Commonwealth of the East
Space, culture, and transregional orders
by the example of an imported British concept

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Introduction

"A common wealth is called a society or common doing of a multitude of free men collected together and united by common accord and coveanauntes [*convenientes*] among themselves, for the conservation of themselves as well in peace as in warre" (Smith 1583: 10). In this way, Sir Thomas Smith (1513–1577), the English scholar and diplomat, defines the Commonwealth of England in his work *De republica anglorum* written in 1583. This title was translated in a later edition from 1609 as *"The Commonwealth of England"* meaning nothing more than the English state's monarchy of that time (Smith 1583; Smith 1609). Thomas Smith was far from alone in regarding England as a commonwealth.

The origins of "commonwealth" are in the fifteenth century. The concept and the word linked to it emerge in the context of the noble rebellion against King Henry VI (1462–1461; 1470–1471), when documents speak of "*common weal*"[1]. The rebels used it polemically (Watts 1995: 7–17). It was a term of protest, of claiming that any government was provided for the *bonum commune*, for the *utilitas communis*, or for

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[1] "From Middle English *wele*, from Old English *wela* ('wellness, welfare, prosperity, riches, well-being, wealth'), from Proto-Germanic **walô* ('well-being, wellness, weal'). Cognate with German *Wohl*, Danish *vel*, Swedish *väl*" (https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/weal#Etymology_1, accessed 17.03.2020).

the *utilitas publica*, i.e. the general good of the subjects. Legitimate is that government, which makes the necessary polity in order to gain the common good, understood also as "common profit" of the subjects. "Hence 'common weal' was [...] denoting the ethical and social purpose of government, its duty to provide for security, social order, justice, peace, and prosperity" (Early Modern Research Group 2011: 663–664). In this meaning, the political form (monarchy, republic, or constitutional monarchy) does not truly matter, because the principle of "commonwealth" is not dependent of the political form, but of the effectiveness to ensure the wealth of its subjects.

"Commonwealth" soon gained connotations of political structure, meaning in fact the English state bundling the interests of its subjects due to integrative law system, taxation, and representation in a parliament. In the 1460s, a chronicle from York stipulated, "the *commones* of this lande [...] loved the Duk of York, because he loved the *communes* and preserved the *commune profyte* of the londe" (Marx 2003: 72, emphasis added). We have that way in England "commonwealth" denominating a *body political*: the *ideal* part of the common good, the *social basis* of subjects' collective, the *polity* to gain the subjects' common good and profit, and, of course, the *structures* of it, laws and institutions. Therefore, the keyword and the concept made a remarkable career in the British history of political thought.

Digression on Begriffsgeschichte

In the German *Begriffsgeschichte* as proposed by Reinhart Koselleck (1979; 2006), concepts connect language with the socio-cultural body, which developed it. We speak in this regard of *historische Semantik*, historical efficiency of concepts (Richter 1987). Critics, especially from mathematics and law theory (Frege 1987: 7f.; Röhl/Röhl 2008: 10), argued that words have also a meaning by their own, independently of historical becoming, so it is necessary to systematically analyse concepts, in order to avoid historical relativism and the "dissolution" of reality in historical contingency and relativity. Another drawback of *Begriffsgeschichte* is that it does not consider concepts as fields of social com-

munication, as being a social practice of communication in the social system. This understanding of social semantics, as proposed by Niklas Luhmann (1980), can efficiently be applied on historical contexts, for instance, of the Middle Ages, as I proposed somewhere else (Grigore 2009). For Luhmann, social semantics fulfil three functions. Firstly, they possess linguistic representation function of concrete/observable phenomena. This is how, secondly, a social group concretizes itself in its semantics. Thirdly, semantics generate a group, constantly update it, and control it normatively; because semantics preserve those inherited values, which are transmitted further to next generations. They are necessary for the articulation and existence of any social structure, so long those social structures consider these values as defining. Semantically handed-down values thus norm the group or the social structure and become traditions. For these reasons, the social context cannot be separated from its semantic expression (Luhmann 1980: 17–30). Applied to "commonwealth," all this theoretical frame enables us to speak of three aspects. We have in "commonwealth" "(a) a keyword, [...] a term, that had particular importance in the early modern period [...], but also a (b) word or term that requires careful contextualization, in the broadest possible sense and not just at any one moment but across time, and (c) a part of a conceptual field, denoting certain values and ideals that certainly needed language to define them ..." (Early Modern Research Group 2011: 62; see also Knights 2010: 439–444).

