



State, Church and Values during the Ukraine Crisis: the Dynamics of Charisma in Russia and Estonia

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Abstract

The paper applies Weberian conceptualizations of charisma in the study of contemporary war-leadership. The study analyzes political legitimacy and legitimization of war by religious and secular leaders since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on February 24, 2022 from three perspectives: 1) pure and manufactured charisma; 2) value charisma at the charismatic moment; 3) charismatic (de)legitimation of war. The comparison of two cases – liberal democratic and authoritarian imperial, traditionally Lutheran and Orthodox – yields variations in several dimensions: legitimacy for political governments (*progressive vs traditional* values); religious and secular sources of sanctioning of charismatic domination; the interaction of personal and depersonalized, institutional and manufactured charisma; instrumental construction of present charisma by sacralization of historic identity, persons, events and institutions. The paper concludes with the discussion of the explanatory value of Weberian conceptualizations of charisma in the study of religious and secular leadership in war-time democratic and authoritarian contexts.

Keywords

charisma – religious leadership – secular leadership – Max Weber – war in Ukraine – political legitimacy

1 Introduction

The twentieth century sociologist Max Weber argued that modern societies were built upon relationships of power and compliance that were organized into rational-legal authority structures by a process of legitimization. Unlike the traditional authority based on cultural traditions, rational-legal authority, then, was based upon rules and regulations that were legally developed through rational processes. The pinnacle of such authority structures were bureaucracies like corporations or government. Leaders in rational-legal societies and organizations were expected to “follow the rules” in most regards and guide the organization to efficient pursuit of goals. Sometimes, however, special leaders came along and rearranged such authority structures, perhaps even recreating them in a different form. In fact, Weber saw charismatic figures as having the ability to found new societies or organizations on the basis of their charismatic appeal which was legitimated by the acceptance by followers. Pure charismatic authority, it turns out, cannot outlast the charismatic person after that person dies or otherwise disappears from the scene, but the legacy of charismatic authority is the institutionalization of such authority in the structure of compliance that the charismatic person had empowered. Weber termed that aspect of social structure “routinized charisma”, indicating the core of compliance to authority that remained at the foundation of social organization itself. We will argue here that charisma remains an essential aspect of modern politics and religion; charisma plays a central function in leadership in both politics and religion, although it takes varying forms.

This study applies three major charisma-related themes in a Weberian perspective¹ to political and religious leaders in liberal democratic Estonia and authoritarian-imperial Russian Federation with prime focus on the time period since the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine (February 24, 2022) and until April 2024. The sample of leaders includes: Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, Estonian Prime Minister from January 14, 2021; Urmas Viilma, the Archbishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) since February 2, 2015;

1 Here ‘Weberian’ refers to both Max Weber’s theories and conceptualizations of charisma as well as to the elaborated ones of several Weberian scholars.

Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation since December 31, 1999;² and Kirill (Gundyaev), Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus' since February 1, 2009. The three Weberian themes are: 1) pure and manufactured charisma; 2) value charisma at the charismatic moment; 3) charismatic (de)legitimation of war. The paper concludes with the discussion of the explanatory value of Weberian conceptualizations of personal and depersonalized charisma in the study of religious and secular leadership in war-time democratic and authoritarian contexts.

2 Pure and Manufactured Charisma

Weber built his theory of charisma and its socio-political implications on the basis of his analysis of the rise of Christianity starting from the uniquely compelling personality of Jesus and the social mobilization of a committed following that grew by celebrating Jesus' charisma.³

For Weber, "pure charisma" constitutes an inner call, the sense of a mission or "spiritual duty,"⁴ whereby leaders' "specific gifts of the body and spirit", gifts "believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody,"⁵ and followers are committed to obey the domination based on "the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person."⁶

Pure and personal charisma contrasts with charisma that is routinized, institutional, depersonalized, manufactured or staged. As the following of Jesus grew into a church, it had to rationalize its structure and discipline into a bureaucratic structure, that is, a structure of offices rather than of people. The highest offices were filled by individuals able to establish a cross-time bond with the charisma of Jesus. In the church this bond has been embodied in the Apostolic Succession whereby each new bishop is consecrated through the transmission of Jesus' charisma in a ceremony centered on the "laying on of hands" of previously consecrated bishops.⁷ While "pure charisma" was legitimated by specific gifts manifested in the charismatic person, the legitimacy of "the *charisma of office*", by contrast, dissociated charisma from a particular

2 From May 2008 until May 2012 Vladimir Putin was in the office of Russian prime minister.

3 "Pure charisma" breaks in a revolutionary form all norms and traditional values in a Jesus-like manner: "It has been written ..., but I say unto you ...". Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 115.

4 Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 244, 246.

5 Weber, *The Sociology of Charismatic Authority*, p. 245.

6 Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 215.

