

France expels controversial Salafist preacher to Algeria

France24 (19.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2F7IvpU> – Controversial Salafist preacher, Imam El Hadi Doudi, who was based in the southern French city of Marseille, was expelled to Algeria Friday morning following a lengthy legal process, according to a French media report.

The 63-year-old preacher – who was born in Algeria and does not have French citizenship – was expelled on Friday, the AFP reported quoting an unnamed French interior ministry source.

The expulsion followed a deportation order issued by the French interior ministry on Tuesday.

But Doudi's expulsion application was suspended pending a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which finally ruled in favour of the deportation on Thursday.

The ruling followed an appeal by the Salafist cleric's lawyer, Nabil Boudi, who argued that his client would be tortured or suffer "inhuman or degrading treatment" if he was returned to Algeria.

The court granted the French government 72 hours "to gather the additional information necessary to make an informed decision". Doudi was held in an administrative detention center pending the court's final ruling.

Sermons targeting women, Jews, Shiites

The imam of the as-Sounna mosque, in the heart of Marseille, was one of the most high profile cases in the French government's effort to combat radicalisation.

The new de-radicalisation plan announced by French President Emmanuel Macron's government includes increased surveillance

of Muslim clerics accused of hate speech and incitement to violence.

The as-Sounna mosque was closed in December following allegations that Doudi was provoking discrimination, hatred and violence toward an individual or group.

A confidential government investigative report, seen by the New York Times, cited numerous sermons by Doudi, where he preached that Jews are “unclean, the brothers of monkeys and pigs”. Women, the preacher stressed, could not leave their homes without authorisation, and an apostate “needs to be eliminated by the death penalty to protect Muslims”.

In its expulsion application, the French Interior Ministry cited the radical imam’s “deliberate incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence against a particular person or group of persons”, notably women, Jews, Shiites and people committing adultery.

Radical clerics under scrutiny

Following a spate of deadly terrorist incidents since the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks, France has tightened its anti-terror laws while attempting to tackle the spread of Islamist extremism particularly in French prisons, schools, mosques and Islamic centres.

Between 2012 and 2015, the French Interior Ministry expelled 40 Muslim clerics while another 52 people – including clerics – were expelled over the past 28 months, according to the New York Times.

In 2017, 20 radicalised foreign nationals were expelled from French territory, according to French Interior Minister Gérard Collomb.

Last month, France expelled Mohammed Tlaghi, a substitute imam at a mosque in Torcy, an eastern Parisian suburb, due to

radical sermons, under an expulsion order issued on March 2.

The as-Sounna mosque, where Doudi preached, has been closed since December 11, 2017, when the Marseille police department issued a six-month closure order, which was ratified by France's top administrative court earlier this year.

(FRANCE 24 with AFP)

YEMEN: Inflammatory speech by the Houthi leader targets Bahá'ís in Yemen with genocidal intent

Baha'i International Community (19.04.2018) – In a televised speech broadcasted to a wide audience within and outside of Yemen, the leader of the Houthis vehemently vilified and denounced the Bahá'í Faith, further intensifying the ongoing persecution of the Bahá'ís in that country.

On 23 March 2018, Mr. Abdel-Malek al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthis in Yemen, gave a speech on the occasion of the first Friday of the Islamic month of Rajab, which commemorates the introduction of Islam to Yemen, to rally Yemenis against foreign powers and ideologies.

In the course of his speech, Mr. al-Houthi employed a rhetoric reminiscent of statements made by the Supreme Leaders of Iran

in former and recent times and strongly denounced the Bahá'í Faith. Mr. al-Houthi warned Yemenis of the "satanic" Bahá'í "movement" that is "waging a war of doctrine" against Islam. He described Bahá'ís as infidels and deniers of Islam and the Prophet and he spread other falsehoods about the Faith and its relationship to western countries and Israel. Finally, he urged Yemenis to defend their country from the Bahá'ís and members of other religious minorities under the pretext that, "those who destroy the faith in people are no less evil and dangerous than those who kill people with their bombs".

