012, 144). In fact, Ilyin admired Mussolini for his anti-Masonic policies (Tomsinov 2012, 121).

Ilyin, Putin, and Little Red Riding Hood

It is certainly not Ilyin's support of fascism and admiration for Mussolini, Franco, and Salazar that motivate Putin's references to him. On the contrary, these positions by Ilyin may explain why Putin does not celebrate the philosopher explicitly more often.

However, sometimes he does. Putin is surely familiar with a text Ilyin wrote in 1950, *What a Dismemberment of Russia Will Mean for the World* (Il'in 2023, 59–83). When he wrote it, Ilyin was in exile. Unlike Putin, he had nothing good to say about the Soviet regime. On the contrary, he predicted (quite correctly) that it will fall under the weight of its catastrophic economic and social policies. The question Ilyin asked was whether this unavoidable fall would involve a “dismemberment” of the Soviet Union into as many states as there were Soviet Republics. He was afraid that the West would favor this “dismemberment,” but predicted catastrophic consequences.

Ilyin poked fun at the idea that the Central Asian republics, whose identity he argued had been artificially created by the Soviets, might one day become independent. Above all, he criticized the claims of independence by the Baltic States and Ukraine. He recognized that they had a separate linguistic and cultural identity, but so did the Basques and the Catalans, and Spain would never let them go (Ilyin also predicted, less accurately, that Croatia, Slovenia, and Slovakia would never become independent: Il'in 2023, 62).

Since he believed that Russia is not based on ethnicity or language, but on a spiritual and religious myth, ethnic and linguistic questions, and the very opinion of the peoples who were part of the Soviet Union, were dismissed by Ilyin as irrelevant. If the West would promote the dismemberment of Russia, Ilyin predicted, since Russia as a spiritual idea and a religion would never die, eventually a strongman would emerge in the Kremlin who will try to take back the former Soviet Republics separated from Russia by force, thus condemning the world to a century of bloody wars.

Ilyin concluded with his own interpretation of the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale. In case they will proclaim independence, the Baltic States and Ukraine will be the Little Red Riding Hoods that would leave the mother (Russia)’s home and end up being devoured by the Big Bad Wolf (the West). A hunter will emerge, as in the fairy tale, who will fight the wolf and take the Little Red Riding Hoods back to the safety of Mother Russia’s home (Il’in 2023, 81–2). It is not impossible that Putin may see Ilyin’s references to a strongman who will emerge in the Kremlin after the fall of the Soviet Union and play the role of the hunter in the Little Red Riding Hood story as an extraordinary prophecy in fact referred to himself.

It is Ilyin’s vision of Russia as a spiritual fatherland, a religion—and not a secular one—threatened by Western democrats, homosexuals, “cultists,” and other infidels that appeals to Putin. The current Russian President may not share Ilyin’s antipathy for Theosophy, considering that he has repeatedly expressed his esteem for Russian Theosophist and painter Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947), and in 2020 was willing to allow Russia to part company with a page of a precious Medieval manuscript and trade it with Serbia in exchange of seven Roerich paintings (*Tass* 2020). On the other hand, Theosophy and Roerich’s version of it, Agni Yoga, are listed as “cults” by Russian anti-cultists, who even called them “Satanism for the intelligentsia” (Tver Branch of the Russian Association of Centers for the Study of Religions and Cults [RATsIRS] 2011).

Ilyin as a Precursor of the Russian FECRIS Campaigns Against Scientology

Besides influencing the Orthodox Church and Patriarch Kirill, Ilyin has a place among the diverse cultural influences that shaped the toxic ideology of the Russian President, although on how important this place is the jury is still out.