7 Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 139.

individual and made it “an objective, transferrable entity” based on “acquired qualities and ... the effectiveness of the ritual acts.”⁸

As an ideal type, institutionalized charisma (that is, charismatic domination that has transformed into “institution”)⁹ or depersonalized charisma,¹⁰ this charisma of office (*ex cathedra* charisma) is independent of the incumbent.¹¹ In the case of the *office* of president or prime minister, the office-related charisma involves also “practices that sanctify the state and nation”.¹²

Accordingly, Russian president Vladimir Putin, “who is far from a charismatic personality”,¹³ can substitute the lack of personal charisma with the neo-traditionalist doctrine of “Moscow, the Third Rome”, where the Russian state is endowed with a sacred dimension keeping the forces of the Antichrist at bay as the *katechon*¹⁴ or “restrainer”. As a result, Putin is a charismatic leader, but the related charisma is derived to a significant extent from sources external to his personality and functions in an established bureaucratic routine.¹⁵

Manufactured (or staged) charisma¹⁶ utilizes *charisma* of other (historical or present) persons, is *media-staged* or *mediated* and emerging not from the charismatic figure’s person, but is “made to appear in representations of them, their works and their words.”¹⁷

Weber certainly did not expect charisma to be merely a quality of the person¹⁸ and considered it dependent on the devotion, recognition and trust which followers have in the leader personally.¹⁹ Similarly, all leaders of this study use and accumulate charisma from sources external to their personality.

During Vladimir Putin’s first two terms as president of the Russian Federation, the federal government held “a resolutely secular course.”²⁰ However, as a significant part of Putin’s publicly gradual but long-term commitment to authoritarianism on the path to the return of Great Russia, Putin adopted Machiavelli’s advice to his prince to appear and act religious for the public

8 Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 248, 1135.

9 Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 1121.

10 Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 1146.

11 Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 1140.

12 Alasuutari, *Authority as epistemic capital*, p. 180; Breuilly, *Max Weber, charisma and nationalist leadership*, p. 494.

13 Sakwa, *The Putin Paradox*, p. 55.

14 Sakwa, *The Putin Paradox*, p. 55.

15 Sakwa, *The Putin Paradox*, p. 244.

16 Metz/Kövesdi, ‘Whoever is not against us is for us’, pp. 527–531.

17 Whisker, *Apocalyptic Rhetoric*, p. 162.

18 Eliaeson/Palonen, *Introduction*, p. 139.

19 Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 268.

20 Papkova, *Russian Orthodox concordat*, p. 670.

even if you are not.²¹ He became a praying Christian and frequently drew the attention of the media to his appearances at services in Russian Orthodox churches where he lit candles, venerated holy icons, made the sign of the cross and prayed the liturgy. As part of this long-term performance, Putin often was joined by the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus’.

Several aspects are important to notice regarding the use of religion (Orthodoxy) for the enhancement of political charisma in Russia. First, Orthodoxy and Atheism have been strategically melded together.²² Russian strategic culture relies on two pillars – nuclear power, which is the primary feature making Russia credibly a great power, and Russian Orthodoxy, which functions as a basis for spiritual security of the nation and for cultural values that protect the nation from ideas and values from the outside. Both pillars act in synergy that Dmitry Adamsky has titled *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy*.²³

A similar merge of Soviet atheism, Orthodoxy and historic imperial state can be seen in the annual celebration of May 9 “Victory Day”. Sean Griffin has pointedly observed: “May 9 has become the high holy day of a new pseudo-Soviet, pseudo-Orthodox sacred memory cult.”²⁴ May 9, periodically reminds the Russian population of the historical strength of Russian culture. Nina Tumarkin²⁵ devoted a major study to “the rise and fall of the cult of World War II in Russia” seeing it as a primary element in strengthening and maintaining patriotism and devotion to Soviet/Russian military culture in the post 1945 period. That cultural focus, though it has had its ups and downs in popular observance, has been sustained till today. Kilp and Pankhurst²⁶ saw this ongoing charisma-building process in the speeches of Putin and Kirill in Victory Day celebrations before and through the war period of 2022 and 2023, and the observance clearly underscores the warrior qualities of Russia.

At the end of September 2022, partial mobilization to Russian army service was announced and Ukrainian territories occupied by Russian troops were annexed to the Russian Federation via fake referendums. In this situation, Patriarch Kirill proclaimed absolution of sins for Russian soldiers dying in battle (discussed in detail below) and Putin characterized Western elites by “[...] complete renunciation of what it means to be human, the overthrow of faith

21 Machiavelli, *Prince*, pp. 68–71.

22 Kilp/Pankhurst, *Soft, Sharp, and Evil Power*.

23 Adamsky, *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy*.

24 Griffin, *Putin’s Holy War*, p. 87.

25 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*.

26 Kilp/Pankhurst, *Serving Caesar to Serve God*.

and traditional values, and the suppression of freedom are coming to resemble a 'religion in reverse' – pure Satanism."²⁷ At this instance, the religious and the secular were substantively mixed – the religious leader sanctified the secular profession of Russian soldiers, while the secular leader exercised religious demonization of the political adversary.