Within days of his speech, over twenty news sites reiterated his negative comments about the Bahá'í Faith, and a prominent Houthi writer and strategist commented on social media that "we will butcher every Bahá'í". Similar sentiments were expressed by religious authorities in Sana'a including the Mufti of Yemen, Shams al-Din Muhammad Sharaf al-Din, who received his education in Iran and was appointed by the Houthis last year. He spent a portion of his weekly Friday talk, aired live on television and radio on 30 March, cautioning Yemenis across the country of the influence of the Bahá'ís. Furthermore, the Ministry of Information held the first in a series of workshops to train Yemenis active on social and traditional media on how to respond to the war of doctrine waged by the Bahá'ís. Other similar seminars, conferences and workshops were also organized by the Ministry of Information and government universities in Sana'a, Hudaidah, Dhamar, Imran, and Hujjah. Finally, a few days ago a Yemeni TV program named "Frankly" dedicated an episode to attack human rights organizations and the Bahá'í Faith, specifically referring to individual Bahá'ís by name and displaying their photographs.

"Not only is the content of Mr. al-Houthi's speech deeply

concerning, but also its context and some of its immediate consequences,” explained Ms. Bani Dugal, Principal Representative of the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations. “Mr. al- Houthi’s influence over a large number of armed followers as well as the echoing of his sentiments by the highest religious authority in Yemen, by other government officials, and by others on traditional and social media all imply that Mr. al-Houthi’s latest speech is a call for mass atrocity crimes against a religious minority which is genocidal in intent.”

Ms. Dugal further stated, “In order to avoid disastrous consequences for thousands of Yemeni Bahá’ís, the international community must condemn these latest actions by Mr. al-Houthi in the strongest terms, to demand an end to the spread of vitriolic, false rhetoric, and incitement to hatred against the Bahá’ís, and to call for the immediate release of all Bahá’ís imprisoned in Yemen.”

These latest developments constitute a severe escalation of the systematic pattern of activity undertaken by the authorities in Sana’a to oppress the Yemeni Bahá’ís—a pattern punctuated by the mass arrest in August 2016 of over 60 women, men, and children participating in an educational gathering organized by Bahá’ís; the call in April 2017 for the arrest of over two dozen prominent members of the Bahá’í community and the subsequent detention of several Bahá’ís, including members of Bahá’í institutions; and the court pronouncement in January 2018 for the public execution of Mr. Hamed bin Haydara, a Bahá’í detained since 2013 for his religious beliefs, and the dissolution of all Bahá’í Assemblies in Yemen. Despite mounting pressure, at present, six Bahá’ís remain in prison, Mr. Haydara’s death sentence remains to be repealed, and some prominent Yemeni lawyers have refused to

accept his appeal case in the fear of possible repercussions. Reports further indicate that the Houthis are monitoring and seeking to identify the Bahá'ís.

Several independent sources have repeatedly confirmed that Iranian authorities are directing efforts to persecute the Bahá'ís in Yemen. Multiple reports further indicate that high-ranking officials in the National Security Bureau are maintaining pressure on the Bahá'í community as a result of instructions from Iran despite repeated appeals by prominent Yemenis, including some among the Houthis, for the release of the imprisoned Bahá'ís.

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EGYPT: 102 Churches to be

Legalised in Egypt

Egypt Streets (18.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2EUHRfF> – Prime Minister Sherif Ismail has approved the legalisation of 102 unlicensed churches and 64 church-associated buildings according to the MENA news agency.

The policy transpired on Monday during a meeting with a regulating committee charged with reviewing and legalising unlicensed churches.

It is extremely difficult in Egypt to gain church building licenses, with the process often taking years, which means that many Egyptian Christians congregate in unlicensed churches. However, as of late, regulations appear to be loosening. January saw an order issued from Egypt's Ministry of Housing allowing Christians to practice their religious rites at unlicensed churches pending legislation procedures, while in February the Cabinet's Committee approved the legalisation of 53 churches and church-affiliated buildings.

Indeed, 2016 saw the [passing of a law](#) that eased regulations around obtaining licences for building Christian houses of worship, building on the 2014 constitution which guarantees the right to freedom of religious practice for Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

Christians are a religious minority in Egypt and the issue of building churches in the country has been particularly controversial. According to Catholic News Agency, Egypt has about 2,600 churches in the entire country, meaning there is

one church for every 5,500 Christian citizens, while there is one mosque for every 620 Muslim citizens.

There has been a number of incidents where often-Muslim mobs have instigated attacks against Christian citizens and damaged or destroyed churches, particularly in Upper Egypt.