From England and the British Islands, "commonwealth" translated overseas in the American commonwealths of Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Kentucky, to end up with the *Statute of Westminster* in 1931, which created the *Commonwealth of Nations*. In this post-imperial, I would say neo-imperial[2], form it already became an export-concept when, for instance, a number of post-Soviet states established 1991 the *Commonwealth of Independent states* (CIS).

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2   On the new-imperial thesis and the legitimation problems of the *Commonwealth of Nations*, see Murphy 2011; Murphy 2018; Stockwell 2018; Wandesforde-Smith 2019.

Nevertheless, this is *not* the "Commonwealth of the East," in which this paper is interested.

In 1971 the Russian scholar of Byzantine history Dimitri Obolensky (1918–2001) (Bryer 2001), who was active at Oxford University, published the groundbreaking study *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500–1453* (Obolensky 1971). Obolensky proposed a concept – a commonwealth-like intertwined "Eastern and South Eastern Europe" – which "gained the status of orthodoxy" (Speake 2018: 5) and to this day decisively shapes entire technical terminologies in academic disciplines like Byzantine studies, Eastern and South Eastern European history, Eastern Christianity studies, Slavic studies, etc.

I speak of the incredibly successful career of this concept for several reasons. Not only is "Byzantine Commonwealth" used in many encyclopaedias, companions and introductions to Byzantium and post-Byzantine successor states[3], it also serves to underpin the theory of a coherent and continuous cultural and historical area "South Eastern and Eastern Europe," and thus finds its way not least into the university policies and funding[4]. In scientific studies one speaks analogously also of other "commonwealths" like an "Orthodox" (Kitromilides 2007). or even an "Athonite Commonwealth" (Speake 2018), in an integrative approach, which tries to overcome spatial-geographical and historiographical heuristics of a South Eastern and Eastern European common history with a new focus on culture, religion, or even monastic traditions.

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3   E.g. Shepard 2006, who interestingly extends the chronological limits of the concept hundred years further, to 1550, as Obolensky originally did (Speake 2018: 5).

4   See, for instance, the Leibniz Science Campus *Byzanz zwischen Orient and Okzident* (https://www.byzanz-mainz.de, accessed 18.02.2020) or the Graduate school *Byzanz und die euromediterranen Kriegskulturen* (https://grk-byzanz-kriegskulturen.uni-mainz.de, accessed 18.03.2020). Both are located in Mainz, Germany. They use among other things the narrative of a "Byzantine" and "Post-Byzantine" area of continuance of Byzantine culture, religion, law and political structures from Constantinople to Moscow.

In this contribution, I will compare the English/British concept of "commonwealth," which was regarded as a model for Obolensky, with the concept of the "Byzantine Commonwealth." Above all, I would like to show, how, in the new deployment, the concept was subject to a much stronger constructivist effort. Obolensky and the authors he has influenced to this day use geographical, cultural, religious and economic arguments in order to construct a specific historical area – separated from the rest of Europe – that builds on its common Byzantine heritage.

After few considerations on "commonwealth" and geography in the concept "Byzantine Commonwealth," I will discuss "commonwealth" from the cultural, religious, and polemical point of view. The conclusions I sum up under the title *The immortal Byzantium* in order to affirm that the historical Byzantium lives forth in the historiographically constructed and academically, politically, and medially maintained concept of "Byzantine Commonwealth."