What is certain is that, without naming names, Putin has supported the idea that Russia is threatened and under siege by the West through “cults” (*Vzglyad* 2012), as well as through LGBT activists and pro-democracy NGOs. The Orthodox Church and the anti-cultists have given substance to Putin’s statements by singling out the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Church of Scientology as the main “Western agents” and “cults” threatening Russia’s “spiritual security.” If one substitutes “Scientology” for “Anthroposophy” in Ilyin’s criticism of “cults,” his statements look quite similar to contemporary Russian anti-cult discourse.

At the core of Ilyin's ideology is that Russia in its spiritual essence is a unique "Christ-like" nation and a potential redeemer of the world. As such, it is the target of dark anti-Christian forces and is looked at with both envy and hostility by the materialistic West. Russia successfully resisted the invasions of both Napoleon I and Hitler. Although the war against the latter, in the eyes of Ilyin, was led by an evil regime, it still testified to Russian greatness. The West thus understood that Russia cannot be defeated militarily. It can only be destroyed if its spirit is corrupted. The West tries to corrupt Russians through "cults," which operate hand-in-hand with the other two anti-Russian main agents of subversion, homosexuals and activists for Western-style democracy. Before the Russian Federation, Ilyin believed that the Western assault would target the easier preys of the Baltic States and Ukraine, with the aim of separating them from Russia.

Ilyin died in 1954, still believing that the main agent of corruption was Germany. He warned the United States that, if it would be allowed to convert Ukraine and the Baltic States into its satellites, Germany would quickly become again an anti-American world power (Il'in 2023, 78), thus in some way "obliterating" the two World Wars and their consequences (Il'in 2023, 80).

It was from Germany that Anthroposophy had been exported into Russia and, when he wrote *What a Dismemberment of Russia Will Mean for the World* in 1950, memories of World War II were still fresh in Ilyin's mind. In their version of the Little Red Riding Hood tale, contemporary Russian anti-cultists have replaced Germany with the United States as the Big Bad Wolf. The two narratives are otherwise similar.

FECRIS, the European Federation of Centers of Research and Information on Cults and Sects, is the main European umbrella organization for national anti-cult movements. From 2002 and until March 2023 (Information and Consulting Center on Cultism 2023), it had as its Russian branch, the Russian Association of Centers for Religious and Cultic Studies (РАЦИРС/RATsIRS), later called "Center for Religious Studies," which is in turn a federation between different local anti-cult organizations. In March 2023, under heavy international criticism because of RATsIRS' support to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, FECRIS decided to no longer indicate it as its Russian branch in the list of its member organizations published on its website. The decision came more than one year after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

While it operated as the Russian FECRIS between 2002 and 2023, RATsIRS constantly promoted a narrative depicting Russia as besieged by “cults,” which led it to enthusiastically support the two invasions of Ukraine of 2014 and 2022, based on the claim that the Ukrainian government was both dominated by “cults” and trying to export them to Russia (Berzano et al. 2022). Although RATsIRS asked the Russian government to suppress a number of different religious minorities and assisted it in the “liquidation” of the Jehovah’s Witnesses (Šorytė 2022), the Church of Scientology played a leading role in its discourse about a spiritual invasion of Russia and the former Soviet Union territories organized by the West to demoralize and corrupt the Russian soul. In this sense, Scientology was for the Russian FECRIS what Anthroposophy was for Ilyin.

The similarities are easily discernible. Like Ilyin, RATsIRS maintains that Russia is a beacon of spirituality and Christian values, and that the West uses “cults” to infiltrate the country and destroy its identity. However, unlike Ilyin the Russian FECRIS sees the United States rather than Germany as the evil center organizing this attack against the Russian spirit after the fall of the Soviet Union.

This was not, the Russian FECRIS argued, a Cold War strategy, and only emerged in the 1990s. Archpriest Kirill Novopashin, Vice President of RATsIRS, writes that until 1990

The largest number of trials against cult leaders took place in America, the largest number of convictions were in America, the largest number of cults that were dispersed and whose leaders were imprisoned were found in America (Novopashin 2023).

