A Conceptual Rationale

Correcting the injustices done to the Russian Imperial House of Romanoff, which made a significant contribution to the foundation, development, and growth of the Russian state over the course of 760 years, is a vital and necessary part of the general policy to affirm the continuity of the current Russian government with the nation’s past. Russia’s rejection of its former Communist ideology and Russia’s Constitutional guarantees of freedom of thought have together created the conditions for the revival of the full range of diverse and dynamic ideals, among the most significant of which are the religious, social, and political values embodied by the Romanoff dynasty. It would be wholly unthinkable to attempt to construct and cultivate a healthy civil society, which all recognize is essential for our nation, without acknowledging our country’s glorious past, to which its social and political structures are inextricably linked.

It was a profoundly Providential moment for our country when November 4 was declared the Day of National Unity—a date that is linked to the restoration of the Russian state after the Time of Troubles at the beginning of the 17th century. It was on that date in the year 1612 that foreign occupiers were expelled from Moscow and that internal enemies and traitors were defeated, beginning a historical process that culminated in the Assembly of the Land of 1613, which called the House of Romanoff, in the person of Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich, to the throne. The
Russian government and society today understand and accept the need to eradicate the effects of a new Time of Troubles of the 20th century: the Revolution of 1917 and the atheistic and totalitarian regime it gave birth to. It was therefore that very meaningful date—November 4—that was chosen to mark the Day of National Unity.

The Historical and Legal Foundations of the Russian Imperial House

The Russian Imperial House continues to exist as a historical institution on the basis of its historical and legal traditions and in full accord with its historical and dynastic laws.

No other legal foundation for determining the membership and internal structure of the Imperial House exists, nor can exist, except the House Laws.

Membership in the Imperial House is determined by the Family Statute, and the question of the Headship of the dynasty is determined in accordance with this Statute, “which provides complete clarity on the question and grants no allowance for a choice from among the various members of the ruling House.”

Within the boundaries of its historical legal codes, the right to interpret these laws belonged always to the Head of the Russian Imperial House, that is, to the person, either male or female, who at any given moment is the senior member of the senior branch of the dynasty.

The Composition of the Russian Imperial House at the Present Time

According to the laws of succession of the Russian Empire, the Russian Imperial House today consists of two persons: The Head of the Russian Imperial House, Grand Duchess Maria of Russia (born 1953) and the Tsesarevich and Grand Duke George of Russia (born 1981).
The remaining descendants of the Imperial Family were born of morganatic marriages and therefore do not belong to the Imperial House (Art. 188 of the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire) and would not have any rights to the throne in the event of a restoration of the monarchy (Art. 36).

Claims by some politicians and authors that the “Imperial House is no more,” that the “Romanoffs cannot even agree among themselves,” and other similar claims, are groundless and false. Arguments against the rights of the senior line of the Russian Imperial House (which is descended from Alexander II the Tsar-Liberator) are, when appraised objectively, either the typical slander one encounters or the result of ignorance or political partisanship. The legitimate rights of the senior line of the House of Romanoff are based exclusively on the Family Laws, and are recognized by royal houses around the world, by the Church, and by the international community of professional genealogists.

*Dynastic Rights in the Context of the Modern Constitutional Framework of the Russian Federation*

A right can exist in several forms: in laws, in agreements, in customs, in canon law, and in other forms. In our country, all these kinds of rights exist and are applicable insofar as they do not contradict the prevailing law of the land.

In the Preamble to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, there is a line that states that the people have adopted it (the Constitution) “revering the memory of ancestors who have conveyed to us the love for the Fatherland, belief in the good and justice.” The internal laws of the Russian Orthodox Church (its canons) and of the Russian Imperial House (its Family Statute) are not only entirely consistent with the current law codes of the Russian Federation and its Constitution, but indeed also fortify and expand upon this line in the Preamble, as well as the content of Article 44, Paragraph 3 of the
Constitution: “Everyone shall be obliged to care for the preservation of cultural and historical heritage and protect monuments of history and culture.”

The current Russian state—the Russian Federation—though a secular government, nonetheless recognizes the special legal status of the Russian Orthodox Church and that of other traditional religious confessions. Similarly, our state, though a republic, can devise a form of recognition for the legal status of the Russian Imperial House, which, as a historical institution, constitutes a vitally important element of civil society in our country.

The Head of the Russian Imperial House, Grand Duchess Maria of Russia, and her heir, Grand Duke George of Russia, have many times stated that the House of Romanoff is prepared to return to Russia. They make no claims on former properties, nor aspire to political power or privilege, but they do consider it proper that the Imperial House be recognized as a historical institution and as part of the historical legacy of Russia. This recognition would be purely on the social and cultural level, but it should be expressed in a legal act.

This legal act regulating the position of the Russian Imperial House in our republic might be modeled on the Presidential Decree № 998 of the Transnistrian Moldavian Republic (the PMR, for Pridnestrovskaja Moldavskaja Respublika), which was issued on December 21, 2011 (see the Appendix). While the Transnistrian Moldavian Republic is not recognized as an independent state internationally, its legal acts have no less legal validity than, for example, the regional laws of the constituent parts of the Russian Federation or those of any other federal state. The example of the Decree “On the Status of the Russian Imperial House in the Transnistrian Moldavian Republic” makes it clear that the position of a non-ruling dynasty can be affirmed in law by a republic without any contradictions to its Constitution or other legislation, without any political and financial complications, while at the same time showing respect for
the national historical heritage. A decree such as this one determines the rights and obligations of members of the Imperial House and provides assurances of their political neutrality.

**International Precedents**

There is a range of precedents outside of Russia that might be referenced to determine how the legal status of the Russian Imperial House might be established in accordance with the norms of historical and current Russian and international laws, and taking into account the sentiments of society at large.

In many countries, even in those that have experienced political revolutions, the former ruling dynasties often play important social roles today. Non-Communist countries that passed various laws that compelled the former ruling dynasty to go into exile have now revoked these discriminatory laws and today the former dynasties fulfill a vital social function in society. In the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe and Asia, royal houses have returned, have been granted formal recognition by the government, have received some of their former properties back and now reside in their homelands, and work together with other elements of society to eradicate the destructive legacy of the revolutionary era and to restore and develop their country’s international relations. Attempts by the government in Greece to deprive the deposed King Constantine of his Greek citizenship and properties ended with a convincing legal and moral victory for the former monarch and a Court order that the government cease its unjust and illegal persecution of the king and his family.

Comparing all the cases where a former ruling dynasty resides in its home country which is now a republic, a clear pattern emerges: In those lands where the people value their history and where the internal political situation is stable, the former dynasty enjoys the respect of the people and the authorities, and their rights are
legally protected. Furthermore, there is in those lands absolutely no concern that the constitutional order of the government is in any way threatened by these rights.

These royal and imperial houses in these countries all enjoy legal status, and as such they are protected from the claims of imposters and are considered a vitally important part of the social and cultural life of their countries.

**The Current Situation of the Russian Imperial House in Russia**

In its own way, Russia has begun the same process of reintegrating its ruling dynasty into the social life of the country as has taken place in other states of Eastern Europe and Asia. The first step for Russia in this process was the visit on November 5-11, 1991, of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich, and his spouse, Grand Duchess Leonida Georgievna, at the invitation of the mayor of St. Petersburg, A. A. Sobchak. Other similar moments in this process soon followed: the meeting between the Head of the Dynasty with President Boris Yeltsin at the Russian embassy in Paris on February 6, 1992; the granting of Russian citizenship to the members of the Russian Imperial House (who had never become citizens of those nations in which they lived during their long years of exile); the funeral service in St. Isaac’s Cathedral for Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich, who reposed in the Lord on April 21, 1992, and his burial in the Family Mausoleum in the Ss. Peter and Paul Cathedral—both officiated by Patriarch Aleksei II of Moscow and All Russia; and the reburial on March 7, 1995, in this same Family Mausoleum, of the remains of the Emperor-in-Exile Kirill Wladimirovich and Empress-in-Exile Victoria Feodorovna. These events were all overseen by V. V. Putin, who at that time occupied one of the most important positions of leadership in the mayor’s office of St. Petersburg. Over the last 24 years, there have been more than 70 visits of the Head of the Russian Imperial House to Russia in connection with a broad range of
historical anniversaries and Church celebrations, all at the invitation of the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, representatives of the President of the Russian Federation (for example, for the 100th anniversary of the glorification of St. Seraphim of Sarov in 2003), or the presidents and other leaders of constituent republics and regions of the Russian Federation. The Head of the Russian Imperial House takes part in a wide range of charitable activities. In Moscow the Chancellery of the Head of the Russian Imperial House has been registered with the state as a non-profit organization. The Knights’ Councils of the Imperial Orders of St. Anna and St. Nicholas the Wonderworker have been reestablished, helping to direct the educational and cultural activities of the House of Romanoff, often working in tandem with the Russian Orthodox Church. On October 1, 2008, the Presidium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation ruled favorably in a case brought to it by Grand Duchess Maria of Russia seeking the political rehabilitation of her relatives: the Holy Royal Passion-Bearers Emperor Nicholas II and the members of his family. The Head of the House of Romanoff called this ruling a victory for all citizens of Russia, who together seek to strengthen the Russian state today and eradicate legal nihilism.