"Commonwealth" and geography

"The study of cultural intermediaries [i.e. agents of cultural diffusion] can help to bring out the importance of the *geographical factor* in this process of diffusion. Seas, plains, river valleys and mountain passes were the channels through which the centres of Byzantine civilization sent out, like great searchlights, their *beams of light* to the most distant corners of Eastern Europe" (Obolensky 1971: 362–363, emphasis added).

The scholars were influenced in the 1970s, when *Byzantine Commonwealth* was published, by the French *École des Annales* with its structuralist approach to history. Especially the category of "diffusion" and the importance given to geography in processes of cultural diffusion, found in Fernand Braudel's (1902–1985) works on the Mediterranean (Braudel 1949; 1978), determines the conceptual framework of Obolensky's "Byzantine Commonwealth." He constructs his "Byzantine Commonwealth" in the same "pacifying and acritical historiographical

ecumenism in which everything runs together," how Mario del Treppo put it in 1976 criticizing Braudel in an important article (Treppo 1976)[5]. "Byzantine Commonwealth" describes a huge area of acculturation, enculturation, and cultural diffusion beyond the political borders of Byzantium. Cultural diffusion from an imagined centre of civilized Constantinople to peripheral cultures in the Rus', in the Balkans, in the Caucasus and so on.

> "These *beams* [*of light*, see above] radiated from Constantinople up the Maritsa valley to Northern Thrace and the Bulgarian hinterland; from Thessalonica up the Vardar into Macedonia; from Dalmatia up the Zeta river to Southern Serbia, and up the Neretva to Herzegovina and Bosnia; up the Dnieper and its effluents to Russian cities" (Obolensky 1971: 263, emphasis added).

Obolensky titles his book introduction of 45 pages *The Geographical Setting*, proliferating the idea that geography and culture are intertwined.

> "The movement of men, goods and ideas across the Balkan peninsula in the Middle Ages was greatly affected by the *features of its physical geography*. Three of these features had a lasting effect upon the history of the Balkan lands. In the first place, the peninsula, itself predominantly mountainous, opens funnel-wise at its northern end into a vast plain, some 1200 kilometres long, which is traversed by the Danube and its tributaries, the Sava and the Drava, and which – save for the low-lying plateau surrounding the Iron Gate and forming the southern extremity of the Transylvanian Alps – is barred by no physical obstacle. [...] Secondly, the mountainous nature of the peninsula and the fragmentation of its landscape, caused by its multiple ranges and isolated valleys, have deprived it of a commanding geographical centre. Its principal cities – Constantinople and Thessalonica – occupied a peripheral position; Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire,

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5   The main critics against the *Annales* came from the Italian *academia*, influenced by Benedetto Croce's and Karl Marx philosophy of history (Marino 2010: 7–9). Main accusation point was that *Annales* method represents an artificial modus of a history "without people and without human agency" (Marino 2010: 8).

succeeded at times in enforcing its sovereignty over all or most of the Balkans, but these periods of Byzantine hegemony were few and brief" (ibid.: 19, emphasis added).

In this, Obolensky follows again Fernand Braudel, who established the analytical category of "*géohistoire*" to counteract the geographical determinism of the 19th century German scholar Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904) expressed in the concept of "*politische Geographie*" (Ratzel 1897). According to Ratzel, the geographical location provides a certain space with a relation to neighbouring spaces, understood as political locations of states. This relation conditions the states. Ratzel represents in his writing a so-called "geographical determinism" based on natural landscape conditioning of state and politics (Dünne 2018: 374–375). The keyword for Ratzel is "geographical location" semantically described by the metaphor of the river:

> "The river is always new, for it keeps on flowing; but the shape of its riverbed remains the same and causes it to be subjected to the same influences in the same place again and again. Thus the generations of men pass over the earth, whose ground, unchangeable or little changeable, exerts the same influence on their movements in the same place. In the two words 'geographical location' we summarize this permanence in movement, which belonged to the earth and is expressed in all life on the earth's surface [...] and therefore passes into all expressions of life" (Ratzel 2018: 386, own translation).

