

The Mikhailov Files: Patriarch Kirill and the KGB

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In our state, such a mechanism in an appropriate form has not been worked out, therefore it is necessary to think seriously about the legal procedure for access to archives, the sooner the better. At the same time it is important to display the greatest concern for our helpers. They must be absolutely certain that they will not find themselves in an awkward position thanks to our fault, and that concern for them - and for their families - is our duty.

KGB Chair Vladimir Kryuchkov answers question on access to KGB archives, at meeting of secretaries of party organisations of central KGB, 15 April 1989
Sbornik KGB SSSR, No. 133, 1989, p. 18

Unlike with his predecessor as Russian Orthodox Patriarch, Aleksii II, the date the KGB recruited Patriarch Kirill is unknown. The earliest known mention of the future patriarch as a recruited agent in available KGB materials dates from February 1972, when he was just 25. Already a young priest, he was a protégé of Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) of Leningrad (KGB agent 'Svyatoslav') and the first mention in known KGB files came when the two of them travelled to Australasia.

Although the KGB materials refer to him only as 'Mikhailov' (it was very unusual in internal KGB documents for any person, whether agent or victim, to be referred to by name before the late 1980s), it is clear that the codename relates to Kirill, born Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev in Leningrad on 20 November 1946. The choice of the codename 'Mikhailov' might have been a nod to his father Mikhail and thus his patronymic Mikhailovich. 'Mikhailov' was a relatively frequently used KGB codename (as recently as 1986, the KGB planned to use an agent 'Mikhailov' in a joint operation with Czechoslovak state security against the Pen writers' club). However, it is not difficult to determine which references are to Kirill.

Documents from the central KGB archives in Moscow (now held by one of the KGB's successors, the FSB) reveal tasks Kirill was assigned as an agent. Most of these relate to his participation in international religious organisations, including the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches, and entail providing information and promoting decisions and candidates for posts favourable to the Soviet Union.

These documents - which were produced by the 4th department of the KGB Fifth Directorate (the department that controlled religious affairs) - were seen by a number of researchers after the archives were briefly opened in the wake of the failed August 1991 coup, but access was then closed again after the Russian Orthodox leadership protested about the extent of the revelations. Unfortunately, researchers did not reveal the full contents of each

report, confining themselves to brief and tantalising extracts from the titles and text of the reports.

Documents from the KGB First Chief Directorate archive in Moscow, noted by the then archivist Vasily Mitrokhin before his 1984 retirement, reveal that Kirill was an agent when he served as Moscow Patriarchate representative to the World Council of Churches in Geneva. This is hardly a surprise: any Soviet religious leader who travelled abroad would have been a KGB agent. The documents also reveal that the KGB was aware Kirill was corresponding with Rome-based Catholic professor Eduard Huber, rector of the Pontifical Oriental Institute, even if the KGB backed away from attempting to recruit Huber as an agent. Another intriguing mention is of Kirill's May 1980 assignment to visit the Russian Orthodox parish in Baden-Baden, to the annoyance of the diocesan head, Archbishop Iriney Susemihl. A KGB agent with the codename 'Icarus' (Ikar in Russian), Susemihl later became famous for having recruited US military intelligence officer Colonel George Trofimoff. Mitrokhin did not note the reason for Kirill's visit to the parish.

Interestingly, despite Kirill's recruitment as a KGB agent in the late 1960s or early 1970s, he was still listed as late as February 1983 as directly subordinate to the KGB department of Leningrad Region (which included the city of Leningrad). Agents, whether of the local or national KGB, were required to undergo periodic 'control meetings', where they were questioned by officers above the level of their usual case officer. In Kirill's case, he is known to have had two such meetings in 1983, conducted by officers of the 4th department of the Fifth Directorate. In September 1983 the officer interviewing him was the then head of the department, Colonel Nikolai Romanov.