However, unlike nearly all these other countries, Russia has not yet resolved the question of the legal status of the Imperial House. This omission creates a certain ambiguity in the government’s position vis-à-vis the dynasty and prevents Russia from making the most of the international status and spiritual and historical potential of the Romanoff dynasty.

**The Principal Difference between Granting Legal Status to the Former Dynasty and Restoring the Monarchy**

Attempts to equate granting the Russian Imperial House legal status with restoring the monarchy, or to see it as merely the first step of the realization of a plan to restore the monarchy, are absolutely without foundation. The
examples of other countries that have resolved this issue, as mentioned above, show that there is no danger to the present constitutional order in granting legal recognition to former ruling dynasties.

The position of the Russian Imperial House is that, while it remains the bearer of the ideal of monarchical government and in no way rejects these ideals and its long-held religious and social convictions, it at the same time firmly believes, firstly, that the time for the restoration of the monarchy has not yet arrived; secondly, that no attempt to restore the monarchy should ever be made without the lawful and clear expression of support of the people, and thirdly, that the Imperial House should not and will not participate in politics in any form or on any level.

The Theoretical Possibility of a Restoration of the Monarchy in the Future

Russia’s national political leaders have not categorically rejected the possibility of a restoration in Russia of the monarchy, given certain stipulations. When he was acting president of the Russian Federation, President Vladimir Putin was asked: “If you are a person who likes to take history into consideration when discussing issues of the day, then surely one of key aspect of our nation’s history is the monarchy. What then should we do now, restore the monarchy?” President Putin replied, “I think it is very unlikely. But in general...in certain periods...in certain places...under certain conditions...monarchy has played and continues to play even in our day a positive role, such as in Spain. I think that monarchy has played a decisive role in that country’s transition away from despotism and totalitarianism. The monarchy was obviously a stabilizing factor. The monarch needn’t wonder if he is going to win the election or not, or meticulously calculate how to influence the electorate. He is free to think only of the good of his people and not be distracted by unimportant details.” When asked if this was also possible in Russia, President Putin replied: “You know, a lot of things might
seem at a given moment to be impossible or impractical, and then, suddenly—boom! That’s how it was with the Soviet Union. Who could have imagined that it would collapse the way it did. Not even in our worst nightmares did we see that coming.”

These words of Vladimir Putin prove that he does not exclude the possibility of a restoration of the monarchy in Russia, that he recognizes its “positive role” and not only does not associate it with despotism and totalitarianism, but, quite the contrary, considers it a guarantor of the transition from these oppressive forms of government to lawful government. These comments about the possibility of a restoration of the monarchy are far less restrained than even some of the statements made by Grand Duchess on this subject.

Of course, if the question of the restoration of the monarchy should ever be posed in a serious way, the legal status of the Russian Imperial House as a historical institution and as an already active participant in the social life of the nation, would do much to provide for a smooth and legal transition to the monarchy, without any dangerous forms of political experimentation that might otherwise accompany that transition—like usurpations of the throne, a struggle among “claimants,” Bonapartism, and so on.

But for now, this is a purely academic discussion. In the foreseeable future, the restoration of the monarchy is not in the offing, and the Russian Imperial House on principle abjures all political involvement and does not seek a return to power.

**The Question of Properties**

Before the February Revolution of 1917, the properties of the Russian Imperial House were divided into three categories.

*State properties*, which were under the control of the
Emperor in his capacity as Head of State, but which were never held nor regarded as his private property.

_Inherited properties_, which belonged to the Russian Imperial House as a whole—that is, belonged to the family that enjoyed the status of a state institution, and whose members were ranked by seniority of birth and were led by the emperor. This type of property also was not private property, but was distributed among the members of the Russian Imperial House at the discretion of the Emperor.

It was these first two categories of properties that members of the Russian Imperial House were stripped of in March 1917.

_Private properties_, which were acquired by members of the Russian Imperial House using their own financial resources, and which remained in their possession until July 13, 1918, when the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom), V. I. Ulianov (Lenin) signed a decree entitled “On the Confiscation of the Property of the Deposed Russian Emperor and Members of the Imperial House.” According to this decree, all real and personal property of members of the Russian Imperial House, both in Russia and abroad, was subject to confiscation.

Based on all the foregoing, it follows that the claims of some politicians and other prominent figures that the granting of official status to the Russian Imperial House would be accompanied by a return to them of “all their palaces,” “the Kremlin and the Hermitage,” and so on, is entirely without foundation and designed only to engender ill feelings toward the Imperial House. Naturally, the Russian Imperial House does not now, nor ever had, any such unrealistic pretentions. Any consideration of the return of _private_ properties—and only private properties, the third category alone—could proceed only in the event the Russian Federation should pass a Federal law on the restitution of properties, but there is no such law now, as
everyone knows.

Even while those who had lost their properties, or their direct heirs, were still alive, the grandfather of the present Head of the Russian Imperial House, Emperor-in-Exile Kirill Wladimirovich, stated that the Imperial House rejects the idea of the restitution of properties on account of the irreversible changes in the social and economic structure of Russia after the Revolution. This opinion was held likewise by his son, Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich, and also by his daughter, the current Head of the Russian Imperial House, Grand Duchess Maria of Russia, who has many times publicly stated that, in her view, a restitution of properties would cause enormous upheaval in the country, such that the disadvantages far outweigh the advantages.

As a result, the question of the return to the Imperial Family of private property has not been taken up in Russia.

We cannot rule out the possibility that the current Russian government might, in recognition of the role the Russian Imperial House plays in society today and out of respect for its place in our nation’s history, facilitate the return of the imperial family to its homeland by providing, by mutual agreement, some historical building where the royal family could live and base itself for its various activities (housing a chapel, offices, a museum, an archive, etc.). It might be one of any number of buildings in need of repair yet of historical and cultural significance—one of the many that government officials have repeatedly said that there is no money to renovate. While the Imperial Family also does not have funds sufficient to restore one of these buildings, the government might permit the restoration work to be funded through private donations from those who respect the Russian Imperial House. As demonstrated by the example of those countries that have returned one or even several palaces to the former ruling dynasties, this option can work quite well: it places no financial burden on the government,
and places the responsibility for the renovation and upkeep of the building or buildings in the hands of private citizens.

**Whatever the case, contrary to the slanderous claims of some political figures, the Russian Imperial House has never requested nor intends to request from the government the return of any properties or any sort of governmental financial support. Legal status for the House of Romanoff is sought not for personal gain or privilege, but to expand the opportunities to serve the nation.**

**The Main Functions of the Russian Imperial House in the Social Life of Russia**

The potential of the Russian Imperial House as a national symbol and as a guardian of national traditions, bridging the entire length of Russia’s history, is both obvious and natural. The Head of the Russian Imperial House, Grand Duchess Maria of Russia, has herself stated her vision of the role of the dynasty might play in an interview she gave to Rossiiskaia gazeta: “In the majority of countries, both republics and former Communist countries, the question of the status of the former ruling dynasties has long ago been decided for the benefit of all concerned. The state has granted the royal or imperial houses the status of historical institutions which link modern-day life with the past, with the nation’s traditions, and with the ancient structures of society. I am certain that sooner or later the same will happen in Russia. Many important steps have already been taken in this direction, in fact. In any case, both I and all my family strive to be useful to Russia and to our people, to help as far as possible the president in his efforts to rebuild the country into a strong and stable state… Of course, we have our own opinions on certain things. But as I have many times said, the Russian Imperial House does not involve itself in political debates, nor does it participate in any party politics, because such things contradict its very nature. The historical dynasty, regardless of whether it occupies the
The Grand Duchess developed these ideas in an interview she gave to Agence France-Presse (AFP) on September 10, 2007: “My main role as Head of the Russian Imperial House is to help the people of Russia to restore the nation’s spiritual and moral values and its national character, to help them build a civil society based on their ancient traditions, which the Revolution nearly destroyed. In practice, this means our active involvement in charitable, cultural, legal, and other forms of social activities.... Ideally, I want each citizen of Russia, regardless of his or her political convictions, social views, or religious affiliation, to know that the Imperial House of Romanoff continues to exist and that it belongs to each and every one of them. That is, I want them to know that there exists a living symbol, which is not just an inanimate representation of the state, like a state coat-of-arms, a flag, or a national anthem, but is something to which the people can turn for moral support and assistance.”