Braudel argues, on the contrary, that geographical space is to be understood as a relational and thus a *self-changeable* framework for enabling political, cultural and economic practice. This practice is not tied to an organisational conception of state. It transcends the territorial ties of state structures to a transregional framework of different relations: religious, cultural, or economic. "No, geography does not explain the whole life and not the whole history of people. The surroundings, in which they live, however important they may be, [...] does not determine everything. Outside its influence, man's work on the environment

and man's work on man is constantly growing" (Braudel 2018:403–404, own translation, M.-D.G.).

Braudel combines the temporal and geographic elements in his main category of "*géohistoire*," but it needs also subsequent categories like "*longue dureé*," "*conjoncture*," or "*événements*" in order to develop a total history (Marino 2010: 10–11; Dünne 2018: 376). Such approach makes possible histories beyond histories, such as a history of Italy before there was an Italian state or a history of Byzantine Commonwealth *beyond* the political and temporal limits of Byzantium.

Obolensky follows Braudel in this generously open view on relation between culture, geography, and state only partially. Accentuating that much the geographical setting of the Byzantine Commonwealth, the Russian scholar reconciles in fact the two paradigms on space theory discussed previously. He uses one third of his book in order to show how Byzantium's military and political expansion caused the establishment of the Commonwealth, imposing its military, political, and – implicitly – cultural supremacy on neighbours. Therefore, the Commonwealth is to an extent, for Obolensky, consequence of state policies.

Afterwards, when Byzantine sovereignty in the Balkans and in Eastern Europe disappeared, while the imperial Byzantine state was irreversibly shrinking, the Commonwealth ties still functioned due to irradiation and diffusion facilitated by the geographical setting. Roman or Eastern Roman state's expansion and control laid *in nuce* the preconditions for this late diffusion. Therefore, we encounter both the Ratzelean and Braudelean paradigm in Obolensky's approach, with preponderance of the latter. Byzantium's territorial expansion was dependent on the geographical barriers, which could not be crossed by armies. That way the huge steppes of Rus' were never provinces of the Empire but for sure, integral part of the Byzantine Commonwealth. Therefore, not all cultures included in the Commonwealth were political subjects of the Byzantine emperors. However, it was said against Obolensky's "Byzantine Commonwealth" centred especially on South Eastern and Eastern Europe, that the influence of Byzantium covered all of Europe and the Near East (McCormick 1987; Raffensperger 2012, 11–12); influences in

court ceremonies could be observed even at the Caliph's court in Baghdad (Shepard 1992: 57–58).

This conception, of "commonwealth" without state, contradicts flagrantly the original semantics of the concept in England/British Empire, where it raised: that of a *body political*, with government preoccupied of the subjects' welfare and wealth. All the historical or contemporary commonwealths have in common the power relation instituted in a body political between ruling and ruled structures, between state and subjects. Commonwealths reunite subjects bound to a political core, as there were, for instance, the American colonial commonwealths of the 17th and 18th centuries. On the other hand, they reunite former subjects around the former capital, as it is the situation with the *Commonwealth of Nations* (coordinated from London) or with the mentioned *Commonwealth of Independent States* (coordinated from Moscow).

"Byzantine commonwealth" as polemic term

It is difficult to construct such a huge coherent area of geopolitical relevance called "Byzantine commonwealth." Obolensky was one of the greatest Byzantine historians there are, so he knew very well that his concept would not apply perfectly on the geopolitics in the Byzantine millennium (500–1453). Few years after the book's publication he showed, he was aware of this.

> "Some years ago, in a book entitled *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, I ventured the opinion that in the Middle Ages, *despite notable differences in social and political life*, those East European countries which owed their religion and much of their culture to Byzantium formed a *single international community*; its nature, I argued, is revealed in a common cultural tradition shared and contributed to by their ruling and educated classes. They were bound by the same profession of Eastern Christianity; they recognized that the Byzantine emperor was endowed with a measure of authority over the whole Orthodox Christendom; they accepted the principles of the Roman-Byzantine law; and they held that

the literary standards and artistic techniques of the Empire's schools, monasteries, and scriptoria were universally valid models. This international community I rather *intrepidly* called the Byzantine Commonwealth" (Obolensky 1988: 1, emphasis added).