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EGYPT: Disputed status of Beni Suef church sparks sectarian violence

By Hadeer El-Mahdawy

Translated by Habiba Effat

MadaMasr (18.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2Hd5WEt> – The homes of several Coptic Christians in the Beni Suef village of Beni Menin were set ablaze by Muslim villagers on Monday night in the latest incident of sectarian violence, according to a member of the village who spoke to Mada Masr.

Monday's violence was preceded by attacks on a church building used for worship in the village, as well as homes and shops owned by Copts, which took place on April 14, the source added.

The Fashn Prosecution, which has jurisdiction over the region in which the village resides, issued four-day detention orders on Monday for 20 people and arrest warrants for 10 others in connection to the April 14 events, according to the privately owned [Al-Shorouk newspaper](#). The 20 people that are currently in custody include nine Coptic Christians and 11 Muslims, who have been charged with illegal assembly and disrupting public peace, according to Ishaq Ibrahim, a researcher on religious freedoms at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR).

Security forces also arrested five Copts during the attacks that took place on Monday, according to a Coptic villager, who spoke to Mada Masr on condition of anonymity and fled Beni Menin upon hearing that a warrant had been issued for his arrest on charges of inciting violence against Muslims. All of the Coptic men from the village have taken refuge in neighboring villages, with only a number of women and children remaining in Beni Menin, the source added.

Another Coptic villager who spoke to Mada Masr on condition of anonymity stated that investigation authorities have accused the five Copts arrested on Monday with setting their own houses on fire. However, he told Mada Masr that the Coptic men had been arrested while attempting to extinguish the fires, which were set off when someone threw Molotov cocktails at their residences.

A Muslim villager denied stories of Monday's attacks, stating that they had been fabricated.

The conflict began over the legal status of the church building, an issue that has often served as a tinderbox for sectarian strife. On April 11, the first Coptic source was summoned to the Fashn Police Station, where police officer Mohamed Rabea threatened to report him for conducting prayers in the church building "without a permit." The source told Mada Masr that Copts in the village have used the building to pray for a decade.

"The officer asked Coptic villagers to coordinate with the National Security Agency and to stop holding prayers in the building," the source said. On April 12, security forces arrested Magdy Roushdy Labib, the son of the previous owner of the church building, who sold it in 2010 to Bishop Stephanous of Biba and Fashn, the source added. "The sale was registered in court for the purpose of holding prayers in the building."

According to the Coptic villager, a Fashn priest subsequently submitted documents to confirm the building's status as a site of worship in 2017, as part of a survey of churches and church

buildings in Fashn that was conducted after the issuance of the [church building law](#) on September 28, 2016.

Ibrahim attributes the frequent occurrence of these sectarian events to this very same law. Out of 3,500 applications submitted by churches to legalize their status, only 219 churches and affiliated buildings have been approved by the government committee responsible for reviewing these applications since the issuance of the new law in 2016. The committee, which stopped receiving new applications in September 2017, confirmed the status of 53 church buildings in [March](#) of this year, as well as an additional 166 [on Monday](#).

“A police officer at the station asked the son of the previous owner to sign an eviction notice,” the Coptic villager stated. When he refused, because he did not legally have the right to do so, the police officer issued a cease and desist order on grounds of ‘inciting religious discontent.’ Last Friday [April 13], officials attended the inauguration of a mosque in the village. The officials informed Coptic residents that there was no problem holding prayers in the church. However, churchgoers were surprised when, on [April 14] during a church service, they received a phone call warning them of an attack on the church. They evacuated the building, but matters escalated, resulting in attacks on several Coptic-owned homes and shops.

The attacks were not limited to the church building and its immediate vicinity, the Coptic villager stated.

“Although I live a kilometer away from the church, they

attacked my house with bricks and Molotov cocktails and broke the windows. My children and I were terrified, and my daughter was hit in the head by a brick. I couldn't even leave the house to take her to the local hospital," he said. "The police arrived three hours after the clashes and arrested a number of Muslims and Copts in the village."

The source who had fled from the village said he had left with one of his brothers, while another had been arrested. He said, "I don't know where we can go. Don't we have the right to pray? Aren't we Egyptians? Why should I be attacked and have to run away and leave my work and home just because I pray and say the name of the Lord?"

Mada Masr was unable to reach the Fashn archbishopric responsible for the church in question for official comment.

The Muslim villager presents a different account of the events, however. Security sources informed Muslim villagers on April 12 of the existence of a church that had previously been unknown and was not licensed, the source told Mada Masr.