Thus the range of activities of the Russian Imperial House lie outside politics entirely and include only public service, philanthropy, defending the rights and freedoms of the citizens, collaborative projects with the Russian Orthodox Church to restore its holy places and religious life in general in the country, working with governmental bodies and religious and civic organizations to support education, civil peace and cultural initiatives, defending the environment, helping to advance research and higher education, and similar endeavors. The Imperial House also works together with governmental agencies, offering advice and support in advance of preparations of celebrations marking significant historical events and also taking part in those celebrations, helping to preserve historically and culturally significant monuments, serving as honorary chairs and members of organizations that, while not vested with any official powers, nonetheless contribute in significant ways to resolving social issues of the day, conflict resolution, and so on.
The Basic Functions of the Russian Imperial House Internationally

In the above cited interview that Grand Duchess Maria of Russia gave to Rossiiskaia gazeta, she mentions the “formation of a positive image of the country across the world.” It is hard to overstate the vital role played by the Russian Imperial House in this area. The kinship ties connecting the Romanoffs and other royal houses present inestimable potential benefits to the nation, which most political leaders do not nor could ever possess and which could not be purchased for any price. Grand Duchess Maria of Russia is a direct descendant not only of Peter the Great, Catherine the Great and Alexander II the Tsar-Liberator, but also of the biblical King David, Queen Victoria of Great Britain, Charlemagne, and the Prophet Muhammad. Common ancestors link her to all the monarchs and Heads of former reigning dynasties of Europe, and in Muslim countries she has the right to the title “Holy Mother.”

The importance of dynastic connections has been broadly acknowledged by the leaders of many nations today, including the President of Russia. For example, in his speech on October 15, 2007, in Wiesbaden, at the plenary session of the Petersburg Dialogue Russian-German Civic Forum, President Putin, speaking of the “regular direct contacts between civil society representatives from Russia and Germany,” noted particularly that “I would like to remind you that many members of the Russian imperial family came from Germany. This was another important channel that established contacts between our two peoples. Also, many members of the imperial family married members of the German aristocracy and went to live in Germany and this also had its weight.”

The Head of the Romanoff dynasty and other members of the Imperial House can utilize their family ties, their historical position, and their fluency in foreign languages to serve as “goodwill ambassadors” of the nation, helping
to advance the official diplomatic agendas of the nation on an international level, promoting the nation’s manufacturing and agricultural sectors on the international markets, and so on. We can see how important this role might be for Russia by examining how other royal families around the world have helped their countries in these very ways. At present the valuable potential of the Russian Imperial House is not being exploited, like a violin that is nothing more than a piece of wood and wire to those who have never heard its magical sounds. The lack of any official legal status inside Russia is an obstacle to the full participation of the Romanoff Dynasty on an international level (because to engage in serious matters of state, one has to possess formally certain rights and responsibilities), and it dampens the outreach that might be undertaken by foreign dynasties and political circles via their dynastic connections to the Romanoffs. So for now, the relationship of foreign dynasties, governments, and influential social and political groups to the Russian Imperial House remains limited mostly to invitations to dynastic celebrations, exchanges of letters and cards on various family occasions, and purely private meetings and communications.

But even in the present circumstances, the Russian Imperial House, having received at least some measure of moral support from official Russian governmental bodies, does much good for its native country. One particularly telling example is the visit by the Grand Duchess Maria to Australia in September 2007. The Head of the Russian Imperial House arrived there at the invitation of the Archdiocese of Sydney and Australia and New Zealand of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Communities living there. The Russian Embassy in Australia arranged a reception in honour of the Grand Duchess, the Russian ambassador accompanied Her Imperial Highness during her visit to the War Memorial in Canberra, and the First Secretary of the embassy accompanied the Grand Duchess at a number of church services, memorial events, and receptions in other cities. These were very important and very visible gestures but
nonetheless still expressions of personal respect for the Grand Duchess rather than official recognition of the status of the Russian Imperial House by the Russian Federation. And yet, the reception for the Head of the Russian Imperial House given by the Australian authorities was entirely appropriate to her rank and completely official in nature. They received her both as the Head of a foreign dynasty and as the great-great-granddaughter of Queen Victoria, whose memory is greatly honoured in Australia. Grand Duchess Maria of Russia met with members of both houses of parliament and with the co-chair of the Russian-Australian parliamentary group; she stayed in the Governors’ residences in those states she visited; and she met with the lord mayors of the cities she stopped in during her travels about the country. Everywhere she went, the Head of the Russian Imperial House gave speeches supporting new cooperative ventures with Russia, which had been announced by the President of the Russian Federation when he attended the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Australia. The Grand Duchess’s speeches were met with very positive reactions from officials, members of the public, and the press. Moreover, the joint participation of the Grand Duchess and representatives of the Russian Embassy at ceremonies and events helped to establish even further the friendly and warm ties between the people of Australia and the Russian community living in Australia, a point which was warmly and sincerely emphasized by representatives of the Russian embassy at their farewell meeting with the Grand Duchess. There can be little doubt that, if this much success and good will were achieved without legal recognition, then surely much more might have been achieved by the Grand Duchess during this trip (and others like it) if the Imperial House enjoyed legal status as a historical institution in the Russian Federation.

The Head of the House of Romanoff could likewise play a vitally important role in the nations that comprised the former Soviet Union. The Imperial House never took part in the fratricidal civil wars nor in those processes that led
to the disintegration of the former Soviet state. For all the peoples of the Russian Empire and USSR, who together belonged to a common cultural space and who were linked by a common history, the Imperial House remains a unique unifying symbol, a reminder of our fraternal past and a politically neutral instrument for the revival of cooperation in the present and future. This theory was confirmed in practice when Grand Duchess Leonida Georgievna and then the rest of the Imperial Family visited Georgia (in 1994 and 1995, respectively); when Grand Duchess Leonida Georgievna visited Latvia (in May 2000); when Grand Duchess Maria of Russia visited Transnistria and Ukraine (May 2009) and Belarus (in July 2009); when Tsesarevich George of Russia visited Transnistria (September 2010); when the Grand Duchess visited Ukraine (May-June 2011, and September 2013, together with Tsesarevich George of Russia); and when she visited Armenia (in November 2011) and Uzbekistan (in November 2014).

Possible Opposition

Despite the firm legal foundations of its historical status and its ardent neutrality in political and social affairs, the Russian Imperial House is sometimes attacked and criticized by political figures of both the Left and the Right. The motivations for these attacks and criticisms vary and are often inconsistent. (For example, some Leftist politicians see the activities of the Imperial House as a potential threat to democracy, whereas some on the Right criticize the Head of the Imperial House or its members for their positive statements on democracy.)

Like those critics of the Russian Orthodox Church who denounce the Moscow Patriarchate as somehow being uncanonical and its hierarchs guilty of heresy, critics of the Russian Imperial House attempt to challenge the dynastic rights of the Imperial Family and accuse it of “violating” one or another law or tradition of the dynasty.
Unfortunately, sometimes the personal likes and dislikes of certain persons prevail over decency, legality, character, and common sense. In official Church pronouncements and in his correspondence, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia routinely addresses Grand Duchess Maria of Russia as the Head of the Russian Imperial House, yet some clergy allow themselves to challenge the position of the Grand Duchess. Similarly, the Patriarch and the Office of External Church Affairs have both publicly and officially endorsed the legal proceedings initiated by the Grand Duchess Maria of Russia to obtain the legal rehabilitation of members of the Imperial Family who were executed in 1918; but some clergy individually spoke out against these initiatives.

Some government officials, exploiting the lack of a clear position of the current Russian government with regard to the Imperial House, and so acting on their own personal opinions, have thrown their support around one or another relative of the dynasty. In such cases, there is a double standard at work: when Romanoff relatives who do not belong to the Imperial House but who are friendly to some government official are invited to some official events, they are sometimes introduced as the “Heads” or “members” of the House of Romanoff, but when specialists on the history and laws of the Imperial House object to the use of these terms in reference to these relatives, these same government officials then hasten to say that, in point of fact, there “is no Imperial House anymore,” that these are merely “members of the family,” and so forth. But not one single official who has revealed their bias against the legitimate Head of the Russian Imperial House in his or her official capacity in the government or in public statements to the press, has ever signed a legal and official public document challenging the rights of Grand Duchess Maria of Russia because, in reality, all the facts are on her side, and all their false or groundless allegations are exposed and refuted by conscientious and expert jurists and historians.