In the last years of the Soviet Union and the years following its fall in 1991, Russian society struggled with the cultural problem of how to remember the Soviet era, the three-quarters of the century from the 1917 Revolution to 1991. Principal among the needs for resolution in this era was the question of how to envision the towering charismatic figures Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin.²⁸ Soviet school history taught the mythology surrounding Lenin and the Revolution, and crystallized the institutionalization of Lenin's charisma in Soviet culture as the "Lenin Cult".²⁹ The cult of Stalin, however – that is, the image and aura of the strong ruler from 1929 until 1953 – had a cultural allure that was more difficult to push aside for a new imaginary that rejected his cruelty. Nevertheless, the charisma of Stalin retained a strong grip on many Russians throughout the 1990s and the first decades of the Twenty-First Century.³⁰ That charisma had penetrated their consciousness so deeply that it could not be uprooted even in the seductions of western materialism and individualism. While Lenin's charismatic authority was generated by his revolutionary leadership, Stalin manufactured charisma by the "cult of personality" through "an overt co-option of the charismatic authority generated by Lenin's revolutionary leadership".³¹

Thus, Stalin used charisma of Lenin to enhance his own charisma. Stalin, without being the original charismatic figure, had his charisma routinized and rationalized into the institutional structure of Soviet society. That format was so deeply rooted that it survived even throughout the upheaval of the Soviet collapse. It became the infrastructure of societal life during the period of Stalin's rule and, despite several efforts at "de-Stalinization" under later Soviet leaders – Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Gorbachev all attempted de-Stalinization campaigns in some form – it can be argued that none succeeded, and the cultural "residue" of Stalinism became the fertile ground in which Vladimir Putin planted his strongman rule.

27 Putin, *Address by the president of the Russian Federation*.

28 Brinkhof, *Healing Russia's 'Post-Traumatic' Church*.

29 Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*

30 Apple, *От беспамятства к войне*.

31 Strong/Killingsworth, *Stalin the charismatic leader*, p. 391.

Stalin and Putin have not just merely transformed raw power into legitimate authority through the routinization of charisma.³² Stalin's popular appeal was built not on his natural attractiveness or religious legitimation but fostered as the extraordinariness of leadership when subjection to power is unavoidable; this helpless acceptance of overwhelming power might be called *ersatz charisma*³³ as it serves to add legitimacy to power resulting in authority, that is, the ability to get what one wants to have done because of the conviction by others that one is the right person to do whatever is intended.³⁴ To clarify, Weber argued that raw power must be legitimized in order for its use to be seen as appropriate in some way, that is, to be authority. Power plus legitimization equals authority, and if that legitimization is the result of overwhelming, inescapable power, then the legitimizer is the special form of charisma called *ersatz charisma*.³⁵

Thus, in Russia, the charisma of religious and secular leaders and institutions have sustained each other. Kirill's presence has lent a great deal of legitimacy to Putin's rule. As such, the Patriarch has been playing a leading role in constructing and sustaining the propaganda environment that saturates Russia and bolsters Putin's strongman rule. Because Kirill and his top leadership group have basic benefits growing from their companionship with government leaders, they publicize their support and show their involvement in Putinist events and projects. And because the attack on Ukraine has special importance for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in its international competition for prestige and power, it is deeply committed to the Putinist rule's structure of wealth and privilege.

Additionally, both Kirill and Putin enhance their charisma by sacralizing the historic identity, persons, events and institutions. Putin famously declared that the collapse of the Soviet Union was "a major geopolitical disaster" of the 20th Century which left many Russians residing outside their homeland.³⁶ He often indicates his longing to return to many of the conditions and practices of the USSR, and he also points to the Russian imperial heritage with pride.

32 Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, pp. 324–373.

33 Pankhurst, *A Comparative Perspective on Religion and Regime*.

34 Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, p. 152 et seq.

35 *Ersatz charisma* is supported by a religious explanation of the overwhelming power of the state being seen as an embodiment of God himself or, at least, the first assistant of the Lord. This is the imagery of the Russian Orthodox faith.

36 Putin, *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly*.

The study of Kirill's official speeches at the World Russian People's Council (WRPC *Всемирный Русский Народный Собор*) from 1993 until 2022³⁷ found Kirill referring often to years 1612 (period of "Troubles" before the first Romanov tsar was enthroned and Russia was saved from Polish control), 1812 (when Napoleon's army was defeated at Borodino near Moscow) and 1942 (battle of Stalingrad as the decisive battle in the Second World War) as the examples of confrontations with the West for defence of either religious (1612), cultural (1812), or physical (1942) independent existence. Thus, Kirill builds up his personal charisma by constructing the 'true path' in Russian history based on historic events, where Russians "defended our right to life, liberty and independence."³⁸ Kirill accumulates charisma by references to historic ruler-saints and selecting historic events with a potential of social appeal.

Thus, in the November 2014 meeting of WRPC he said: "Love for the motherland, a sense of brotherhood and a sense of duty, a willingness to lay down 'one's soul for one's friends' are equally characteristic of the heroes of Kulikovo Field, Borodino and Stalingrad. These same qualities of national character distinguish most Russian people today."³⁹

The ROC and Patriarch Kirill are perfect foils for this thinking on this plane. The history of the Russian empire was intimately intertwined with the history of Russian Orthodoxy, and despite the rejection of religion by the Soviets, from Stalin forward, the Church and state found grounds for flourishing.

