

UKRAINE: Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, a Kremlin's Trojan horse in Ukraine's presidential election?

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (18.02.2019) – Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia hopes that he will be able to visit Ukraine in the future to meet with the believers of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, he said in an interview timed to the 10th anniversary of enthronement as reported by Tass News Agency.

He was quoted as saying: “I hope that God would bring about my visit to Ukraine. Political situation[s] and conjuncture are fleeting occurrences. Today we have these political forces, then others... I still retain hope that I would be able to pray in the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, to meet with my believers, with the hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which, at the present time, heroically defends canonical Orthodoxy.”

On the eve of the presidential election in Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill should not make such a statement for multiple reasons.

First, his words will be perceived in Ukraine as covert support for candidates oriented towards Russia rather than candidates focused on Kyiv and as an attempt to influence the votes of local populations in predominantly Russian-speaking

regions. Hopes for a change at the head of the Ukrainian state are clearly expressed in the Patriarch's words. In the current geopolitical context, it will be viewed as another blatant intrusion of the Kremlin in an electoral process abroad. This comes at a time when Putin uses his political weight to dissuade Orthodox Churches in the European Union from recognizing the autocephaly granted to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Second, Patriarch Kirill is bringing water to the mill of those who accuse the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate, of being a 'foreign agent' of an 'aggressor country' and of being instrumentalised by Moscow. This move of Patriarch Kirill will also put Metropolitan Onufry of the UOC in a very uncomfortable situation, given the tenuous ecclesiastical links to the Russian Orthodox Church. For example, the UOC participates in the election of the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church but this is not reciprocal as the Metropolitan of Kyiv is elected locally.

Surely, the Patriarch's statement will fuel increased social and political hostility towards the UOC. It will also give arguments to those who push or force UOC parishes to switch to the new Orthodox Church recognized by the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

On 17 January, the Ukrainian parliament adopted a bill setting the procedure for changing the affiliation of religious communities in the country. It specifically targets 'those' that are part of "the structure of a religious organization whose governing center is located outside Ukraine", in 'a' state, which is recognized by law as having committed military

aggression against Ukraine. Concretely, it is the sole UOC in communion with the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow that is on the radar. The bill provides for specific limitations of the activities of 'such religious organizations.' Among other things, it restricts access to military units for their clergy and chaplains.

Interreligious conflicts would be highly detrimental for the social, political and regional stability of Ukraine. Neither President Poroshenko, who personally deployed huge efforts to obtain the autocephaly of a 'truly' Ukrainian Orthodox Church before the presidential election, nor the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church should instrumentalise religious divides for political purposes. It is unfortunately the trend that we are witnessing on both sides and the EU should not remain a passive observer of such a situation.

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UKRAINE: Parliament obliged the UOC (MP) to change the name and restricted its chaplains' access to the army

The Parliament of Ukraine passed as a bill (draft law No. 5309) which requires changing the name of religious organizations within the structure of a religious association, a directing centre of which is located in the aggressor country.

Institute for Religious Freedom (20.12.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2TDfU3v> – According to the Institute for Religious Freedom, 240 parliamentarians voted for these amendments to the Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations”.

Pursuant to the amendments to paragraph 8 of Article 12 of the Law, the affiliation of a religious organization to a religious association, a directing centre of which is located in the aggressor country, is determined if one of the following features is present:

1. an indication in a statute of a religious organization, operating in Ukraine, of its affiliation to the structure of such a foreign religious association;
2. indications in a statute of a foreign religious association of affiliation to its structure of a religious organization operating in Ukraine, and also

subordination of such a religious organization in canonical and organizational matters;

3. indications in the statute of a foreign religious association which stipulate a mandatory affiliation of leaders of a religious organization operating in Ukraine to the statutory authorities of the said foreign religious association.

This being the case, a religious organization, operating in Ukraine, is obliged in its full statutory name to feature the affiliation to a foreign religious association by compulsory reproduction in its own name of the full statutory name of such a religious association.

It is important to note that the Russian Federation is meant by the aggressor country, which follows from the Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring Civil Rights and Freedoms, and the Legal Regime on the Temporarily Occupied Territory of Ukraine."

Besides, the transitional and final provisions of the adopted law provide that the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine shall conduct a religious examination of the registered statutes of a religious organization (associations) in order to check their names for compliance with the new requirements of the Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" within one month from the date of these amendments came into force – since December 26, 2018.

After that, the Ministry of Culture, through the official publication in Uriadovyi Kurier and in writing, shall inform religious organizations in which names the inconsistency with

the Law is found, about the need to make appropriate changes to their statutes within three months and to submit them for registration in the prescribed manner.

If within four months (or nine months for religious communities) from the date of adoption of the Law, a religious organization did not make statutory changes in its official name and did not submit the said changes to its statute for registration, then the statute of such an organization becomes invalid in the part that defines the full official name of a religious organization.

The adopted Law stipulates that access for the clergy, religious preachers, chaplains of a religious organization, which belongs to a religious association from the aggressor country, to units, formations of the Armed Forces and other military formations of Ukraine in the places of their deployment may be restricted, and there may also be other restrictions provided for by the Law.

According to a discussion that took place in the parliament before voting on the adopted Law, it is believed that it will affect primarily the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate.

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