The worry of some over how the recognition of the legal
status of the Russian Imperial House might lead to protests from some relatives of the Romanoffs is entirely unjustified. First of all, the morganatic relatives of the Imperial House are of a range of opinions, and many of them have excellent relationships with Grand Duchess Maria of Russia. Only two elderly brothers—Nicholas Romanovich Romanoff (1922-2014) and Dmitrii Romanovich Romanoff (b. 1926), the sons of Prince of the Imperial Blood Roman Petrovich by his morganatic marriage to Countess P. D. Sheremeteva—have spoken in negative and destructive ways about the legitimate Head of the Russian Imperial House. This line of descent, in a purely genealogical sense, is not even the most senior line. (The most senior are the grandsons of Grand Duke Dmitrii Pavlovich and the great-great-grandsons of Emperor Alexander II from his first marriage, with Empress Maria Alexandrovna, born Princess of Hesse-Darmstadt—Prince D. P. Romanovsky-Ilinsky and his brother, Prince M. P. Romanovsky-Ilinsky. After them comes the great-grandson of Emperor Alexander II from his second morganatic marriage, to Princess E. A. Iurievskaya, born Princess Dolgorukova—Prince G. A. Iurievsky.)

Secondly, and most importantly, the status of the Head of the Imperial House is determined only by the dynastic laws and does not depend on anyone’s recognition or lack thereof. For the current Russian government to withhold official status from the Russian Imperial House on account of the objections of some relatives would be as illogical as withholding all cooperation and concelebration with His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia because there also existed a “Kievan Patriarchate,” or a “Suzdal Schism,” or because the former Bishop Diomid of Chukotka had issued an “anathema” against the entire hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Claims that parts of the public—“the older generation,” for example—could object to the granting of official legal status to the Russian Imperial House are also utterly dismissible. One need only examine the many visits of
the Imperial Family to Russia to be convinced that the vast majority of our countrymen, including veterans of the Second World War, regard the Grand Duchess and members of her family with enormous respect and admiration.

Of course, there have been and will always be attacks on the Russian Imperial House. It is likely that these attacks will only increase, particularly as the question of the Imperial House’s official status is discussed and if it were ever granted—at least until the clear and very real benefits of this move became apparent to all. Just as the sad and somber death of Patriarch Aleksei II of Moscow and All Russia did not prevent some from slinging mug at him or his successor on the Patriarchal throne, or even at the entire Russian Orthodox Church, the Russian Imperial House will become fair game for its enemies, who may seize upon each and every accomplishment or expansion of its activities as an opportunity to attack and besmirch it.

In the absence of a clear governmental position and plan of action on this question, the status of the Imperial House will continue to lie in limbo, as every time that a resolution to the issue seems to come into view, some anti-Romanoff group sounds off, which then becomes a convenient excuse again to “shelve” the matter indefinitely. However, if a decision in principle were to be made by the highest authorities in the government to begin utilizing the full potential of the Russian Imperial House for the benefit of today’s Russia, then no one could prevent the formation of a fully-empowered governmental commission, which could carry out its work competently, objectively, and transparently, and which could establish all the necessary legal facts and create a legal framework for the granting of official status to the legitimate Russian Imperial House of Romanoff in the Russian Federation and for the return of its members to Russia to reside there permanently.

APPENDICES
Chapter Two of the Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire: “On the Order of Succession to the Throne”

25. The Imperial Throne of All the Russias is hereditary within the Imperial House presently reigning.

26. Inseparable from the Imperial Throne of All the Russias are the Thrones of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Finland.

27. Both sexes have the right of succession to the Throne; but this right belongs by preference to the male sex according to the principle of primogeniture; with the extinction of the last male issue, succession to the Throne passes to the female issue by right of substitution.

28. Accordingly, succession to the Throne belongs in the first place to the eldest son of the reigning Emperor, and after him to all his male issue.

29. With the extinction of this male issue, succession passes to the branch of the second son of the Emperor and his male issue; with the extinction of the second male’s issue, succession passes to the branch of the third son, and so forth.

30. When the last male issue of the Emperor's sons is extinct, succession remains in the same branch, but in the female issue of the last reigning Emperor, as being nearest to the Throne, and therein it follows the same order, with preference to a male over the female person; but the female person from whom this right directly proceeds never loses this right.

31. With the extinction of this branch the succession passes to the female issue of the branch of the eldest son of the Emperor-Progenitor, wherein the nearest relative of the last reigning Emperor in the
branch of this son succeeds, the eldest in this descending line, or if unavailable, in a collateral line, and if this relative is lacking, then the male or female person who takes her place by substitution, with preference, as above, for a male over a female person.

32. When these branches too are extinct, succession passes to the female issue of the other sons of the Emperor-Progenitor, following the same order, and after that to the male issue of the eldest daughter of the Emperor-Progenitor; and when that too is extinct, to her female issue, following the order established for the female issue of the Emperor's sons.

33. With the extinction of the male and female issue of the eldest daughter of the Emperor-Progenitor, succession passes first to the male and then to the female issue of the second daughter of the Emperor-Progenitor, and so forth.

34. A younger sister, even if she has sons, does not deprive her elder sister of her right, even if the latter is unmarried; but a younger brother succeeds before his elder sisters.

35. When the succession reaches a female branch which is already reigning on another throne, it is left to the person who succeeds to make a choice of faith and throne and, together with that person's heir, to renounce the other faith and throne, if such a throne is tied by Law (with a religious denomination); if there is no renunciation of faith, the succession passes to the person next in order.

36. Children born of a marriage between a person of the Imperial Family and a person not of corresponding dignity, that is not belonging to any royal or sovereign house, have no right of succession to the Throne.
37. As the rules on the order of succession, enunciated above, take effect, a person who has a right to succeed is free to abdicate this right in those circumstances in which an abdication does not create any difficulty in the following succession to the Throne.

38. Such an abdication, when it has been made public and becomes law, is henceforth considered irrevocable.

39. An Emperor or Empress succeeding to the Throne undertakes, at accession and anointment, to solemnly observe the aforesaid laws on succession to the Throne.

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The Russian Imperial House: A Historical Survey

The Imperial House of Russia is the Romanoff Dynasty, which ruled until 1917 and was elevated to the throne by the Assembly of the Land (Zemskii Sobor) in 1613 because of its close kinship ties through the female line with the extinct Riurikovich Dynasty. The direct male line of the Romanoff Dynasty ended in 1730 (on the death of Emperor Peter II, the grandson of Peter I “the Great”). After that, the Russian Throne was occupied by Peter the Great’s niece, Empress Anna Ioannovna (ruled 1730-1740), then by her grandnephew, Emperor Ivan VI Antonovich (ruled 1740-1741), and then by Peter the Great’s daughter, Empress Elizabeth Petrovna (ruled 1741-1762). In 1761, the succession to the throne, together with all the corresponding titles and the surname “Romanoff,” passed through the female line to the House of Holstein-Gottorp (to Peter the Great’s grandson, Peter III Feodorovich, the son of Peter the Great’s daughter, Tsarevna Anna Petrovna). Emperor Paul I, the son of Peter III, issued a Decree on the Imperial Succession on April 5, 1797, which determined the order of succession to the
throne, as well as membership in the Russian Imperial House. This Decree was amended on March 20, 1820, by Emperor Alexander I, who issued a Manifesto stipulating that, “if any person in the Imperial Family enters into a marriage with a person of a status unequal to His, that is, not belonging to any Royal or Ruling House, in such a case the person in the Imperial Family cannot pass on to the other person the rights which belong to Members of the Imperial Family, and the children issuing from such a marriage have no right of succession to the throne.”

Russian dynastic law, which was based upon the Decree on the Imperial Succession, belongs to what is known as the Austrian system of succession, which stipulates male primogeniture. In Russia, succession passed through the female line only after the extinction of all male branches of the dynasty. Similar to the succession laws governing other monarchies, the articles pertaining to the succession to the throne (Articles 25-39 of the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire) are inviolable—that is, not susceptible to abolition or modification even by the Sovereign Emperor.

According to the definition in the Encyclopedic Dictionary by Brockhaus and Efron, the Russian Imperial House is “a special institution, membership in which is enjoyed by those who may be called upon to inherit the throne according to the established laws, and by those who are married to persons who have or may come to have the right to inherit the throne.”