When Vladimir Putin was inaugurated into his fifth term as Russian president (on May 7, 2024), Patriarch Kirill prayed:

for the President of our Russian country, Vladimir Vladimirovich, for a tribute from heaven, to rule and justice, strength and wisdom, to rule our country well, to plant peace and prosperity in it, and to turn the adversary to fear and flight. [...] Such decisions, made for the good of the people, for the good of the country, have never been condemned by either the Church or the people. And we know how many saints of God there were who headed our state and who courageously defended their people on the battlefield. It is enough to remember the holy blessed prince Alexander Nevsky, close to both you and me, because we are both from

37 Kilp, Pankhurst, *The Role of Moscow Patriarchs in the Promotion of the Imperial Culture of Sobornost'*.

38 Kirill, *Доклад Святейшего Патриарха*.

39 Kirill, *Слово Главы ВРНС*.

St. Petersburg. This man did not spare his enemies, but became famous as a saint.⁴⁰

Major Russian saints are known less for their piety than for their state-building exploits.⁴¹

2.1 *Charismatic Authority in a Democracy*

Weber's insights concerning charisma and authority were meant to apply to general social organization in its various forms, and although quite different in scale, they apply to both large and small states and religions. Here we introduce the comparison of Russian and Estonian leadership in state and religion. This comparison also permits us to explore the differences that occur when the state is a participatory democracy rather than an authoritarian government. In a democratic regime, charismatic authority operates within the framework of democratic structures, while key features of the (believed) impact of the charisma on followers and audience can remain the same as in the authoritarian regime.⁴²

The personal charisma of Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas is manifested primarily in her leadership style and uncompromising attitudes regarding war-time Russia. Her leadership style is "assertive, potentially hawkish", her language style "conveys influence and power".⁴³ In inter-governmental and international relations, Kaja Kallas has earned a title of "Europe's New Iron Lady",⁴⁴ has been recognized internationally as "determined supporter of Ukraine",⁴⁵ has articulated strong solidarity with Ukraine, and has represented Estonia as a voice of expertise on Russia.⁴⁶

40 Kirill, *Предстоятель Русской Церкви совершил благодарственный молебен*.

41 Prince Alexander Nevsky led forces in heroic battle against invading Swedes and saved precursor Russian states that he led in famous battles in northern Russia. Another very popular saint memorialized in the ROC is Dmitry Donskoi who, as Grand Prince of Moscow, fought off the Tatars/Mongols at Kulikovo Field in 1380. This battle was the first major challenge to Mongol rule and helped consolidate the several principdoms which became the state of Muscovy, the original core of Russia itself. Many other Russian saints are known less for their piety than for their state building exploits.

42 According to Weber, plebiscitary democracy is "a variant of charismatic authority", where legitimacy "is *formally* derived from the will of the governed", the leader "rules by virtue of the devotion and trust which his political followers have in him personally", and the leader "becomes the 'servant' of those under his authority". Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 268.

43 Brittain-Hale, *The Vilnius Summit*, pp. 36, 39, 41.

44 Cliffe, *Europe's new Iron Lady*.

45 Mölder *Estonia: Political Developments*, p. 141.

46 Hagelin, Gibson, *Renegotiating Estonia's marginality*, p. 11.

In August 2023, Kallas lost some of her credibility as a vocal supporter of Ukraine and staunch critic of Russia when it became publicly known that a logistic company co-owned by her husband conducted business with Russia after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Formal laws were not transgressed, but the prime minister's support rate declined drastically based on ethical grounds. Despite subsequent polls, which showed that the majority of Estonians wanted her to resign from the office of prime minister, Kallas did not resign.

In contrast, on September 30, 2023, when she was facing re-election to her party leadership position, Kallas said in a speech delivered at the Autumn Council of the Reform Party: "This autumn has been overshadowed by a witch hunt against me with the aim of humiliating me and weakening the party. I reject all doubts and fabricated accusations against me. I am not going to give up, resign or give up running for party chairman."⁴⁷

In response to her staunchly negative positions regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine,⁴⁸ in January 2024, she became the first head of state placed on the Russian Interior Ministry's wanted list by the Russian government. The Russian Federation accused Kaja Kallas of destroying or damaging monuments in memory of Soviet soldiers.⁴⁹

As far as Russia is concerned, brutality needs a strong response. Two weeks before Estonian Parliamentary elections in March 2023, Kallas said:

We ourselves can influence Estonia to be led by people who dare to confront brutality and aggression. We cannot be neutral in this conflict. Neutrality is not a worldview, neutrality is indifference. Indifference to violence and injustice. Indifference, the consequences of which we only feel when we ourselves are in trouble and wonder why no one comes to our aid.⁵⁰

The Archbishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Urmas Viilma, has a public persona of his own – e.g. he interviewed Estonian prime minister Jüri Ratas before Christmas 2019 in Estonian Public Broadcast,⁵¹ has been the most vocal opposing voice regarding granting the equal rights to family and

47 Kallas, *Kõne Reformierakonna sügisesel volikogul*.

48 Shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Kallas promised that Estonia will remove all Soviet monuments from public places.