Critics indicated the political and cultural differences, even the religious ones, between the presupposed cultures and states of the Byzantine Commonwealth, which, thus, speak against a monolithic view on such a huge area. Even the top-down vision of Obolensky's "commonwealth", which he borrowed from the British Commonwealth, ignoring the major difference of political belonging, found critics, who accentuated the need of stressing "the connective" history of the Byzantine Commonwealth, i.e. trade, diplomacy, networks, etc. (Cameron 2014: 39; Kaldellis 2015).

Obolensky develops his conceptual construction in the direction of *cultural geography*, towards a transregional space characterized by cultural homogeneity due to phenomena of acculturation, enculturation and diffusion. Beginning with considerations on geographical setting, his book ends affirming the Byzantine Commonwealth as being a cultural dimension stretching theoretically out from Mount Sinai to Moscow and from Georgia to Finland (Obolensky 1971: maps on pp. 43, 378–379). Moreover, the special "binding agent" of this huge cultural osmosis was the religious orthodox faith coordinated from Constantinople. Knowing that the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople *always* transgressed the geographical and temporal limits of the Byzantine political state, Obolensky has to stabilize the heuristic force of his concept using culture, and especially the religious homogeneity.

"The work of East Roman missionaries, and the administrative build-up of territorial churches that followed it, resulted in the *transplantation* of the Christian Orthodox tradition of Byzantium to the countries of Eastern Europe. Nowhere perhaps is the whole-sale nature of this borrowing more apparent than in the field of monasticism. The slight variations of type, which can be detected in the early Middle Ages between the monasteries of the different East European areas are far less

significant than the underlying unity of formal structure and spiritual experience, which they reveal; and these differences become even less perceptible after 1300, when a new current of asceticism and spirituality, which originated in the *leading monasteries in the Byzantine Empire*, further strengthened the ties that bound together the various local branches of East European monasticism. [...] It seems a justifiable inference from the sources to suggest that, at least in the field of religion, the Byzantine tradition in Eastern Europe became during the Middle Ages increasingly *homogeneous*" (Obolensky 1971: 381, emphasis added).

At this point, where Obolensky's book *The Byzantine Commonwealth* ends, with considerations on the homogenizing power of religion, the Greek scholar Paschalis Kitromilides takes over in his book *An Orthodox Commonwealth. Symbolic Legacies and Cultural Encounters in South Eastern Europe* (Kitromilides 2007). The Greek author stipulates in the book's introduction that he is trying to further apply the concept, Obolensky developed for the Byzantine millennium, to the post-Byzantine history, after the 15th century until the beginning of the 20th century, when the Balkan Wars started (ibid.: ch. VI, 18).

> "As a historical phenomenon, the 'Orthodox Commonwealth', *the cultural creation of Byzantium*, remained a hallmark of the post-Byzantine period, and the provision of its spiritual leadership was understood as an essential element in the historical mission of the period, Orthodox religious institutions (patriarchates, monastic foundations, places of pilgrimage) in the broad geographical area from the Baltic to the Red Sea functioned as substitutes for the Christian Empire, and became the focal points in the collective life of the Orthodox communities. [...] In this sense, *Byzantium survived after 1453*" (ibid: ch. VI, 6–7, emphasis added).

Kitromilides, we have seen, decidedly focuses on the binding power of Orthodox confession[6]. He stresses even more than Obolensky the unifying power of Eastern Orthodoxy, seen, in an essentialist way, as something definite and efficiently *per se.* Political implications, alterations of this "ideal" Orthodoxy, even epigonate to the orthodoxy of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, are ignored.