Novopashin does not offer any evidence for this statement. Certainly, the U.S. had an active anti-cult movement, and a few leaders of new religious movements who committed common crimes went to jail. On the other hand the two groups Novopashin regards as the very epitome of “cultism”—the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Church of Scientology—, as well as many others he calls “cults,” won several legal and administrative cases in the U.S. and were allowed to exist and prosper.

Novopashin argues that only after the fall of the Soviet Union made Russia permeable to “cults,” did the U.S. decide to transform themselves from an “anti-cult” to a “pro-cult” country:

Cults became one of the instruments of the United States in reorganizing the world. The United States began to forbid Europeans to fully fight against cults and put serious pressure on Russia—they said, if Russia wanted to become a truly “civilized state,” then

it should not infringe on the rights of cults, should not persecute them, and should not ban their activities. On the contrary, Russia should assist them in every conceivable way. In 1997, former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright [1937–2022], while visiting Moscow, met with Patriarch Alexy II [1929–2008]. She promised His Holiness the Patriarch to support the Russian Orthodox Church, but on the condition that the Russian Church would not interfere with the Western missionaries pouring into Russia, representing various destructive pseudo-religious associations. Naturally, His Holiness the Patriarch did not even begin to talk about this topic. And the very next year, 1998, the United States passed the International Religious Freedom Act. According to this law, any opposition to cults is immediately declared a “serious violation of freedom of religion,” which may entail certain sanctions—political, economic (Novopashin 2023).

Of course, the 1998 U.S. International Religious Freedom Act did not even mention “cults,” and promoted freedom for all religions.

Novopashin specifies that

experts have long been making a well-founded assumption about Scientology, which has long been working as a special unit of the U.S., intelligence service, sharing part of the information it obtains with the U.S. intelligence community, and in return receiving support from the State Department and other U.S. government bodies (Novopashin 2023).

As mentioned earlier, Scientology plays in the Russian FECRIS’ narrative the role Anthroposophy played in Ilyin’s tirades against “cults.” Neither Scientology in the 21st century nor Anthroposophy in Ilyin’s times were the largest new religious movements operating in Russia. However, they were both singled out because the countries from where they came, Germany then and the United States now (although in fact Anthroposophy had moved its headquarters from Germany to Switzerland), were regarded as the main enemies of Russia. Just as Ilyin saw in the arrival of Anthroposophy in Russia a devious German plot, the Russian FECRIS saw in the activities of Scientology in the United States the result of a conspiracy by the U.S. intelligence (Šorytė 2020).

Another significant parallel is that, like Ilyin, RATsIRS believes that the conspiracy, before extending to the territory of the Russian Federation, started hitting the softer targets of the former Soviet Republics separated from Russia, Ukraine in particular. The most famous Russian anti-cultist, RATsIRS President (and, from 2009 to 2021, FECRIS’ Vice President) Alexander Dvorkin, insisted that Scientology was behind Ukraine’s Orange Revolution of 2004, the Maidan Revolution of 2014, and the resistance of Ukraine to Putin’s policies ever since (Berzano et al. 2022; Šorytė 2022). After his theories were dismissed and

criticized even by the most extreme Western anti-Scientologists as devoid of any evidence (e.g. Ortega 2014), Dvorkin somewhat reformulated them, but he has maintained to this very day that Scientology infiltrated Ukraine on behalf of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency to ultimately target Russia. This is reminiscent of Ilyin’s and his friends’ insistence, despite the lack of evidence, about a German conspiracy to demoralize Russia by infiltrating Anthroposophy there.

Both Ilyin’s and the Russian FECRIS’ narratives served a dual purpose, one domestic and one international. Domestically, they reinforced the image of Russia as a “Christ-like” suffering and besieged nation. It is an image that has served Russia well during the crises of its history. Internationally, they elicited the sympathy of some Westerners—who disliked “cults” for reasons of their own—for Russian nationalism, which would otherwise hardly have been popular. Despite their differences, Ilyin’s and RATsIRS’ discourses about “cults” threatening Russia both perpetuate an old narrative of Russia as a victim, envied and hatred by the West because of its deeper and superior spirituality (Šorytė 2020), which keeps being mobilized in periods of crises and wars.