Village elders intervened to prevent the situation from escalating, the Muslim village said, adding that, on April 13, Copts and Muslims in the village participated in the inauguration of a local mosque. On April 14, a group of children began fighting in front of Coptic homes, the source stated.

"They were messing around and we sprayed water on them. They

left," he said, adding that a Coptic villager fired shots into the air from a rooftop, which provoked neighboring residents and gave rise to fighting.

The Muslim source said that he intervened to protect the homes of his Coptic neighbors during the attacks out of a sense of duty. He feels the situation was blown out of proportion, however, since Copts and Muslim in the village have always lived in peace and harmony.

An estimated 200 to 250 Coptic Christians live in Beni Menin, according to Ibrahim, which he put as a relatively low figure. Although this was the first attack of its kind in the village, there have been similar incidents, with the most recent occurring earlier in April, in a village in the governorate of Qena.

The houses attacked also included one owned by a Muslim villager, according to the second Coptic source, who added that the Muslim man was forced to sign a police report at the station accusing Copts of arson.

While the causes of sectarian violence in Upper Egypt are complex, Ibrahim asserted that the legislation that regulates church legalization plays an important part. He described the law as "discriminatory," saying it increases sectarian tension by implying that the construction of churches is a problem, especially in villages where Copts are a minority, as they are in Beni Menin.

The researcher added that the state wished to continue controlling churches and violating the rights of individuals to worship freely and did not take necessary measures to stem violent and discriminatory discourse or address those found to be inciting sectarian violence.

According to a [report](#) in November 2017, from the time the new church building law was issued until October 2017, EIPR recorded 20 incidents of attacks or sectarian tension linked to the practice of religious rites, with the governorate of Minya witnessing nine incidences, followed by Beni Suef with five incidences, and Sohag with three, Cairo with two and Alexandria with one.

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ROMANIA: Kovesi Stays, so

what next from #Romania's tainted corruption fight?



President Iohannis' decision to retain Laura Kovesi as head of Romania's DNA overlooks the myriad of abuses her department is accused of.

By Willy Fautre

EU Reporter (18.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2qKHBe2> – This week, Romania's President Iohannis announced his decision to retain the powerful Laura Kovesi as Chief Prosecutor at the National Anti-Corruption Directorate (DNA). This follows months of political wrangling, debate and scrutiny of the current state of the country's fight against corruption. Earlier this year, it seemed that Romania's controversial, and at times disturbing, anti-corruption effort was finally going to be brought back under control. However, it is now clear that President Iohannis had other ideas.

A myriad of accusations has been levelled against Kovesi and the DNA. These include, but are not limited to, evidence tampering, witness coercion and falsifying statements. In February this year, tapes were published in which two DNA prosecutors are recorded conspiring to falsify charges and fake evidence. They were caught red-handed. It seemed that the

poisonous activities of such an organisation had finally been laid bare and that reform was forthcoming. Sadly, this hasn't proved to be the case.

Last month my organisation, Human Rights Without Frontiers, published a report cataloguing the string of human rights abuses and rule of law violations committed under the guise of Romania's anti-corruption fight. We found that of the 47-member nations of the Council of Europe, Romania was the 3rd worst offender with regards to human rights abuses. On top of this, the 69 cases brought against it to the European Court of Human Rights is the highest number of any EU member state.

The report reflects mounting concern that Romanian politicians, businessmen and civilians are victims of unfair trials, unwarranted detention periods and spurious convictions. Reports that defendants are being denied the right to submit evidence and enlist witnesses should trouble all of us who believe in the rule of law and the primary importance of a legitimate criminal justice system. Even more sinister and alarming is the alleged level of deep involvement of the security services, echoing a darker chapter from Romania's past.

The Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI) is the successor to the much-feared, communist-era Securitate. Sadly, their well-documented involvement in anti-corruption cases bears all the hallmarks of their omnipotent predecessors. Our report highlighted how 1,000 of Romania's nearly 7,000 judges were 'trained' by the SRI in a programme using European funds. This reflects SRI General Dumitru Dumbrava's own characterisation of the judicial system as a 'tactical field', heavily suggesting direct interference with judges, prosecutors and the entire process of criminal justice.