Kirill figures at least twice in joint plans by the KGB and the StB security agency of Czechoslovakia, one of the Soviet Union's more dependable allies in Eastern Europe. The November 1978 joint plan of action between the KGB Fifth Directorate and StB Directorate X (which similarly controlled dissidents and religion) of Czechoslovakia's National Security Corps in the Interior Ministry contained a section which appears to be a wish list of aims in the area of religion. Kirill is one of two KGB agents assigned to help achieve the wideranging tasks outlined. Similarly, a joint 1986 plan by the KGB Fifth Directorate and StB Directorate X identified Kirill as one of three KGB agents and four Czechoslovak agents expected to promote favourable candidates and resolutions at the Conference of European Churches.

Kirill also figures (as Archbishop Kirill of Vyborg, not with his KGB codename) in documents of the Bulgarian DS (State Security) in 1982 and 1984 relating to the joint operation on the World Council of Churches (WCC), agreed between the KGB's Fifth Directorate and the DS Third Department of the Sixth Directorate (which controlled religious and ethnic communities), headed by Colonel Todorov. One report from 30 August 1982, signed by Todorov, covers attempts to have the Bulgarian Orthodox layman Todor Sabev (Bulgarian agent 'Damyanov') remain at the WCC, in which 'Archbishop Kirill of Vyborg, rector of the Leningrad Spiritual Academy' was involved. Kirill also urged increased representation at the WCC for Churches from Eastern Europe. A report from August 1984, also signed by Todorov, covers the election of a new WCC general secretary, where 'Archbishop Kirill of the ROC' is among those manoeuvring (successfully) to get Uruguayan Protestant pastor Emilio Castro elected as the candidate most acceptable to the Eastern bloc and preventing the American pastor Arie Brouwer being elected. As would be expected in its own documentation, neither DS report gives any indication of Kirill's status with the KGB.

All senior clerical appointments in the Soviet era were made by the KGB and mediated through the government's Council for Religious Affairs (the public face of the 4th department of the KGB Fifth Directorate) - and many junior appointments besides. Kirill's collaboration was nothing exceptional - almost all senior leaders of all officially-recognised religious faiths - including the Catholics, Baptists, Adventists, Georgian Orthodox, Armenian Church, Muslims and Buddhists - were recruited KGB agents.

Although in public the KGB never acknowledged its role in controlling religious affairs in the Soviet Union, in private it made no secret of it. The KGB leadership approved a briefing paper No. 48s 'On the use by the organs of the KGB of the possibilities of the Russian Orthodox Church in counter-espionage measures within the country and abroad' on 28 July 1970. In 1982 the 4th department of the KGB Fifth Directorate boasted that through 'leading agents, the ROC, Georgian and Armenian Churches hold firmly to positions of loyalty' to the Soviet state.

THE MIKHAILOV FILES

The following are all the known references to Patriarch Kirill (KGB codename Mikhailov) in publicly-available KGB materials:

February 1972

'To New Zealand and Australia went the agents "Svyatoslav" [Metropolitan Nikodim Rotov] and "Mikhailov" to the meeting of the WCC CC [World Council of Churches Central Committee].'

FSB Central Archive, f. 5, op. 19, por. No. 273, d. E62, p. 90

January 1973

'The agents of the organs of the KGB "Magistr" [Archbishop Antoni Melnikov] and "Mikhailov" were sent to Thailand and India to take part in the work of the WCC. The agents exerted a good influence on the work of the Council and provided information of operational interest on the situation in the WCC and information on the personal character of individual figures.

[...]

Dep. Head of the 4th dept of the 5th directorate of the KGB attached to the USSR CM Lieutenant-colonel [Vladimir Vasilievich] Fitsev'

FSB Central Archive, f. 5, op. 20, por. No. 304, d. Zh64, p. 32

February 1973

‘Visiting the USSR as a guest of the Moscow Patriarchate was the general secretary of the WCC Philip Potter, on whom via the agents “Svyatoslav”, “Adamant” [Metropolitan Yuvenaly Poyarkov], “Mikhailov” and “Ostrovsky” [Archbishop Filaret Vakhromeev] was exerted a favourable ... influence. Information on the activity of the WCC having an operational interest was received.

