

# Russian Orthodox Church Under Threat of EU Sanctions

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*[The European Union is debating on imposing sanctions on Patriarch Kirill](#), the head of The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), also known as the Moscow Patriarchate, who leads about 100 million believers. The EU has accused him of supporting the war in Ukraine, and President Vladimir Putin. The sanctions would entail an asset freeze and a travel ban, with EU diplomats set to meet this week to discuss the sanctions, which is part of a wider package proposed by the EU on Wednesday.*

[About 75% of Russians and 60% of Ukrainians profess to be Orthodox Christians](#), which can be both a religious as well as cultural affiliation.

In a sermon in March, Kirill preached against western values such as greed and gay pride parades. Kirill and many Russians who hold his views, see the war in Ukraine in terms of religious values, defending conservative moral values against a corrupt West. [Kirill has referred to “so-called homosexual marriages” as a threat to family values](#). “When laws are detached from morality they cease being laws people can accept.”

The Ukraine had been closely united with Russia. The prevailing faith in Ukraine was the Russian Orthodox Church. A large percentage of those living in Ukraine speak Russian and identify themselves as ethnically Russians. However, in the decades since the fall of the Soviet Union, and the independent status of Ukraine, the government there has been leaning toward the West. They want to join the EU, NATO and accept western views on gay issues.

“By separating from Moscow we are adhering to the Christian vision of the world,” said [Father Vladimir Melnichuk](#) of the Russian Orthodox Church in Udine, Italy. Melnichuk recently split his church from Moscow, and instead allied with a church based in Istanbul.

In 2018, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), were considered “schismatics” (illegally segregated groups) by the Patriarchate of Moscow (ROC), as well as by the other Eastern Orthodox

churches. [The schism forms part of a wider political conflict](#) involving Russia's 2014 annexation of the Crimea and its military intervention in Ukraine, as well as Ukraine's desire to join the EU and NATO.

Russian values are not the same as Western values. The Russian Orthodox Church does not approve of gay marriages, or educating children about their options to declare themselves gay, or choose a different gender to identify with. What has become common place in USA is not accepted everywhere, but the US government seeks to impose their own values on other countries, in their role as the global superpower.

The US has a long list of regime-change projects: Vietnam, Iraq, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Syria. Imposing a US style of freedom and democracy on foreign countries has become a decades old mantra at the State Department. Similarly imposing US style secular values on foreign countries has become a point of derision.

The American society, government, schools and churches have made gay rights and transgender issues an accepted fact of life. If there are conservative Americans with different views, they have been encouraged to remain silent, and accept the prevailing notion that everyone has a right to choose.

The Russians not the same as Americans. There are different opinions and viewpoints based on history, religion and culture.

Putin, in responding to prevailing Russian opinion on issues involving homosexuality, passed laws preventing indoctrinating minors about homosexuality and preventing gay pride rallies which would have been seen by children.

In July 2020, [Putin mocked the US embassy in Moscow for flying a rainbow flag](#) to celebrate LGBT rights. Russia had conducted a nationwide vote on constitutional reforms that included an amendment enshrining the definition of marriage specifically as a union between a man and a woman.

"It's no big deal though. We have spoken about this many times, and our position is clear," said Putin, who has sought to distance Russia from liberal Western values and aligned himself with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Putin added,

"Yes, we passed a law banning the propaganda of homosexuality among minors. So what? Let people grow up, become adults and then decide their own destinies."

Russia had decriminalized homosexuality after the fall of communism in 1993, but anti-gay sentiments have been on the rise in the country in the past decade.

Under the [Obama administration, the issue of gay rights became extremely import.](#) Obama sent gay Ambassadors to five countries in order to send a message on where the US government stood on the issue. Promoting gay pride, and same-sex marriages in foreign countries became an important foreign policy in Obama's State Department.

During Obama's terms in office, the push to make lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights became an international issue. The high point came in December 2011, when then-

secretary of state Hillary Clinton went to the United Nations in Geneva and proclaimed LGBT rights “one of the remaining human rights challenges of our time”.

In 2014, [US Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul](#), said he was proud of the message the United States gave Russia on gay rights leading up to the Olympics, and said the Obama administration had been tough on Russia on human rights throughout his tenure in Moscow.

“We as an administration, starting with the president, virtually every day are very open in criticizing the Russian government when we see human rights abuses,” McFaul said.

US advice and encouragement is sometimes condemned as unacceptable meddling with foreign cultures and religious values. Some conservative American groups are outraged by the policy. Brian Brown, president of the National Organization for Marriage, calls it “a slap in the face to the majority of Americans”, given that American voters have rejected same-sex marriage in a number of state referendums.

“This is taking a flawed view of what it means to be a human being male and female and trying to impose that on countries throughout the world,” Brown said. “The administration would like people to believe that this is simply ‘live and let live.’ No, this is coercion in its worst possible form.”

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