> "The title of the present collection is obviously inspired by that of the evocative work of the late Professor Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*. [...] The title I have chosen for this collection has been inspired by that of Obolensky's work but it should be noted as well that there are differences [...]. I refer to *An Orthodox Commonwealth* trying to recast by means of the indefinite article the broad assertion in Obolensky's title into an interpretative and exploratory hypothesis. Furthermore, the indefinite article is meant to suggest that the focus of the present collection is upon a narrower region within the broader world of Eastern Europe evoked by Obolensky's magnum opus. [...] Therefore, I refer not to the Byzantine period but to the *Orthodox cultural forms* that survived and adjusted themselves to the pressures of *conquest* and later responded to the challenges of *modernity*. The Orthodox Commonwealth in the post-Byzantine era, in the period *after the fall of Constantinople in 1453*, remained as broad in geographical terms as the Byzantine Commonwealth" (ibid.: ix).

Kitromilides intensifies tendencies of delimitation from the West already established in Obolensky's *Byzantine Commonwealth*. He proliferates the idea of West-East antagonism with perilous tendencies of alteration coming from the West and the salvation mission of a providential Greek *spiritus rector* of the Orthodox Commonwealth coordinated from Constantinople (Istanbul after 1453).

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6   On the justifiabile application of the historiographical confessionalization paradigm on Eastern Orthodox traditions, see among others Grigore/Kührer-Wielach 2018.

"Despite the destruction of the Christian Empire and the humiliation of captivity, the intellectual reserves of the Greek East continue to form the most important cultural resource of the Orthodox Commonwealth. The intellectual contribution of the Greek East to the Russian world embraces primarily the men of letters […] and also those who subsequently taught Greek letter and cultivated the Orthodox spirit in Russia. Scholars and prelates arrived in waves over a period of four centuries […] to sustain and in turn be encouraged by the intellectual endeavours and the hopes which Russia symbolised for the Orthodox world. The intellectual contribution also included *the struggles* of the Patriarchs of the Greek East *to protect* Orthodoxy in Russia, the Ukraine, and Poland, from the *penetration* of the Uniate Church, the *stealthy advances* of Protestantism, and the open *pressures* from Rome" (ibid.: 7).

While the analysis is in many regards accurate and describes the tendencies in interconfessional dynamics after the 16th century, we have, on the other hand, to observe the polemical tone in the choice of terms he uses in writing history: "struggle," "penetration," "to protect," or "protect Orthodoxy."

In his collection of studies, Kitromilides bundles together entire academic and public discourses from systematic theology, to history and film. His accentuation of Byzantium living forth after 1453 in the Orthodox Eastern and South Eastern Europe creates a narrative, which flourishes in the scholar research in the area here discussed. We have, for instance, young scholars speaking of a "Byzantium of the Church" (as continuator of the political Byzantium until 19th century) (Cotovanu 2003: 534–535). We also encounter theological treaties in Russia or Greece arguing for a neo-Orthodox front against the dangerous tendencies from the West like humanism, individualism, secularism, human rights, rationalism, Catholicism, Protestantism, materialism, etc. (Payne 2011; Makrides/Uffelmann 2003; Stöckl 2006; Stöckl 2008). There are documentaries comparing Putin's Russia with Byzantium (THE FALL OF AN EMPIRE – THE LESSON OF BYZANTIUM 2008 [RUS, R:

Tichon Schewkunow][7]). And, finally, fundamentalist trends in Russia celebrate the nuclear arsenal as "nuclear Orthodoxy," God's weapon against the (political) evil (Hagemeister 2016: 22–74).

For sure, I do not want to say that Obolensky or Kitromilides, great historians, argue for such things. The most of their historical analysis is insightful and inspiring. I only want to show the *problematic potential* when using the "commonwealth" concept.

The immortal Byzantium. Final considerations

The application of the English concept of "commonwealth" to alien regions and historical contexts is difficult. In the Anglo-Saxon area, commonwealth has a centuries-old history as a *concept*, *term* and *value system*. It is part of the thesaurus and has been subject to many discussions, adaptations, and appropriations, so that "commonwealth" intrinsically belongs to political culture, ethics and language. In the East, it is a *historiographical artifice*.