Before the Revolution of 1917, the Russian Imperial House of Romanoff was a unique institution: a family that had the status of a state institution, and whose members received the crown according to a prescribed order of succession. After the 1917 Revolution, the Russian Imperial House lost its political power as well as its status as a state institution, but it retained its status as a historical institution, that is—a legal entity that has enjoyed an unchallenged dynastic continuity from the moment of its
ascension to the throne, and that operates then and now according to its own internal historical laws.

Just like the Church’s canon laws, the dynastic laws of the Russian Imperial House continue in force to the extent that they do not conflict with the Constitution and other laws of the Russian Federation.

Since the Revolution of 1917, the Russian Imperial House has lived in exile, but the order of succession to the position of Head of the Dynasty and membership in the dynasty have remained firmly governed by the statutes of Russian dynastic laws. Membership in the Russian Imperial House is governed specifically by the relevant articles of the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire.

After the abdication on March 2, 1917, of Emperor Nicholas II for himself and for his heir, Aleksei Nikolaevich, the succession passed to the Emperor’s brother, Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich. In his Manifesto of March 3, 1917, Grand Duke Mikhail delayed accepting the crown until the Constituent Assembly could meet and decide upon the future form of Russia’s government. On September 1, 1917, before the Constituent Assembly had been called, Alexander Kerensky, the prime minister of the Provisional Government, in violation of prior decrees, declared Russia a republic.

In 1918, Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich, the former Emperor Nicholas II, and the Heir and Tsesarevich Aleksei Nikolaevich, that is, the entire male line issuing from Emperor Alexander III, were executed on orders from the atheistic regime then in power. In accordance with Article 29 of the Law of Succession, the right to the throne passed to the line issuing from Alexander II: to the descendants of Grand Duke Wladimir Alexandrovich (1847-1908). The latter’s eldest son, Grand Duke Kirill Wladimirovich, declared himself in 1922 the curator of the Throne (since He was still not absolutely certain of the death of Emperor Nicholas II, his son, and brother); and on August 31, 1924, he assumed the title of Emperor-in-exile of All the Russias.
This Manifesto was fully consistent with the Fundamental Laws and was recognized by practically all Members of the House of Romanoff, and by foreign Royal Houses. One of the junior lines of the dynasty, composed of Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich, Grand Duke Peter Nikolaevich, and the latter’s son, Prince-of-the-Imperial-Blood Roman Petrovich, did not recognize the Manifesto of August 31, 1924—all of them believing that the question of who occupies the throne should be decided by the will of the people. The elderly Dowager Empress Maria Fedorovna, not disputing the legality of Grand Duke Kirill Wladimirovich’s action, considered his Manifesto “premature,” since she never gave up hope that one of her sons or her grandson might somehow still be alive in Russia.

At the time that Kirill Wladimirovich assumed the Imperial title, there were still 18 male Members of the Russian Imperial House living in immigration. Their order in the succession to the Throne at that time was as follows:

1. The lines of descent from Emperor Alexander

   1. The line of Grand Duke Wladimir Alexandrovich
      
      1. Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich (son and Heir of Emperor Kirill Wladimirovich)
      
      2. Grand Duke Boris Wladimirovich
      
      3. Grand Duke Andrei Wladimirovich

   2. The line of Grand Duke Paul Alexandrovich
      
      1. Grand Duke Dmitrii Pavlovich

2. The lines of descent from Emperor Nicholas I:

   1. The line of Grand Duke Constantine
Nikolaevich

1. Prince Vsevolod Ioannovich (son of Prince Ioann Konstantinovich)
2. Prince Gavriil Konstantinovich
3. Prince Georgii Konstantinovich

2. The line of Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich the Elder

1. Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich the Younger
2. Grand Duke Peter Nikolaevich
3. Prince Roman Petrovich

3. The line of Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich

1. Grand Duke Mikhail Mikhailovich
2. Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich
3. Prince Andrei Alexandrovich
4. Prince Feodor Alexandrovich
5. Prince Nikita Alexandrovich
6. Prince Dmitrii Alexandrovich
7. Prince Rostislav Alexandrovich
8. Prince Vasilii Alexandrovich

Given the fact that they were all living in exile, the majority of these members of the Imperial House did not consider themselves to be obligated to follow strictly the
requirements of the Fundamental Laws. This is exemplified by the many morganatic (unequal) marriages that occurred after 1917—that is, marriages with persons who do not belong to royal or ruling houses. Grand Dukes and Princes-of-the-Imperial-Blood who had entered into morganatic marriages did not themselves lose their rights to the throne or their membership in the Dynasty, but their descendants, by virtue of Articles 36 and 188 of the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire, possessed no dynastic rights whatsoever (neither the right to the throne, nor titles, nor even the dynastic surname “Romanoff”). Rather, a special status for the descendants of these morganatic unions was devised whereby they would be known as princes Romanovsky, along with a hyphenated surname of their choice, provided that the parents had beforehand requested permission to marry from the Head of the Dynasty (Decree of July 28, 1935). The rights to these titles as provided for in the Decree of July 28, 1935, were utilized by Grand Dukes Andrei Wladimirovich and Dmitrii Pavlovich, and by Princes-of-the-Imperial-Blood Vsevolod Ioannovich, Gavriil Konstantinovich, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich, and by the widow of Grand Duke Mikhail Aleksandrovich, Princess N. S. Brasova. The morganatic son of Grand Duke Nicholas Konstantinovich, A. N. Iskander, received the princely title without the addition of “Romanovsky” to his surname. Grand Duke Boris Wladimirovich, Prince Roman Petrovich, and the sons of Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich (with the exception of Prince Dmitrii Aleksandrovich) did not seek permission to marry from the Head of the Dynasty and therefore did not receive titles for their spouses or children.

Emperor Kirill Wladimirovich died on October 12, 1938. His son, Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich, became the Head of the Dynasty but, following the example of many other Heads of former foreign dynasties, considered it prudent not to adopt formally the title of Emperor until such time as the Monarchy in Russia should be restored. The Decree of his Father had already legally secured the continuing operation of the Fundamental Laws of the
Russian Empire in the realm of dynastic law. Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich used the official title “Head of the Russian Imperial House, His Imperial Highness, The Grand Duke,” which implied the title of Emperor de jure.

Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich, was the sole male dynast of the Imperial House to enter into an equal marriage after 1917. On August 13, 1948, he married Grand Duchess Leonida Georgievna, the daughter of the Head of the Georgian Royal House, H.R.H. Prince George Alexandrovich Bagration-Mukhrani. The royal status of the House of Bagration was permanently recognized by Russia in the Treaty of Georgievsk of 1783 and was confirmed by the Decree of December 5, 1946, issued by the Head of the Russian Imperial House at the request of the Royal House of Spain and has been recognized by all the royal houses of Europe.

From this marriage was born on December 23, 1953, Grand Duchess Maria Wladimirovna. Inasmuch as all other living male dynasts of the Imperial family had entered into morganatic marriages, and because their advanced age made it unlikely that any of them would enter into new and equal marriages and, even less likely, have children—the Grand Duchess became the presumptive future Heiress to the throne by virtue of the inviolable Article 30 of the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire. Therefore, her father, Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich, proclaimed her majority at 16 years of age (in accordance with Article 40), and, on December 23, 1969, issued a Decree proclaiming that, in the event of the Grand Duke’s death, the Grand Duchess was to be the Curatrix over the proper order of succession to the title of Head of the House. This Decree drew objections from certain Princes of the Blood, but its legality cannot be challenged, because it deprived no male dynasts of the Dynasty of any of their legal rights, but merely established oversight over the correct succession.

At the time that the Decree of 1969 was issued, the male line succession after Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich would have been the following:
1. Prince Vsevolod Ioannovich (1914-1973). His first marriage was to Lady Mary Lygon, a British subject, who was granted the title of Princess Romanovsky-Pavlovsky (1939). His second wife was to Emilia de Gosztonyi, a Hungarian, who was granted the title of Princess Romanovsky (1956) by Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich. His third wife was Valli Knust, a Dane, to whom Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich granted the title of Princess Romanovsky-Knust (1961). No children issued from any of the three marriages.

2. Prince Roman Petrovich (1869-1978). His wife was Countess Praskovia Dmitrievna Sheremetev. Children born to this marriage are morganatic: and they have no rights to any dynastic titles.

3. Prince Andrei Aleksandrovich (1897-1981). His first wife was Elisaveta Fabrizievna Ruffo. His second wife was Nadine McDougall of Great Britain. Children born to these marriages are morganatic and they have no rights to any dynastic titles.