Romania's troubles extend further than this however. Prison conditions have been a growing source of concern both within and outside the country for many years. We discovered

allegations of physical abuse, torture and appalling overcrowding. These are the conditions facing those with potentially unsafe convictions. Often, those accused spend months in such conditions before seeing the inside of a courtroom, tantamount to being guilty until proven innocent. This directly contravenes the UN Convention Against Torture, to which Romania is a signatory. It could prove grounds for invoking Article 7 of the Treaty on the European Union, which allows for the suspending of certain member state rights if they are found in violation.

In nations with more established systems of criminal justice, even one of the above allegations would usually be enough to bring down those culpable. Not Romania it seems. Anti-corruption fights should be – to use a common phrase – ‘whiter than white’, but theirs lurks deep in the shadows. The goal should be simple, to uncover corruption and punish it. The goal in Romania’s case however appears to be to ‘inflate the numbers whatever the cost’. With a scarcely believable 50% increase in indictments over the past 5 years, it seems to be an exercise in finding people guilty, rather than finding guilty people.

Despite all this well-documented evidence, Laura Kovesi remains in power, with her position secured by Presidential Decree. A timely opportunity to face up to the disturbing allegations surrounding Romania’s anti-corruption fight has been missed. The question is: what happens next? Will we ever see the reforms required for a truly just anti-corruption fight – free from allegations of evidence tampering and witness coercion? One can only hope so, but this week’s event has once again pushed that possibility further away.

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LEBANON: A better tomorrow, 'Bukhra Ahla'

Part of the child marriage story series.



Painting by an SB OverSeas beneficiary in Lebanon

Written by Jade-Leigh Tenwick, Communications and Development Officer at SB OverSeas

SB OverSeas (18.04.2018) – Lamis is a seventeen year old girl. A seventeen year old girl who is called ‘the divorced woman’. Yet she is barely a woman. Born a year post millennium, she enjoyed her childhood in Syria which was spent going to school and playing with her friends. This all changed in 2012 when the Syrian war broke out. Her family, along with many other Syrian’ families fled their country as the conflict intensified and she found herself at eleven years old seeking refuge in Lebanon, a country where 1 in 4 people is a refugee.

Due to the harsh residency policy in Lebanon,^[1] Lamis and her family were often moving from place to place and this constant upheaval prevented her from attending school. With over three-quarters of Syrians in Lebanon living below the poverty line,^[2] there has been an increase in the rate of child marriage as it is viewed as the only viable way to provide protection for girls.

Lamis’ family were no exception. Struggling to provide security and food for the family, they viewed marriage as a way to secure Lamis’ future. Therefore, when a 22 year old boy from the neighborhood asked for permission from her family for Lamis to be his wife, they accepted, telling her it would be like a fairytale. Not having any experience of marriage or what would be expected of her, she went along with this agreement.

Shortly after the wedding, cracks began to appear. Her husband had different preconceptions as to what it meant to be married. These preconceptions were not ones that she could live up to. He and his family, started to punish her for this by beating her, sometimes until she bled. She could not understand what she had done wrong and experienced this abuse for six months before securing a divorce and escaping to her family.

However, her problems did not end here. Divorce in her community, like most communities, carries along with it a stigma. People on the street called her the 'divorced woman' and refused to acknowledge her by her name. She became an outcast and her family began to fear for her safety warning her not to be on the streets along.

We know of this story as Lamis is one of students at our SB OverSeas school. Despite the difficulties in coming to our school due to street harassment, she attends our classes as she wants to have a better future. She talks openly with others at the school of her experience and encourages them to make their own decision telling them that she wishes she was not married so young as she feels chained by the stigma. She hopes that her message will empower other girls to make their own decision and chose education instead of marriage as a means of security. For herself, she hopes that education will be the key to unlocking a better future and having, like the name of our centre, a better tomorrow: 'Bukhra Ahla'.

Lamis is just one of the many girls at our schools who have been affected by child marriage. SB OverSeas works to prevent the practice of child marriage by providing access to education for 1,400 refugee children in Lebanon and by

economically empowering women and girls through our vocational courses, as well as our self-development courses.

[1] Over 70% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon do not have legal residency:

<http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2018/1/5a548d174/survey-finds-syrian-refugees-lebanon-poorer-vulnerable-2017.html>

[2] <http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2018/1/5a548d174/survey-finds-syrian-refugees-lebanon-poorer-vulnerable-2017.html>

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European Parliament committee urges end to child marriage

EU should act against the unlawful practice globally – and at home

HRW.org (16.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2HovyNH> – The European Union could do more to help end child marriage, and members of the European Parliament are working for it to do just that.