References

- Barbashin, Anton, and Hannah Thoburn. 2015. “Putin’s Philosopher: Ivan Ilyin and the Ideology of Moscow’s Rule.” *Foreign Affairs*, September 20. Accessed October 21, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3tM5Pc9>.
- Berzano, Luigi, Boris Falikov, Willy Fautré, Liudmyla Filipovich, Massimo Introvigne, and Bernadette Rigal-Cellard. 2022. “Sympathy for the Devil: The Anti-Cult Federation FECRIS and Its Support for Russian and Chinese Repression of Religion.” *The Journal of CESNUR* 6(3):25–67. DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2022.6.3.2.
- Ferrari, Aldo. 2023. “Ivan Il’in e il discorso politico di Putin.” In Ivan A. Il’in, *Sulla Russia. Tre Discorsi. Seguito da: Cosa riserverà al mondo lo smembramento della Russia*, Italian translation edited by Olga Strada, 84–94. Milan: ASPIS.
- Il’in, Ivan A. 2023. “Quali conseguenze potrebbero derivare al mondo dallo smembramento della Russia.” Italian translation in Ivan A. Il’in, *Sulla Russia. Tre Discorsi. Seguito da: Cosa riserverà al mondo lo smembramento della Russia*, edited by Olga Strada, 59–83. Milan: ASPIS.

- Ilyin, Ivan A. 1926. “Белая идея” (The White Idea). In *БЕЛОЕ ДЕЛО* (The White Cause), vol. 1, edited by Alexei A. von Lampe, 7–73. Berlin: Mednyi vsadnik.
- Information and Consulting Center on Cultism. 2023. “Информационно-консультационный центр по вопросам сектантства” (The Information and Consulting Center on Cultism). Accessed October 23, 2023. <https://bit.ly/46KGQ7u>.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2014. “Zöllner’s Knot: Theosophy, Jean Delville (1867–1953), and the Fourth Dimension.” *Theosophical History* 17(3):84–118.
- Jumeau-Lafond, Jean-David. 1996. “L’indécis, les sons, les couleurs frères’: Quelques correspondances symbolistes.” In *Symbolisme en Europe*, edited by Shunshuke Kijima and Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond, 22–34. Tokyo: Tokyo Shimbun.
- Kravchuk, Andrei (dir.). 2008. *АДМИРАЛЬ* (Admiral) [movie]. With English subtitles. Accessed October 21, 2023. <https://youtu.be/RESCAwRKvck>.
- Laruelle, Marlene. 2018. “In Search of Putin’s Philosopher: Why Ivan Ilyin Is Not Putin’s Ideological Guru.” *Riddle*, April 19. Accessed October 23, 2023. <https://bit.ly/475veMf>.
- Ljunggren, Magnus. 2014. *Poetry and Psychiatry: Essays on Early Twentieth-Century Russian Symbolist Culture*. Boston: Academic Studies Press.
- Novopashin, Alexander. 2023. “Почему США поддерживает сектантство Источник” (Why the USA Supports Cultism). *Sibru.com*, April 11. Accessed October 23, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3QvSNYQ>.
- Ortega, Tony. 2014. “Is Ukraine’s Proposed New Prime Minister a Scientologist? Says His Niece: ‘That’s Crap.’” *The Underground Bunker*, February 27. Accessed October 23, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3TWg9pJ>.
- Poltoratsky, Nikolai P. 1979. *МОНАРХИЯ И РЕСПУБЛИКА В ВОСПРИЯТИИ И. А. ИЛЬИНА* (Monarchy and Republic in the Thought of I.A. Ilyin). Moscow: Sodruzhestvo.
- Putin, Vladimir V. 2022. “Full Text of Putin Speech at Annexation Ceremony.” *Mirage*, October 1. Accessed October 23, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3MeuqfV>.
- Sedgwick, Mark. 2011. “Occult Dissident Culture: The Case of Aleksandr Dugin.” In *The New Age of Russia: Occult and Esoteric Dimensions*, edited by Birgit Menzel, Michael Hagemester, and Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, 273–92. Munich: Otto Sagner.
- Sharipov, Alexander Mikhailovich. 2008. *РУССКИЙ МЫСЛИТЕЛЬ ИВАН АЛЕКСАНДРОВИЧ ИЛЬИН: ТВОРЧЕСКАЯ БИОГРАФИЯ* (Russian Thinker Ivan Alexandrovich Ilin: A Creative Biography). Moscow: Moscow Main Archive Publishing House.