4. Prince Nikita Aleksandrovich (1900-1974). His wife was Countess Maria Ilarionovna Vorontsov-Dashkov. Children born to this marriage are morganatic and have no rights to any dynastic titles. The line descended from Prince Nikita has died out.

5. Prince Dmitrii Aleksandrovich (1901-1980). His first wife was Countess Marina Sergievna Golenishchev-Kutuzov, who was granted the title Princess Romanovsky-Kutuzov by Emperor Kirill Wladimirovich. His second wife was Sheila Chisholm of Australia. The daughter born to the first marriage was Princess Nadezhda Romanovsky-Kutuzov. The line of descent from Prince Dmitrii has died out.

6. Prince Rostislav Aleksandrovich (1902-1977). His first wife was Princess Alexandra Pavlovna
Golitsyn, his second wife was Alice Baker of the United States, and his third wife was Hedwig von Chappuis of Germany. Children born of these marriages are morganatic and have no rights to any dynastic titles.

7. Prince Vasilii Aleksandrovich (1907-1989). His wife was Princess Natalia Alekseevna Golitsyn. The marriage produced no male issue. Their lone child, a daughter, is morganatic and has no rights to any dynastic titles.

Male dynasts of the Imperial House who died before 1969—Grand Duke Boris Wladimirovich, Grand Duke Andrei Wladimirovich, Grand Duke Dmitrii Pavlovich, Grand Duke Gavriil Konstantinovich, Grand Duke Mikhail Mikhailovich, Prince Georgii Konstantinovich (who died unmarried), and Prince Feodor Alexandrovich—similarly left no issue who are dynasts, since all of their marriages were morganatic.

With the passing in 1989 of Vasilii Alexandrovich, the last living Prince of the Imperial Blood, which occurred during the lifetime of Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich, Grand Duchess Maria Wladimirovna became not only the presumed future Heiress, but in fact the actual Heiress to Her Father’s title.

In 1976, Grand Duchess Maria Wladimirovna entered into an equal marriage with Prince Franz-Wilhelm of Prussia, who, after being received into the Orthodox Church, took the name Mikhail Pavlovich and was granted the title Grand Duke by his father-in-law, Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich. The marriage was later dissolved by divorce; but had the marriage not ended, the position in the dynasty of Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich would have been determined by Article 6 of the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire, which provides that, if Grand Duchess Maria Wladimirovna had ascended the throne, then her husband would have the same rights of any spouse of a Russian emperor (similar to the position and rights enjoyed by Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, the
husband of Queen II of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.)

On March 13, 1981, a son was born of this marriage: Grand Duke George Mikhailovich. By an agreement made between Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich and Prince Louis Ferdinand, the respective Heads of the Russian and German Imperial Houses, Grand Duke George Mikhailovich’s father became a member of the Russian Imperial House, and therefore the newborn child belonged from the time of his birth to the Romanoff Dynasty and bore a Russian title.

On April 21, 1992, the Head of the Russian Imperial House, Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich, died. With his death, the male line of the Romanoff Dynasty became extinct, similar to the situation that occurred in 1730. But unlike then, when the succession was determined by the will of one person or by a small group, the succession in 1992 was determined by a clear and precise Law of Succession. Article 30 of the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire indisputably assigned the headship of the Russian Imperial House to Grand Duchess Maria Wladimirovna.

At present, the Russian IMPERIAL House consists of two persons:

1. The Head of the Russian Imperial House, Her Imperial Highness, Grand Duchess (de jure Empress of All the Russias) Maria Wladimirovna of Russia (born 1953).


All other descendants of Members of the Dynasty have no rights to the throne and do not belong to the Russian Imperial House (Articles 26 and 188 of the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire). The so-called “Romanoff Family Association,” which is now made up exclusively of
morganatic descendants of Members of the Russian Imperial House and which is headed by Dmitry Romanovich “Romanoff,” the morganatic son of the Prince Roman Petrovich, is an entirely private organization and has no foundation whatsoever in the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire.

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The Russian Imperial House

The Head of the Russian Imperial House, Her Imperial Highness the Grand Duchess (de jure Her Imperial Majesty the Empress of all the Russias) Maria of Russia was born on December 23, 1953 (New Style) in Madrid, Spain. She is the only daughter of the late Head of the Russian Imperial House, H.I.H. The Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich, and H.I.H. The Grand Duchess Leonida Georgievna (née H.R.H. Princess Bagration-Muhkranskaya of Georgia). Following the tradition of the Imperial Family, the Grand Duchess was brought up in the Orthodox Faith and instilled with a strong sense of devotion to the interests of Russia.

Because her father was the only male dynast of the Imperial House to contract an equal marriage after 1917, it became highly likely that the young Grand Duchess would in due course become the heiress to the Russian throne. Because of this, Her Father, the Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich, determined that she had reached her dynastic majority at the age of 16 (Article 40 Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire), and on December 23, 1969, the Grand Duchess swore the required dynastic oath of allegiance to her country and to her august father. On the same day, the Head of the Russian Imperial House issued a Decree proclaiming that, should he die prior to the deaths of the several then-living Princes of the Imperial Blood who had entered into morganatic marriages, the Grand Duchess Maria would become the Curatrix of the Imperial Throne.
On September 22, 1976, the Grand Duchess contracted an equal marriage with H.R.H. Prince Franz-Wilhelm of Prussia. Since the Grand Duchess would eventually be the Head of the Romanoff Dynasty, a dynastic agreement was entered into and legally formulated between the Russian Imperial House and the Prussian Royal House prior to the wedding, according to which Prince Franz-Wilhelm converted to the Orthodox Faith and became a member of the Russian Imperial House with the name Mikhail Pavlovich and the title of Grand Duke. He also promised that any issue from this marriage would be brought up in the Orthodox Faith. The status of Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich was determined by the provisions of Article 6 of the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire.

In any event, the Decree of 1969 was never put into effect. In 1989, Prince of the Imperial Blood Vasilii Alexandrovich (Prince Vasilii of Russia) died, leaving the Head of the Imperial House, Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich, as the only surviving male dynast in the dynasty. From that point on, the Grand Duchess became first in line after Her Father.

Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich was the last male dynast in the male line of the Romanoff Dynasty. At his death and in accordance with Article 30 of the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire, the succession passed to the female line in the person of his daughter. The Grand Duchess thus became the Head of the Russian Imperial Dynasty (and de jure Empress of all the Russias).

Her Imperial Highness studied at Oxford University. In addition to Russian, the Grand Duchess is fluent in English, French, and Spanish. She also speaks and reads German, Italian and Arabic. Her first visit to Russia was in April 1992 to attend the funeral of her father, Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich in St. Petersburg. Since that time, Her Imperial Highness has made numerous trips to Russia, carrying on the duties of her father and attempting to help her fellow countrymen in this difficult transitional period. In her speeches she constantly emphasizes that she is ready to answer the call from the people, but that under
no circumstances does she wish Monarchy to be imposed on the Russian people against their will.

Like her father and grandfather, Grand Duchess Maria of Russia loyally and steadfastly discharges the many duties entrusted to her by God, completely dedicating her life to her beloved homeland.

In his congratulatory message to Grand Duchess Maria of Russia on her 50th birthday, His Holiness Patriarch Alexis II of Moscow and All Russia characterized her as a "faithful and ardent servant of the Lord God," adding: "I would like to express to you my profound recognition and gratitude for your tireless and active participation in the fate of the Russian State, in its fundamental moral and social rebirth, and in all its sorrows and joys. It is especially pleasing to see your sincere devotion to Holy Orthodoxy.... It is obvious to all who know you that in your private life, you are guided by the best traditions which are exemplified in the life of the Holy Righteous Princess Olga."

In 2003, Patriarch Alexis II awarded the Head of the Russian Imperial House the Church’s Order of St. Olga I Class, and in 2004, the Grand Duchess awarded the highest dynastic award—the Imperial Order of St. Andrew the First-Called—to His Holiness.

Similarly, in his congratulatory message on Her Imperial Highness’s 55th birthday, Patriarch Kirill noted that "you are the embodiment of a Russian Grand Duchess: noble, wise, compassionate, and consumed with a genuine love for Russia. Though you may reside far from Russia, you continue to take an active part in its life, rejoicing when there are triumphs and empathizing when there are trials. It is deeply gratifying to know that, even in these new historical circumstances, you are making a significant contribution to the building of Russia’s global standing on the basis of spiritual and moral values, and the centuries-old traditions of the Russian people. The Russian Orthodox Church remains the preserver of the historical
memory of the Russian people, and supports, as it has traditionally, the warmest possible relations with the Russian Imperial House.”