In England, and in traditions emerging from England in early modern history and the colonial era, "commonwealth" developed its semantics in political ethics and global post-imperial policies. In England, in Great Britain, or in the British Empire, to speak about "commonwealth" had the premise of ruling structures between ruling institutions and subjects. They regard, first, the *common good* of the people in a body political, secondly, the *polity* in order to gain it, and, thirdly, the *institutions* organising that polity, *symbolising* it, if we use the terminology of the German sociologist Karl-Siegbert Rehberg. Orders, like the post-imperial order of "commonwealth" can not be without institutional symbolisation and linguistic appropriation. Institutions are concrete symbols mediating cultural meaning (*kulturelle Sinnproduktion*), effective through binding values and norms as shown by Karl-Siegbert Rehberg in his book on symbolic orders (Rehberg 2014). "Institutions are essential for

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7   The film director is abbot of a leading Russian monastery and confessor of Vladimir Putin.

political creation and enforcement of judgments. Institutions are about creating and maintaining the culturally shaped self-image of a group. In this sense, it is a synthesis of ideal and practical orientations" (ibid.: 54)[8]. Institutions need further conceptualization, which is this way in permanent interdependence with the body political as place of political practice, political communication, and political ideal.

The concepts of "commonwealth" applied to Eastern or South Eastern Europe are recent and much more artificial. They are *creations of historians* in order to construct heuristic instruments for the description of different geo-political or geo-cultural areas. It is not the place here to speak about the so-called "*Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,*" which scholars of Eastern European history are using, not thinking they apply a term not taken from sources. Sources, which officially titled the confederation established *de jure uxoris* in 1386 Królestwo Polskie i Wielkie Księstwo Litewskie or Regnum Poloniae Magnusque Ducatus Lithuaniae, use further occasionally the Latin "*res publica*" or Polish "*rzeczpospolita,*" which is different from the semantics of "common wealth." However, the monarchical system of Polish-Lithuanian confederation justifies much more the use of "commonwealth," which describes as mentioned a body political and its structures.

Compared to Obolensky's usage, Kitromilides' "Orthodox Commonwealth" has a much more solid fundament in the *transregional* religious deployment of orthodox dogma, orthodox institutions, orthodox liturgical practice, and orthodox cultural production. The canonical jurisdiction and administration of the Constantinople Patriarchate did really include all the parts of the "Orthodox Commonwealth." Therefore, we *may* use this concept historically justified, if we absolutely want it. Not

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8   "Für die 'politische' Kreation und Durchsetzung von Entscheidungen folgt daraus, dass jene Einheiten der politischen Gesamtstruktur in besonderem Maße als 'Institutionen' zu verstehen sind, in denen es um die Schaffung und Aufrechterhaltung des kulturell geformten Selbstbildes einer Gruppe und in diesem Sinne um eine Synthese ideeller und praktischer Orientierungen geht" (own translation.).

that easy would be to use "Byzantine Commonwealth." It is problematic to affirm that geography facilitates cultural homogenization and cultural hegemony of a core over underdeveloped peripheries.

In the application of the "commonwealth" concept on Byzantine and adjacent cultures history, scholars import not only a concept, which is always an *artificial act*, but import the logic of classical eurocentrism underlying it, irradiating in all directions values, culture, civilization, power, etc. "Byzantine Commonwealth" constructs a narrative of a huge area's geopolitical and geo-cultural identity, which opposes and offers an *alternative* to another huge area of the so-called "Western Latinitas." The concept is, in conclusion, a historiographical construction with polemic potential, because recent historical studies show the common history of entanglement not only of Byzantium and the "West" but also of Byzantium and the Islamic traditions of the Near and Middle East (see above). "Byzantine Commonwealth" underpins exoticism and the specific-*other* of the Byzantium-influenced East in delimitation from the West. It neglects, *ergo*, historical realities, which speak in fact of blurred demarcations between East and West, which evidence strong mobility of people, ideas, and goods, from the pre-historical age until today between Europe's "East" and "West."

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