49 Shukla et al., Russia places Estonia's prime minister on wanted list.

50 Kallas, *Minu kõne Tartus Eesti 105. aastapäeva eel*.

51 ERR News, *Urmas Viilma's interview with the PM*.

marriage to same-sex couples in Estonia, and as a result, he has been accordingly condemned by promoters of progressive legal change in this policy area (to be discussed below).

3 Value Charisma at the Charismatic Moment

Charismatic politics does not fit well with normal politics,⁵² because the ‘activation’ of charisma pre-requires “extraordinary” social circumstances,⁵³ extraordinary needs that can be met only “on a charismatic basis.”⁵⁴ Such charismatic moments are moments of suffering and conflicts, distress and despair, enthusiasm and hope,⁵⁵ “collective insecurity, disorder or effervescence.”⁵⁶ According to Weber, charisma has a *revolutionary* nature,⁵⁷ and in this study we find that it is *political* rather than *religious* charisma that has been primarily at work for both religious and secular leaders. By definition, political charisma turns the religious desire for salvation into beliefs of worldly utopia and converts religious emotions into an eschatological faith in ideological vision.⁵⁸

Particularly during charismatic situations, people are being led into a process where “a new collective identity (a charismatic ‘us’)” is being formed.⁵⁹

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 24, 2022 initiated such an extraordinary charismatic situation. Some religious leaders, such as the Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations (DECOR) of the ROC, Metropolitan Hilarion, did not adjust to the emerging ‘war-time’ context and left his position on the 104th day of the war. However, previous Russian military interventions (in Ukraine and Syria) and intensifying collaboration between the ROC and the military in Russia during Hilarion’s previous 13 years of the chairman of DECOR did not constitute a personal challenge for the Metropolitan. During 104 days of war Hilarion argued that “war is not a conflict solution method”, refrained from explicit legitimization of the war, and thus made choices which cost him the high-ranking office in church leadership.⁶⁰

52 Kalyvas, *Charismatic politics*, p. 74.

53 Swatos, *The Disenchantment of Charisma*, p. 124.

54 Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 1111.

55 Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 242, 1115.

56 Barisione, *Reviving Metapersonal Charisma*, p. 548.

57 Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 1115–1118.

58 Schweitzer, *Theory and Political Charisma*, p. 162.

59 Barisione, *Reviving Metapersonal Charisma*, p. 548.

60 Kilp/Pankhurst, *Religious Leadership*.

In contrast, Estonian prime minister Kaja Kallas seems to thrive in times of crises and war. In an interview, Kaja Kallas has said: “... I work better under a lot of pressure. Crisis is my mode. This is how I’m able to concentrate and focus.”⁶¹ Additionally, she has utilized a type of *value charisma* – in this case, promotion of progressive liberal values by establishing marriage equality by an act that was passed in Parliament June 20, 2023, and entered into force on January 1, 2024 – not despite but rather *because* of the context of heightened collective insecurity.

Value charisma describes a situation where a leader personifies either religious, ideological or political values, transforms these values into his inner calling and public mission, and “the glow of his personality enables his followers and adherents to accept his values and be guided by them.”⁶²

War in Ukraine intensified the conflict between liberalism and conservatism in Estonia.⁶³ In April 2023, Prime Minister Kaja Kallas formed her third government consisting of three liberal parties (the Reform Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Estonia 200).⁶⁴ The coalition agreement for 2023–2027 included a promise to establish as quickly as possible marriage equality.⁶⁵ The main civil society opposition for the Act was the Estonian Council of Churches representing ten mainstream Christian Churches (including the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate)⁶⁶ and the Archbishop of the EELC above all.

For Archbishop Viilma, the adoption of marriage equality represented an interruption of the norms of good conduct inherited from previous generations:

We have reached a situation where the good conduct practice we have learned at home from our grandparents or at church in Sunday school or in the camp [...] is interrupted. There is great relativity in the field of

61 Schank Tamkivi, *Prime Minister Kaja Kallas*.

62 Schweitzer, *Theory and Political Charisma*, p. 162.

63 Talving, *Nations in Transit 2023: Estonia*.

64 The coalition of these three parties owned 60 seats at the 101-seat *Riigikogu*.

65 The correct term is “marriage equality” not “same-sex marriage”, because the legislation changed the Family Law Act so that marriage will be contracted between two adults (irrespective of their sexual orientation).