On Thursday, the parliament's Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee adopted an opinion calling for the EU's diplomatic arm to develop a clear strategy and dedicate funds to eradicating child and forced marriage by 2030.

This could not be more timely. Under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, countries around the world pledged to end child marriage – any marriage in which one or both spouses are under age 18 – by 2030.

Achieving this will be difficult. Child marriage occurs in every region of the world, in staggering numbers. About 15 million girls under 18 marry each year – one every two seconds. Every seven seconds, a girl under 15 marries. Most girls marry men over age 18 – in some cases, much older.

Research shows that child marriage is severely harmful. Married children often drop out of school and are locked in poverty as a result. Married girls often quickly become pregnant, and early pregnancy involves serious health risks – including death – for girls and their babies. Girls who marry are at higher risk of domestic violence than women who marry as adults.

The EU has a key role to play. The EU and many of its member states contribute significant amounts of aid to countries with high rates of child marriage. Donors can provide critical assistance for legal and policy reform in these countries. They can also help provide the support – access to education, sexual and reproductive health information and services, economic security, and social empowerment – girls need to escape child marriage.

There is also work for the EU to do at home. A number of EU member states still permit child marriage. Several countries – the Netherlands, Germany, and Sweden – have banned child marriage (and non-EU Norway is considering doing so). But others – including Austria, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom, to name a few – have laws allowing children younger than 18 to marry under some circumstances.

The European Parliament's committee is on the right path to push the EU on this issue. The Foreign Affairs committee and the full parliament should not only adopt this opinion, but ultimately deliver a resolution calling on EU member states to take concerted action. Girls' lives depend on it.

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Portugal gender change law boosts transgender rights, protects infants

NewsMax (13.04.2018) – <https://nws.mx/2JUlqe9> – Portugal, a new gender change law approved Friday means transgender people in the country will no longer need to be diagnosed as mentally ill to legally change their gender and unnecessary surgery on intersex infants is banned.

Several European nations require transgender people to undergo medical procedures such as surgery and sterilization, be diagnosed with a mental disorder, and get divorced if married to have their desired gender legally recognized by government.

The law makes Portugal only the sixth European nation to allow a change of gender without medical or state intervention, according to ILGA-Europe, a network of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) groups.

It follows Malta, Norway, Denmark, Ireland and Belgium.

People who are transgender do not identify with the gender

they were born as, while intersex people have ambiguous genitalia that are not considered typically male or female.

“When trans people are trusted to take decisions for themselves, it signals respect (and) procedures are simplified,” said Transgender Europe’s senior policy officer Richard Kohler.

“It enables anyone who needs legal gender recognition to quickly get through with this bureaucratic step and continue with their lives,” he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The law also means Portugal will become only the second nation in the world, after Malta, to ban medically unnecessary surgery on the genitals of intersex infants, activists said.

About 1.7 percent of the world’s population, or 129 million people, is thought to be born intersex, the United Nations says.

Doctors often perform surgery to “masculinize” or “feminize” the genitalia of intersex babies aged 2 or under in the belief it will make their lives easier and to ease parental distress.

Yet it can cause life-long pain, sterilization, loss of sexual sensation and health complications, campaigners say.

Rights groups such as Organisation Intersex International (OII) and StopIGM.org said Portugal's new law was insufficient.

Parents could circumvent the legislation and have surgeries performed on their children by claiming they were confident of their gender identity, said Kitty Anderson, co-chair of OII.

"The law . . . doesn't explicitly prohibit intersex genital mutilation (IGM), nor criminalize or adequately sanction IGM, nor address obstacles to access to justice and redress for IGM survivors," said Daniela Truffer, co-founder of StopIGM.org.

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UKRAINE: President and the Ukrainian churches officially ask Ecumenical Patriarch to grant the Tomos of autocephaly

Religious Information Service of Ukraine (17.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2qFkNx3> – Today, the President of Ukraine met with the heads of all parliamentary factions to discuss the church-state question. Petro Poroshenko said that he had decided to ask the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to grant the Tomos of autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The president asked that parliamentarians supported his request.

Poroshenko said that he had already handed over the appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarch and hopes that Constantinople will make a positive decision on the Ukrainian question at the nearest Council

“I believe this decision will be made to the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus-Ukraine,” he said. Ukraine will celebrate the anniversary this summer.