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His Imperial Highness the Heir, Tsesarevich, and Grand Duke George of Russia was born on March 13, 1981 (New Style) in Madrid, on the eve of the 100th Anniversary of the martyrdom of his great-great-grandfather, Emperor Alexander II the Tsar-Liberator (on March 1/14, 1881). He is the son of H.I.H. Grand Duchess Maria of Russia and H.I.H. Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich. The Grand Duke was baptized before the miracle-working Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God, in the Orthodox Church in Madrid. Present at the baptism were King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sophia of Spain, and King Simeon II and Queen Margarita of Bulgaria. His godfather was King Constantine II of Greece.

The early childhood of the Tsesarevich was spent in St.-Briac, France, and then in Paris. Up until 1999, the Heir and his mother lived principally in Madrid, where he completed college. From the time of his early childhood, the Grand Duke was educated in the spirit of the Orthodox Faith and in the full awareness of his duties to his homeland.

The Tsesarevich first visited Russia in April 1992, when the entire Imperial Family attended the funeral of Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich. Since then he has been many times to Russia, always showing a lively interest in all aspects of the life of the people.

Russia’s ancient Orthodox churches, and what he considers their uniquely prayerful atmosphere, have made an indelible impression on the Grand Duke. He also takes special interest and great pleasure in visiting military bases and in meeting and conversing with soldiers, sailors and officers of the Russian army and navy.
The Tsesarevich plays a variety of sports and is an excellent marksman. Besides Russian, in which he always received excellent grades, the Grand Duke has studied and speaks English, French, and Spanish. He knows, and participates in, the order of services of the Orthodox Church.

On April 9, 1997, during a pilgrimage of the Imperial Family to the Holy Land, the Heir, Tsesarevich, and Grand Duke George of Russia, pursuant to the Russian Fundamental Laws, took his dynastic oath to his country and to his most august mother. The ceremony took place in Jerusalem, in the Throne Room of the Patriarch’s residence, and was witnessed by the faithful guardian of the purity of Orthodoxy, Patriarch Diodoros of Jerusalem. The Patriarch gave his blessing to the Grand Duke and offered his prayers that the Grand Duke will defend the Orthodox Faith, serve Russia and her people, and inviolably preserve the laws of the Russian Imperial House.

After studying at Oxford University, and wanting to study the political, economic, and social processes that were determining the future course of Europe, His Imperial Highness began working for the European Parliament, and then moved to the position of assistant to the vice-president of the European Commission and Commissioner for Transport and Energy, Loyola de Palacio, in Brussels. Later he continued working for the European Commission in Luxembourg, in the European Commission for Atomic Energy and Security. During these years, the Grand Duke visited Russia several times on business.

In 2006, he made his first official visit to Russia. He traveled to Russia at the request of his mother, the Head of the Russian Imperial House, H.I.H. The Grand Duchess Maria of Russia, to congratulate His Holiness, Patriarch Aleksei II of Moscow and All Russia, on the 45th anniversary of his ordination to the episcopacy. During that visit, the Grand Duke also met with the First Deputy Chairmen of the Duma, Oleg Morozov and Liubov Sliskaia,
as well as with the chairs of several Duma committees and other Duma deputies.

During another visit to Russia in November 2008, the Grand Duke accepted a job offer from the management of Norilsk Nickel; and in December, the Grand Duke assumed the position of special advisor to the company’s Director, V. I. Strzhalkovskii. In this new position, His Imperial Highness represented the interests of Norilsk Nickel—one of Russia’s largest companies—in the European Union. In addition, Grand Duke George of Russia took a seat on the Board of the Nickel Institute.

After having gained significant experience advancing the interests of Russian industry, and his employment contract with Norilsk Nickel having expired, Grand Duke George of Russia formed his own public relations consulting firm—Romanoff & Partners—in Brussels. The agency represents Russian and East European companies in the European Union.

Grand Duke George of Russia is entirely convinced that for him there is no obstacle to exploring a variety of professions and business activities. "My ancestor, Peter the Great," he stated, "bequeathed to future generations of the Imperial House a wonderful example of respect for work. He scorned no form of employment and he was interested in everything. One can and should do what one does best and what benefits others, without regrets or stigma. Being a member of the Imperial House does not grant one privileges. It rather imposes great responsibilities: that neither your ancestors nor descendants should ever be ashamed of you, and that the dynasty’s good name should never be tarnished."

In addition to his business ventures, Grand Duke George of Russia of course performs his duties as Heir to the Head of the Russian Imperial House. Regularly visiting the Russian Federation and other countries that were once part of the former Russian Empire (with his mother and by himself), the Tsesarevich works to strengthen the
friendship between the peoples of these nations, and to contribute to a range of charitable and cultural projects.

In 2013—the year of the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the House of Romanoff—the Grand Duke established in London the Russian Imperial Foundation for Cancer Research.

Concerning his vision of the role of the Imperial House in the modern world, His Imperial Highness has said, "Our main responsibility is to preserve the continuity in our history. Compared with this mission, even our role in government pales in significance. Our ancestors never sought after power, even at the time of the foundation of the dynasty. When emissaries from the Assembly of the Land came in 1613 to Mikhail Feodorovich to announce that he was the heir to the throne, he was filled with terror at the very thought of it and for a long time refused it.

"The throne is a responsibility—a very weighty responsibility. If it is asked of us to assume the throne, we will accept this responsibility without hesitation. We are prepared to respond to a summons from the people of Russia, should they want someday to restore the monarchy. But we do not seek power, nor do we make any claims to it—neither to any sort of political rights nor properties.

"To maintain a living connection to modern Russia and to its thousand-year-long history—that is our duty and our unending responsibility, regardless of what form of government may happen to be in power."

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Decree № 998 of December 21, 2011, of the President of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova: "Concerning the Status of the Russian Imperial House in the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova"
In accordance with Article 72 of the Constitution of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova, and honoring the memory of our ancestors who have conveyed to us a love for our Fatherland, and confirming the integral place of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova in all periods of the centuries-long history of the All-Russian State,

I hereby:

1. determine herewith the status of the Russian Imperial House in the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova (see attached Appendix).
2. affirm that this Decree will take full effect upon signing.

President I. Smirnov
Tiraspol’
December 21, 2011
№ 998

Appendix

The Status of the Russian Imperial House in the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova

1. The Concept, Composition, and Status of the Russian Imperial House

1. The Russian Imperial House is a historic institution, which has preserved its continuity since the time of its accession and which operates according to its own internal historical dynastic laws and regulations, insofar as these laws and regulations do not contradict the current laws of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova.

2. The Russian Imperial House consists of the descendants of Tsar Mikhail I Fedorovich Romanoff, who are accorded this status by the provisions of national historical laws, which were formulated in the Confirmation Charter of the Great Assembly of the Land of 1613, and in dynastic
decrees that are and have been issued by the Heads of the Russian Imperial House of Romanoff since 1797, including: the Law of Succession of Emperor Paul I and the Decree on the Imperial Family, both issued on April 5, 1797; the Manifesto of Emperor Alexander I amending the Decree on the Imperial Family, issued on March 20, 1820; the charter of Tsesarevich Constantine Pavlovich, affirming his abdication of his rights to the throne, dated November 26, 1825; the Manifesto on the Accession to the Throne of Emperor Nicholas I, issued on December 12, 1825; the Manifesto of Emperor Alexander III revising the Decree on the Imperial Family, issued on July 2, 1886; the Manifesto of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, Grand Duke Kirill Wladimirovich, concerning his assumption of the rights and duties of All-Russian emperors, issued on August 31/September 13, 1924; the Decree of Emperor-in-Exile Kirill I Wladimirovich concerning the titles of the morganatic wives and descendants of Members of the Russian Imperial House, issued on July 15/July 28, 1935; the Manifesto of Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich concerning his accession to the rights and duties of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, issued on October 18/October 31, 1938; the Decree of the Head of the Russian Imperial House Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich concerning his recognition of the royal status of the Georgian Royal House of Bagration, issued on November 22/December 5, 1946; the Decree of the Head of the Russian Imperial House Grand Duke Wladimir Kirillovich, granting his consent to the marriage of Grand Duchess Maria Wladimirovna with Prince Franz-Wilhelm of Prussia (in Orthodox baptism, Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich); the Decree of Grand Duchess Maria Wladimirovna, concerning her accession to the rights and duties of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, issued on April 13/April 26, 1992; the announcement of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, Grand Duchess Maria Wladimirovna, concerning the Oath taken by Her Son and Heir, Grand Duke Georgii Mikhailovich, to uphold the dynastic laws, as required by those laws, made on March 27/April 9, 1998; and other such dynastic decrees that may in the future be issued by the legitimate and hereditary Heads of the
Russian Imperial House.