66 In several statements and addresses from 2008 until 2023, the Estonian Council of Churches has considered homosexuality a sin that should not be promoted by the state; has opposed the recognition of same-sex partnerships as families and considered the establishment of marriage equality as an attempt to redefine the meaning of family. Starting from 2018, the Estonian Council of Churches has also expressed its wish to enshrine the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman in the Constitution. Kilp, *Estonia: Marriage Equality*, p. 106.

religion and morality. [...] The unwritten customs inherent in the heritage of Christian Europe, which have shaped our culture of behaviour and communication, are no longer given sufficient attention.⁶⁷

The Archbishop has not directly admired Russia's conservative values but occasionally has considered Russia exemplary in having strong national-religious identity as compared to the West, where religion has become a free market commodity:

We see how the Russian media have influenced the attitude of Russians in Estonia and wonder how many supporters of Moscow's politics and also of the official religious worldview are among them. They have a strong national-religious identity derived from domestic upbringing, but also from a consciously formed and cultivated ideology. We have put people's religious identities on a completely free market. Other nations have values to stand for and fight for. Do we too?⁶⁸

According to Viilma, the position of the Estonian churches is clear – marriage is a partnership between a man and a woman, and this is a biblical and religious foundation that cannot be modified by talks.⁶⁹ Consequently, under his leadership EELC continues to register only marriages between a man and a woman. The establishment of marriage as a gender-neutral union

is contrary to both the teaching of the Bible and the spirit of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia. If marriage is legally transformed from a union between a man and a woman into a gender-neutral union, it will irrevocably have a negative impact on the society, people and culture of the whole of Estonia and will aggravate the division between different people and worldview groups.⁷⁰

As was discussed above, in this statement Viilma utilizes the sources of charisma (by appealing directly to the Constitution and indirectly to divisions in social attitudes and public opinion in general) that are external to both his personality and leadership office (of Archbishop). Similarly, the Consistory of

67 Altosaar, *An Interview with Urmas Viilma*.

68 Altosaar, *An Interview with Urmas Viilma*.

69 Otsmaa, *Archbishop: Coalition acts like a thief*.

70 Viilma, *Esimese võimaluse poliitkultuur*.

the EELC published a letter, where the disapproval with marriage equality was based also on “national-cultural reasons”.⁷¹

Just weeks later, at the end of May 2023, the Estonian government terminated a cooperation agreement between the church and the state, that had previously functioned well for more than 30 years.⁷² Thus, in contrast to Russia, the war-time politics of *value charisma* has alienated the Estonian government from churches and the EELC.

In Russia, both Kirill and Putin have justified the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the securitization of spiritual-traditional values. In February 2023, President Putin delivered the Address to the Federal Assembly, where he revisited the defense of the traditional concept of family as the union of man and woman and denounced the alleged plan of the Anglican Church “to explore the idea of a gender-neutral god”.⁷³

4 Charismatic (de)legitimation of War

After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the first major “contribution” of Patriarch Kirill to the anti-Western war propaganda came in his sermon on 6 March 2022, in which he claimed that the real issue in this war is Gay Parades. He said, “those who claim world powers” require from all peoples who want “to enter the club of [...] ‘free’ countries, [...] to hold a Gay Pride parade.” According to Kirill, people in Donbass reject such values and requirements.⁷⁴

Kirill’s second significant “contribution” occurred during the last ten days of September 2022, when Kirill cultivated the commitment to self-sacrifice of soldiers and compatriots in the name of the imperial nation.⁷⁵ In the sermon of 25 September 2022,⁷⁶ he used the word sin just once. The sermon was not about religious salvation. The sermon was dedicated to the profession of a soldier – his professional oath, calling, and self-sacrifice for all others. Additionally, in different messages from February 2022 until the end of September 2022,⁷⁷ Patriarch Kirill never used the term “holy war”. He did use

71 Viilma, *Esimese võimaluse poliitkultuur*.

72 Kiisler, *Estonian government ends long-standing agreement with Lutheran Church*.

73 Putin, *Presidential Address to Federal Assembly*.

74 Kirill, *Патриаршая проповедь в Неделю сыропустную*.

75 Kilp, *The Role of the ROC*.

76 Kirill, *Патриаршая проповедь в Неделю 15-ю по Пятидесятнице*.

77 The sample included 68 sermons, prayers, the Patriarch’s words after liturgy, addresses, reports, etc.

the term “holy Russia”, but even the expression holy Russia occurred less often than [self-]sacrifice.⁷⁸

In comparison with the 1990s, Patriarch Alexy and (at that time Metropolitan) Kirill used the term ‘Holy Rus’ in a religious rather than a secular sacred sense.⁷⁹ It was only on 27 March 2024, when both Russia and war were explicitly and separately claimed to be holy in the text of the Mandate of the XXV WRPC:

From a spiritual and moral point of view, the special military operation is a Holy War, in which Russia and its people, defending the single spiritual space of Holy Russia (*Святой Руси*), fulfill the mission of the ‘Restraining One’, protecting the world from the onslaught of globalism and the victory of the West, which has fallen into Satanism. [...] The supreme raison d’être of Russia and the Russian world it has created – their spiritual mission – is to be the world’s ‘Restrainer’, protecting the world from evil.⁸⁰

In Estonia, in her 2023 Independence Day speech, prime minister Kaja Kallas attributed the war guilt and responsibility to the Russian people:

