

## Who is Alexander Dvorkin?

HRWF (12.01.17) - Alexander Dvorkin, a controversial figure in Russia and abroad, is regularly accused of hate speech towards religions competing with the Russian Orthodox Church. He is the vice-president of FECRIS (European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Cults and Sects) which was created in France, whose constitution separates state and religions. Oddly enough, FECRIS is heavily financed by French public powers.

FECRIS' Russian member association, headed by Alexander Dvorkin, is an organ of the Orthodox Church and has been blessed by Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II. It is a pawn in its strategy against religious pluralism. Key member organizations of FECRIS' Russian member association are led by radical Orthodox priests and archpriests or are missionary departments of Orthodox dioceses.

Alexander Dvorkin has also become the president of the Justice Ministry's *Expert Council for Conducting State Religious-Studies Expert Analysis*, the members of which were completely purged and replaced under Minister of Justice Alexander Konovalov, a former student of Alexander Dvorkin at St Tikhon Orthodox University.

The appointment of the new members has been widely criticized by leaders of non-Orthodox religions, the Ombudsman for Human Rights, the head of the Russian government's Department for Relations with Religious Associations, and the Slavic Center for Law and Justice. Several notorious new members have repeatedly made derogatory statements against non-Orthodox movements and one of them has even been condemned by a court for his extremist hate speech against a religious group.

Dvorkin is also the president of RATsIRS (\*), the Russian Association of Centres for Religious and Sectarian Studies founded in 1993, which stems from the Saint Irenaeus of Lyons Centre for Religious Studies. It is a missionary faculty department of St. Tikhon's Orthodox University in Moscow and their objective is "to spread credible information on doctrines and activities of totalitarian sects and destructive cults".

The question is, what is FECRIS doing associating themselves with a member organization which sows intolerance towards other religious groups?

The Orthodox Church in Russia would be well-advised to put an end to the activities of its institutions and zealous activists which damage its image on the international scene by spreading hate speech, a practice firmly condemned by the OSCE.

(\*) RATSiRS groups together regional anti-sect organizations in the post-Soviet space. The Association was established in February 2006 on the initiative of the leaders of regional centres for contemporary sectarian studies from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Tver, Ekaterinburg, Ufa, Saratov, Tula, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, and other cities of the Russian Federation.

See the book on FECRIS published by HRWF "**Freedom of Religion or Belief, Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality – A CASE STUDY – FECRIS**" at <http://bit.ly/2bDqBOy>