Head of the 4th dept of the 5th directorate of the KGB attached to the USSR CM
Lieutenant-colonel [Yevgeni Dmitrievich] Kubyshkin’

FSB Central Archive, f. 5, op. 20, por. No. 304, d. Zh64, pp. 101-2

1975

“Mikhailov” – representative of the Moscow Patriarchate at the World Council of Churches in Geneva. KGB agent.

Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Vasiliy Mitrokhin, MITN, 2/1, p. 33

24 November 1978

Future Plan

Of Cooperation between Directorate X of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the CSSR [Czechoslovakia] and the 5th Directorate of the USSR Committee for State Security [KGB] for 1978 – 1980

The state security organs of the CSSR and USSR have in their possession information testifying to the active subversive activity of the special services of the adversary and, connected with them, foreign nationalist, Zionist, reactionary clerical and other anti-socialist subversive centres and organisations of imperialist states, directed against the CSSR and the Soviet Union.

[...]

To realise joint proposals and seek out new operational possibilities for creating conditions for and agent penetration of the Vatican, the World Council of Churches and other reactionary church organisations with the aim of discovering plans and disrupting actions being prepared against the USSR, CSSR and other countries of the socialist commonwealth.

To facilitate by the use of agents the deepening of dissension within leading international reactionary church circles in support of progressive forces in this milieu.

To resolve these questions to coordinate joint measures on the “SPOJENI” case; to continue work to strengthen the position of [agent] “PROFESSOR” in the Vatican and to create the conditions for links to be established between him and the Lvov vice-province via the PPR [Poland]; to strengthen work with “[Philip] POTTER” (WCC [general secretary]) and other persons who could influence the policy pursued by this organisation in the interests of the countries of the socialist commonwealth; to support Bulgarian friends in promoting professor T. SABEEV [Todor Sabev] (PRB [Bulgaria]) to the post of 3rd general secretary of the WCC; evaluate and analyse materials on [Lukas] Vischer, Bauman and others, suspected of links with the special services of the adversary, with the aim of their subsequent compromise in front of society.

Via agent and other possibilities to continue work to strengthen the position of the Christian Peace Conference (CPC) in the international arena. To use the developing favourable circumstances in this regard to promote agents of the security organs of the CSSR and USSR in foreign centres and special services of the adversary.

To coordinate agent-operational measures to intercept the channels of communication of emissaries of foreign reactionary organisations of sects, conducting subversive work against the CSSR, USSR and other socialist countries.

To devise joint counter-intelligence measures to prevent the anti-social activity of leaders and active participants of “Jehovah’s Witnesses”, “Seventh-day Adventists”, “pentecostals” and other sects. Devote special attention in this to the cultivation of sect leaders who try to conduct illegal, hostile activity.

With these aims to use agents “Mikhailov”, “Petrov” (USSR KGB 5th Directorate), “Congress” and “Oldrich” (Directorate X of the CSSR Interior Ministry).

[...]

Head of Directorate X of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the CSSR

Major General V. [Vladimir] Starek

Head of the 5th Directorate of the USSR Committee of State Security

Lieutenant-General F. [Filipp Denisovich] Bobkov

Security Services Archive, Prague

<https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/mezinarodni-spoluprace/sss/spoluprace33ru.pdf>

Late 1970s

“Sportsman” – Eduard Huber, born 1922 in the village of Oberdorf near Munich, German, citizen of FRG [West Germany], lives in Rome.

Jesuit, rector of the Gregorian University [actually rector of the Pontifical Oriental Institute 1975-81], professor of philosophy and theology. Was in the Soviet Union, studied the heritage of Plekhanov at Moscow state university.

“Sportsman” – under cultivation by the KGB 5th directorate, 4th department.

“Sportsman” maintains correspondence with “Luch”, an agent of the UKGB of Dnepropetrovsk Region, and agent “Mikhailov” of Leningrad UKGB.

“Luch” – Catholic priest, teacher of the department of scientific atheism.

“Mikhailov” – from among the church people.