A typical example and question is whether or not a war in Ukraine is Putin’s war or a war of the Russian people? I think that the answer and the responsibility are clear on this issue at this point in time. This is the war of the Russian people and the common crime of the Russian people. As long as the Russian people are unable to change a system that, by reproducing itself, constantly elevates to power autocrats [...] so long will the Russian people also be responsible for the crimes that such absolute fullness of power leads to.⁸¹

78 Kilp, *The Role of the ROC*.

79 Kilp/Pankhurst, *The Role of Moscow Patriarchs in the Promotion of the Imperial Culture of Sobornost’*. For example, in the 1993 meeting of WRPC, Metropolitan Kirill said: “The churching of our people, the return of the prodigal son to his father’s house – only this can resurrect Russia and give it the strength to become Holy Rus’ again, capable of resisting the forces of hell.”

80 *Наказ XXV Всемирного русского народного собора*. For the construction of the radical ideology of the notion of Russia as “restrainer” or “restraining one” – in Russian “Katechon” – and its adoption by Putin and other political and church leaders see Shnirelman, *Russia as a Katechon* and Engström, *Contemporary Russian messianism*. Maureen Perrie (*Apocalypse Delayed*) has noted that the idea of Russia and the ROC as *Katechon* has migrated from “far-right nationalist and ultra-Orthodox circles” to the Patriarch’s and Putin’s thinking. According to Russian Apocalyptic interpretations, the notion of restrainer/*Katechon* is based upon the biblical verses of 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12.

81 Kallas, *Minu kõne Tartus Eesti 105. aastapäeva eel*.

Kallas has also utilized *security*-concerns against opposition in Estonian domestic politics. In a pre-European Parliament elections campaign speech delivered at the General Assembly of her Party April 07, 2024, she said:

also in many countries of the European Union, it is the marauding nationalist conservatives who are on the rise, promising voters a manna of heaven with whipped cream, if [according to nationalist conservatives] only this disgusting European Union were not ahead. Whose interests such talking points represent is not very difficult to guess.⁸²

Either by implication or in *expressis verbis*, Kallas identifies some nationalist conservatives as pro-Putin:

in every European country there are a considerable number of people who think that this Russia is not really that bad. Even in Estonia, there are politicians who do not hide much that they do not really care what happens to Ukraine and the Ukrainians. [...] Every time you hear talk about your people being pantsless but the Ukrainians being given the last one, you can be sure that this is not really about pants or the last cent. We are talking about inciting indifference and xenophobia [...].⁸³

However, as far as national security is concerned, Archbishop Viilma supports Kallas. In his 2023 Independence Day sermon, the Archbishop said:

As long as there is no peace, war in Ukraine is also our war. If we want the peace that will come to be our peace, we must strive for that peace – each with an affordable contribution. [...] In helping Ukraine, we, like other nations and countries, have chosen a side. [...] In this war, it is not possible to remain neutral in order to distance ourselves from what is happening. Instead of neutrality, one must be objective, because God is also objective. He is always on the side of the righteous and against evil.⁸⁴

Additionally, in 27 September 2022, Viilma reacted publicly to Patriarch Kirill's sermon that granted absolution of sins to soldiers dying in battle comparing the statement of Patriarch Kirill with Pope Urban 11's 1095 call for a crusade against the Muslim Seljuks and arguing: "Reading daily reports of the horrors

82 Kallas, *Minu kõne Reformierakonna Üldkogul*.

83 Kallas, *Minu kõne Tartus Eesti 106. aastapäeva eel*.

84 Viilma, *We should not forget to live!*

and atrocities, rapes and tortures perpetrated in Ukraine by the ‘brothers’ from Russia, one wonders how Patriarch Kirill can believe it himself and openly declare that all the sins one has committed in violence can be washed away.” Viilma continued, “Kirill’s statements can be interpreted to suggest that taking up weapons against a brother nation at the risk of one’s life redeems all tortures, rapes, murders, humiliations and exterminations committed in the name of ‘duty’ and ‘the need to honor one’s oath.’”⁸⁵

Thus, despite shared, principled disapproval of marriage equality, there is no “elective affinity” between Patriarch Kirill’s and Archbishop Viilma’s geopolitical positions.⁸⁶ In his 2024 Independence Day’ sermon (February 24), Viilma reflected over the principle “want peace, prepare for war”:

it is absurd that the only viable method of achieving peace is to obtain even more weapons and to provide for even greater sums in the state budget. I don’t like knowing that I’m morally involved in gun deals when I start paying new or higher taxes. Although I wish we could act on the principle of ‘if you crave peace, make peace’ (*si vis pacem, para pacem*) when certain conditions are met, I am still willing to pay the taxes requested.⁸⁷