Petro Poroshenko also said that all the bishop of the Kyivan Patriarchate had signed a similar appeal to Patriarch Bartholomew. Representatives of other churches supported this idea.

“I met with the Metropolitan of the UAOC Makariy and he informed me that the Hierarchical Council of the UAOC today also supported the appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarch and the President,” he said.

The President also stressed that the formation of a new United Local Orthodox Church in Ukraine is a historical event for Ukraine.

“Ukraine, as an independent state, is not just entitled but obliged to create such a Church and demonstrate the same unity regarding this issue, as all the Churches have shown, ” said Poroshenko.

He also noted that the United Local Orthodox Church would not become a state Church.

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UKRAINE: Autocephaly for the Ukraine Orthodox Patriarchy a step closer?

Odessablog (17.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/1Xqs2k2> – (...) It has come to light that following Easter, President Poroshenko made a personal appeal to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (and the Synod) during a seven hour meeting to free the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarch from its chains to that of the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarch.

Naturally the UOC KP is absolutely unanimous in its support for autocephaly, and as is to be expected, the ROC MP is very much against.

President Poroshenko it is claimed, has stated that he hopes that the “local autocephalous church in Ukraine may appear before the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus” – namely this year.

A reader will recognise no doubt that following what has been a complete policy disaster by The Kremlin when it comes to keeping Ukraine in its orbit, that it has in fact very few effective political, economic, or social levers and influence channels with which to attempt to control or influence the Ukrainian constituency, or “political Kyiv”. The Church however remains one such avenue for so long as the Kyiv Patriarchy is perceived to be what is in effect subservient to

the Moscow Patriarchy.

It is not only a matter of the Kremlin infiltration and any pre-existing allegiances of the clergy, nor any such national security issues that may therefore be relevant within the Moscow Patriarchy. Undoubtedly The Kremlin would not be particularly keen to see the Kyiv Patriarchy officially be set free from the shadow of Moscow as it would be perceived as far more than a symbolic or bureaucratic exercise by the faithful.

Nor is it simply a matter of perception or acceptance by the Orthodox followers, or a battle to shepherd those tens of millions of Ukrainian souls toward godly enlightenment – Kremlin leaning war-clerics with subversive holy hand grenades aside.

There is the matter of some serious earthy riches too. Thousands of churches, thousands of very valuable religious icons, church income, church expenditures, church finances – and its ability to raise finance, tens of thousands of loyal clergy *etc.*

Naturally should autocephaly be granted, that will not mean the end of the ROC MP in Ukraine. A newly attained autocephaly for the UOC KP does not turn it into a State church at the expense of another Orthodox schism – at least not immediately and not under State direction. The believers will undoubtedly remain free to choose whether their souls are tendered by the UOC KP or ROC MP. It is they that will ultimately remain or migrate.

The issue of the earthly treasures however, may be a little more difficult to resolve. How to deal with a congregation, or clergy, or both that move across, but with a church (as in the building) and its inventory belonging to a different patriarchy? Are ungodly legal battles awaiting over earthly riches? What will happen to antiques and ancient icons if autocephaly is to occur and the Moscow Patriarchy decides to

bring all that can be moved across the border to be moved prior to such a decision?

While the Kingdom of God may bring enlightenment and serenity (or not), the kingdoms of men (and a particularly irked Kremlin/Moscow Patriarchy) is far less likely to be forgiving or tolerant – not that pandering to The Kremlin has ever done Ukraine any good, so to do so now would be complete folly.

All very interesting, and perhaps not entirely unsurprising this seven hour meeting between Head of State and Head of Church occurs now that the electioneering for the office of president in 2019 has openly, albeit unofficially, started.

The question is whether Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (and the Synod) will bestow gifts of autocephaly to the UOC KP in a timely electoral manner for President Poroshenko.

A reader will have noted that President Poroshenko, whatever his pluses and minuses, is not especially good at predicting timelines when it involves external actors. He was really some way off with his predictions for the introduction of the Schengen Visa-free (albeit it did indeed arrive eventually), and he seems extremely ambitious with regard to EU membership timelines too.

Nevertheless, this appeal is something to watch that will have repercussions across the Ukrainian constituency should it come to pass. It will also be interesting, should it come to pass prior to Verkhovna Rada elections in October 2019, as to which clergyman a politician will seek to recruit for their reelection campaign (and their Facebook and Instagram accounts will be replete with photographs of politicians with their “chosen” clergy as those elections draw near).

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