- Snyder, Timothy. 2018. “Ivan Ilyin, Putin’s Philosopher of Russian Fascism.” *The New York Review*, March 16. Accessed October 23, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3Sayfq6>.
- Sokhryakov, Yuri I. 2004. *И. А. ИЛЬИН – РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЙ МЫСЛИТЕЛЬ И ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫЙ КРИТИК* (I.A. Ilyin: Religious Thinker and Literary Critic). Moscow: IMLI RAS (Institute of World Literature Named After A.M. Gorky of the Russian Academy of Sciences).
- Šorytė, Rosita. 2020. “Opposition to Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia: The Cultural Roots.” *The Journal of CESNUR* 4(6): 11–24. DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2020.4.6.2.
- Šorytė, Rosita. 2022. “Scientology, Jehovah’s Witnesses, ‘Cults,’ and Conspiracy Theories in Russia Before and During the War in Ukraine.” *The Journal of CESNUR* 6(6):47–73. DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2022.6.6.3.
- Tass*. 2020. “Putin Approves Swapping Miroslov Gospel Page for Roerich Paintings.” July 14. Accessed October 21, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3FvmOlu>.
- Tomsinov, Vladimir A. 2012. *МЫСЛИТЕЛЬ С ПОЮЩИМ СЕРДЦЕМ: ИВАН АЛЕКСАНДРОВИЧ ИЛЬИН: РУССКИЙ ИДЕОЛОГ ЭПОХИ РЕВОЛЮЦИЙ* (Thinker with a Singing Heart: Ivan Alexandrovich Ilyin: Russian Ideologist of the Epoch of Revolutions). Moscow: Zertsalo-M.
- Tver Branch of the Russian Association of Centers for the Study of Religions and Cults (RATsIRS). 2011. “РЕРИХОВСКАЯ ВЫСТАВКА КАК АЛЬТЕРНАТИВНЫЙ ДЕНЬ КОСМОНАВТИКИ? (РЕПЛИКА ТВЕРСКОГО ОТДЕЛЕНИЯ РОССИЙСКОЙ АССОЦИАЦИИ ЦЕНТРОВ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ РЕЛИГИЙ И СЕКТ (РАЦИРС))” (Roerich Exhibition as an Alternative Day of the Cosmonauts? Replica of the Tver Branch of the Russian Association of Centers for the Study of Religions and Cults [RATsIRS]). February 14. Accessed October 21, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3MfrXBN>.
- Vzglyad*. 2012. “Путин: Тоталитарные секты растут как грибы” (Putin: Totalitarian Cults Are Growing Like Mushrooms). October 25. Accessed October 21, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3gCiBmF>.
- Zemánek, Ladislav. 2016. “Národní idea v pojetí Ivana Iljina” (Ivan Ilyin’s Concept of National Idea). PhD diss. Charles University, Prague.
- Zernov, Igor N. 2007. *ИВАН ИЛЬИН: МОНАРХИЯ И БУДУЩЕЕ РОССИИ* (Ivan Ilyin: Monarchy and the Future of Russia). Moscow: Algorithm.