On 2 May 2024, Viilma also asked the Estonian Parliament to postpone the adoption of the statement “On the proclamation of the Moscow Patriarchate as an institution supporting the military aggression of the Russian Federation”, because the adoption of this text on the “Thursday of Holy Passion Week” may “seriously encroach on the religious feelings of Estonian Orthodox”.⁸⁸ As a result, it was on May 6, 2024 that the Estonian parliament declared the Moscow Patriarchate an institution sponsoring Russia’s military aggression.⁸⁹

5 Conclusions

This study used Max Weber’s conceptualizations of personal and depersonalized charisma and of their interaction in “war-time” as a charismatic moment

85 Viilma, *Patriarch Kirill has approved of killing*.

86 Kilp, *Religious Conservatism in War-Time “Culture Wars.”*

87 Viilma, *Kui rahu ei ole*.

88 Viita-Neuhaus, *Peapiiskop Viilma pöördus palvega*. According to Viilma, for a large number of Orthodox believers in Estonia the timing (the most sensitive moment of the church year) may override the content of the message, which is directed against the Moscow Patriarchate.

89 Parliament of Estonia, *Riigikogu declared the Moscow Patriarchate*.

as concepts for insightful explanation of the patterns of religious and secular leadership in democratic (Estonian) and authoritarian (Russian) contexts in three dimensions: pure and manufactured charisma; charismatic authority at the charismatic moment; charismatic (de)legitimation of war.

The findings of the study can be discussed from three perspectives. First, what has been the unique insight gained from this study? We emphasize in particular that the role of church primates in contributing or opposing the cultural narratives and *value* charisma employed by political leaders is particularly important. In Eastern Orthodox Churches, power is concentrated in the hands of ecclesial leaders, that is, the bishops who are organized in a strong hierarchical system leading to the national head bishop, the archbishop or the patriarch. Increasing numbers of reformist Orthodox clergy and scholars are claiming this system places too much power, which is backed by the charisma of the Apostolic Succession, in the hands of bishops, even amounting to “episcopality”,⁹⁰ an excessive emphasis on the hierarchy nearing “bishop worship”.⁹¹ This criticism is most acute in the light of the controversial position of Patriarch Kirill and the Russian Church. Indeed, within ecclesial circles of theologians, philosophers and historians there has developed a critical mass of those arguing for significant change, most of it referencing the historic theologians and philosophers who have raised similar issues in the last two centuries.⁹² The analysis here helps us to understand the cultivation of charisma that backs up Patriarch Kirill’s authority and links it with the construction of Vladimir Putin’s secular charisma.

When the Estonian Minister of Interior called the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in Estonia “to recognize Patriarch Kirill’s statements as ‘heresy’”,⁹³ he aimed at two targets at the same time – the excessive political role of the religious leader and the explicitly secular message of the formally religious content. From the perspective of the “48 Laws of Power” leadership toolkit of Robert Greene – and in particular according to Law 42 “Strike the Shepherd and the Sheep will Scatter” – he may have purposefully identified among adversaries the person, who is “a single strong individual”, “the one head that matters”, “the person with willpower, or smart, or, most important of all, *charisma*”.⁹⁴

90 Jillions, *Episcopality*.

91 Reformers argue that, instead of the tyranny of ecclesial primates, the Church needs governance that is transparent and accountable, and inclusive of lay participation. Denysenko, *Conciliarity in Ukrainian Orthodoxy*, p. 192.

92 Bremer et al., *Orthodoxy in Two Manifestations?*; Pankhurst, *Both Symptom and Cause*.

93 ERR, *Minister calls for МРЕЃК to recognize*.

94 Greene, *The 48 Laws of Power*, pp. 358–366.

Second, in accordance with the Weberian perspective, we highlight the interplay between the extraordinary and the ordinary, the interplay between manufactured and personal charisma, the routinization of novel social norms and normalization of 'war-time' context. The opportunity structure that opened up as an extraordinary charismatic moment for the religious and political actors of this study has years later transformed into the context of a 'new normal' corresponding better to institutional and manufactured charisma than to personal charisma.

Third, methodologically, our comparative study involved a comparison of countries of difference size (Estonia is a small country, Russian Federation large country) and too small number of cases to yield significant generalization for any category of (micro, small, medium, large) countries. We compensated the small number of countries as cases with an increased number of variables (regime type, predominant national religion) and actors (religious and secular) included in the study.⁹⁵ The comparison of Estonia and the Russian Federation is partly asymmetrical – as far as the Russian invasion of Ukraine is concerned, it is the Russian Federation that is the core research object in the study, while Estonia is its comparative referent point,⁹⁶ a country where leadership reacted to a changed international context. In the category of initiating a war of aggression on alien territory, Estonia and the Russian Federation are incomparable cases.

On the other side, Estonia and the Russian Federation were selected because the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 initiated a period of extraordinary times demanding charismatic leadership, allowing leaders to implement a change in social values, *despite* differences of the country size, predominant national religion, regime type and substantive content of the value change. We assert that this comparison validates Weber's deep conceptualization of the general processes of charismatic authority, whether personal or institutionalized, even in extremely diverse societies.

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95 Lijphart, *Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method*, p. 685.

96 Kocka, *Asymmetrical Historical Comparison*.

Biography

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