3. A person who issues from a legal marriage, contracted with the permission of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, or a person who has entered into a legal marriage, contracted with the permission of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, with a member of the Russian Imperial House, is recognized as a member of the Russian Imperial House.

4. At the time of the issuance of this present Decree, the members of the Russian Imperial House are: Grand Duchess Maria Vladimirovna Romanova (the Head of the Russian Imperial House), and Grand Duke Georgii Mikhailovich Romanoff (the Heir of the Head of the Russian Imperial House).

5. The legitimate descendants of the members of the Russian Imperial House will be recognized as members of the Russian Imperial House on the territory of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova from the moment of their birth or from the moment of their entering a marriage with a member of the Russian Imperial House, such recognition requiring no special amendment to the present Decree.

6. On the territory of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova, the Russian Imperial House is recognized as a unique historical institution, without corporate rights, which assists in the patriotic, spiritual, and moral betterment of the citizenry of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova, in the preservation of its historical-cultural legacy, and in the traditions of Transnistrian society.

7. The Russian Imperial House possesses no political authority in the territory of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova.

2. The Head of the Russian Imperial House

8. The Head of the Russian Imperial House is that person
who, by right of dynastic primogeniture, is identified as such by the Decree of Succession of Emperor Paul I of April 5, 1797, and by the subsequent legal acts listed in paragraph 2 above.

9. The Head of the Russian Imperial House represents the Russian Imperial House on the territory of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova and may designate others to act on behalf of the Russian Imperial House. The rights and duties of the Head of the Russian Imperial House are passed down through inheritance in accordance with the provisions of the internal dynastic decrees governing the order of succession within the dynasty.

3. The Activities of the Russian Imperial House in the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova

10. In the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova, members of the Russian Imperial House shall be free to engage in any activity that is not prohibited by the laws of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova.

11. Members of the Russian Imperial House may create in the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova legal corporations.

12. The Branch Office of the Chancellery of the Head of the Russian Imperial House in the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova represents and protects the interests of the Russian Imperial House in the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova. The Head of the Branch Office is appointed by the Head of the Russian Imperial House. Financial support for the activities of the Branch Office of the Chancellery of the Head of the Russian Imperial House in the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova is provided by donations and other means not prohibited by the laws of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova.

13. With regard to members of the Russian Imperial House in the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova, all protocols will be observed, as specified by the Office of Protocols of the Administration of the President of the
Transnistrian Republic of Moldova and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova, in consultation with the Chancellery of the Head of the Russian Imperial House.

4. Titles, Symbols, and Dynastic Awards of the Russian Imperial House

14. The titles of members of the Russian Imperial House shall be in accordance with the traditions and rules established by its own dynastic decrees. The titles of members of the Russian Imperial House are to be considered part of their full names and are to be written as such in all official documents.

In the event of a change in the title of a member of the dynasty, the Head of the Russian Imperial House will, through Her Chancellery and in writing, inform the appropriate governmental institutions of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova.

15. The historical coat of arms and other symbols of the Russian Imperial House are recognized as the intellectual property of the Russian Imperial House, which possesses the sole right to use such symbols, or to permit or prohibit their use by other persons.

16. The Russian Imperial House has the right to award the dynastic awards of the Russian Imperial House to citizens of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova, as well as citizens of other countries and those without citizenship residing in the territory of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova, including government officials, military servicemen, and law enforcement officials.

17. The Transnistrian Republic of Moldova recognizes the following dynastic awards of the Russian Imperial House:

a) The Imperial Order of St. Andrew the First-Called;

b) The Imperial Order of the Holy Martyr Catherine;
c) The Imperial and Royal Order of the White Eagle;

d) The Imperial Military Order of St. George the Victory-Bearer;

e) The Imperial Order of the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Grand Prince Vladimir;

f) The Imperial Order of St. Anna;

g) The Imperial Military Order of St. Nicholas the Wonder-Worker;

h) The Imperial Order of the Holy Great Martyr Anastasia the Healer;

i) The Imperial Order of St. Stanislav;

j) The Imperial Order of St. Michael the Archangel;

k) The Medal of Distinction (Order) of the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Princess Olga;

l) Elevation to personal or hereditary noble status and the granting of noble titles which are to be recognized as part of one’s personal name;

m) The awarding of the right to wear Imperial medals of distinction (Imperial monograms of the Head and Members of the Russian Imperial House, Imperial medals, and commemorative medals);

n) The awarding of letters of commendation, of gratitude, and of special distinction; and of official portraits of the Head and members of the Russian Imperial House.

5. The Russian Imperial House’s Representation of the Interests of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova
18. The Russian Imperial House may, in agreement with the governmental authorities of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova, act on behalf of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova in its relations with foreign states and international organizations to achieve the following goals:

a) The development and strengthening of relations between the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova and foreign governments;

b) Attracting investment, technology, and skilled personnel to the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova;

c) The development of international scientific and cultural exchanges between the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova and foreign countries, legal entities, and citizens;

19. In order to carry out the activities specified in paragraph 18, members of the Russian Imperial House shall receive authorization and be provided with any and all required documents in the manner to be determined by the President of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova.

6. Non-Interference in Internal Affairs

20. On the territory of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova, the Russian Imperial House shall:

a) Operate in accordance with its own internal historical dynastic laws, insofar as these do not contradict the current laws of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova;

b) Select, appoint, and replace its staff in accordance with its constituting decrees, taking into account the historical circumstances of the Russian Imperial House and the requirements of the current laws of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova;

c) not fulfill any functions in any bodies in the national government, in any other national agencies, in any governmental offices, or in any bodies of local self-
government, nor participate in the elections to national governmental offices or to any bodies of local self-government;

d) Play no role in the activities of political parties.

21. The Head and members of the Russian Imperial House on the territory of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova enjoy all the rights of citizens of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova, and enjoy no other privileges beyond those enumerated in this present Decree.

7. The Defense of the Honor, Integrity, and Good Name of the Russian Imperial House

22. It is prohibited on the territory of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova for anyone who is not a member of the Russian Imperial House to use the titles of members of the Russian Imperial House, or act on behalf of the Russian Imperial House, or to use the coat of arms and other symbols of the Russian Imperial House, without the official permission of the Head of the Russian Imperial House.

23. It is prohibited on the territory of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova to register any legal entity employing the word “Imperial,” in all its grammatical forms, nor to assert any connection of such legal entity with the Russian Imperial House, if that entity (or entities) is not a member of the Russian Imperial House, or if such entity has not received written permission from the Russian Imperial House to use said word.

24. The protection of the honor and integrity of the Russian Imperial House on the territory of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova is to be carried out in accordance with the laws of the Transnistrian Republic of Moldova.

For the original sources (in Russian), see:  http://president.pmr-ov.org/zakon/?category=2&id=3627

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The Chancellery of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, H.I.H. The Grand Duchess Maria of Russia

The Chancellery of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, H.I.H. The Grand Duchess Maria of Russia (hereafter, Chancellery of H.I.H) was formed by the Head of the Russian Imperial House, Grand Duchess Maria of Russia, on 19 December 2002 and was registered on 17 January 2003 as a legally defined “Nonprofit organization” (registration № 1037725002842).

The Chancellery of H.I.H is an institution that performs the clerical and organizational work of the Russian Imperial House and carries out the directives of the Head of the Imperial House.

Historically, the Chancellery of H.I.H. is the successor to His Imperial Majesty’s Own Privy Chancellery which existed in the Russian Empire up to the revolution of 1917, and is the successor to subsequent bodies created in exile: the Chancellery of the Curator of the Imperial Throne (1922–1924); the Chancellery of His Imperial Majesty (1924–1938); the Administration for the Affairs of the Head of the Russian Imperial House (1938–1941); the Secretariat of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, H.I.H. Grand Duke Vladimir Kirillovich (1941–1944); the Privy Chancellery of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, the Grand Duke Vladimir Kirillovich (1945–1992); and the Privy Chancellery of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, H.I.H. The Grand Duchess Maria of Russia (1992–2002).

The Founder and Supreme Authority of the Chancellery of
H.I.H. is the Head of the Russian Imperial House.

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The official website of the Russian Imperial House: www.imperialhouse.ru

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