The question was considered of inviting “Sportsman” to the Soviet Union via the Moscow Patriarchate with the 5th department of the FCD [First Chief Directorate – foreign intelligence] being engaged in cultivating him with the prospect of using him from the positions of [KGB] residencies abroad.

But the view was reached of the inappropriateness of the intelligence service conducting cultivation of “Sportsman”, as it conceals in itself the threat of the security of intelligence work abroad and the possibility of links between “Sportsman” and the special services of the adversary are not excluded.

Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Vasiliy Mitrokhin, MITN, 2/1, p. 15

1980

“Mikhailov” – KGB agent.

In May 1980, on instruction from the Moscow Patriarchate, “Mikhailov” visited the church community in Baden-Baden, which was under the temporary leadership of “Icarus” [KGB agent Archbishop Iriney Susemihl]. The latter expressed his dissatisfaction that “Mikhailov” visited the parish of the Russian Orthodox Church in Baden-Baden without his knowledge.

Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Vasiliy Mitrokhin, MITN, 2/1, p. 124

February 1983

'To Switzerland to participate in measures to prepare for the WCC assembly and in the work of the Executive Committee were sent agents "Mikhailov" and "Konstantin". Komarov, Shitikov, Polyakov'

FSB Central Archive, f. 6, op.6/16, por. No. 24, d.T-175, p. 155

February 1983

'Control meetings were held with agents:

"Adamant" – [Nikolai Nikolaevich] Romanov, Fitsev

"Mikhailov" (UKGB for LR [Leningrad Region]) – Komarov

"Skala" (UKGB for Kharkov Region) – [Valentin Ivanovich] Timoshevsky, Zotov'

FSB Central Archive, f. 6, op.6/16, por. No. 24, d.T-175, pp. 163-4

February 1983

'On the results of an assessment of measures in relation to the agents "Mikhailov" (UKGB for LR) and "Adamant" (5th directorate), a comprehensive report was prepared. Shitikov'

FSB Central Archive, f. 6, op.6/16, por. No. 24, d.T-175, p. 164

September 1983

'Control meetings:

"Magistr", "Mikhailov" – UKGB of Leningrad Region – N.N. Romanov

"Adamant" – N.N. Romanov

"Vadim" - UKGB of Chernovtsy Region – Zotov

Head of the 4th dept of the 5th directorate of the KGB attached to the USSR CM
Colonel N.N. Romanov'

FSB Central Archive, f. 6, op.6/16, por. No. 27, d.T-175, t. 4, p. 163

July 1984

'To Switzerland, as part of the ROC delegation to the CC of the WCC, went the agents "Ostrovsky", "Kuznetsov" [Aleksey Buyevsky], "Mikhailov", "Remark" and others, having the task of promoting to the post of general secretary of the WCC a candidate acceptable to us. Chosen for this role was Emilio Castro, whose election was supported by, as well as the ROC, the churches of the socialist countries.

Comrs. [V.D.] Lyutikov, Zotov, Shitikov, Bolotinsky'

FSB Central Archive, f. 6, op.7/16, por. No. 24, d.U-175, t. 4, pp. 122

October 1986

Prague

List of joint agent-operational measures to further the aims of Directorate X of the National Security Corps [NSC] of the CSSR [Czechoslovakia] and the 5th Directorate of the Committee for State Security of the USSR

[...]

29/ By means of the operational potential of agents "ZANETA" [Anezka Ebertova], "ONDREJ" [Dusan Ondrejovich], "JOHN", "MIREK" (NSC, CSSR), "DROZDOV" [Metropolitan Aleksii Ridiger], "REMARK", "MIKHAILOV" (KGB, USSR) and others, to take measures to support individuals who have, in our view, a favourable outlook and to put them in the posts of chairman and deputy chairman of the presidium of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), strengthening the peaceful tendency of this organisation, and securing a realisation of the adoption of positive resolutions at the 9th General Assembly [in Stirling, Scotland, September 1986].

[...]

Security Services Archive, Prague

<https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/clanky/stb-kgb-spoluprace2.pdf>