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UKRAINE: 23 criminal proceedings opened against 33 pro-Russian clerics

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By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (28.11.2022) – Vasyl Malyuk, the head of the Security Service of Ukraine declared in an interview with Ukrinform in

October: "Since the beginning of the war, we have opened 23 criminal proceedings against clerics, there are already 33 suspects – from classic agents gathering in-depth information to banal fire adjusters in cassocks."

In November, the SBU searched facilities of the UOC/ MP (Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate) across Ukraine

In November, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) searched quite a number of churches, religious buildings and premises of clerics of the UOC/ MP to identify some collaborators or people sympathizing with the Russian occupying forces.

Ukrainian security officers officially conducted "counterintelligence procedures", including at the famous Kyiv Lavra of the Caves, "looking into reports that the monastery's premises might be used to hide reconnaissance and sabotage groups, foreign citizens, weapons, etc."

On Sunday 27 November, the SBU carried out a security operation in the Ivano-Frankivsk Diocese of the UOC/ MP. Searches were being conducted in the Church of the Nativity of Christ. This was stated on the SBU Facebook page of the SBU, "Espresso. Zahid" reported.

The operation was carried out together with the National Police and the National Guard within the framework of the SBU's systematic work of countering subversive activities of the Russian special services in Ukraine," it was said in their message. The special forces were looking for prohibited items and verifying some accusations of alleged misuse of the diocese premises as a center for the promotion of the "Russian World".

On 25 November, the (SBU) searched the bishop of the Ternopil Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC).

Russian literature glorifying the Russian World was allegedly found, and equipment was seized. The bishop was said to use this material to promote the values of the Russian Federation and anti-Ukrainian agitation.

On 23 November, the SBU also conducted searches in St. Nicholas Cathedral in Chernivtsi and found evidence of collaboration between the Chernivtsi-Bukovyna Diocese and Russia: pro-Kremlin literature, copies of occupiers' documents, as well as correspondence with Moscow curators were found. The investigative actions yielded documents confirming the Russian citizenship of the heads of the diocese entities, correspondence of the heads of the diocese with the Russian Orthodox Church and pro-Russian literature, the media reported. According to the reports, a criminal case was opened based on the article of the Criminal Code dealing with high treason.

On the morning of 22 November, the Security Service of Ukraine conducted a counter-intelligence operation in over 350 church buildings, including in the premises of the Holy Dormition Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra in Kyiv, the Koretsky Holy Trinity Monastery and the Sarnensky-Polissia Eparchy of the UOC/ MP. About 850 persons were checked in all. Over 50 of them were subjected to in-depth counterintelligence interviews, including with the use of a polygraph. Russians were found in the facilities of the UOC/ MP. Some of them presented passports and military IDs of the USSR, or did not have original documents at all, but only copies of them, or had Ukrainian passports with indications of forgery or damage.

In addition, a 32-year-old citizen of Ukraine was staying in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. He is suspected of unlawful

activities of the pro-Russian news agency *Antvan* in Ukraine.

According to media reports, the searches yielded “pro-Russian literature” that is used in instruction in seminaries and parish schools and, in the opinion of law enforcement officials, contains “Russian world” propaganda. The searches also yielded more than two million hryvnias, more than \$100,000 and several thousand Russian rubles.

The SBU also conducted additional searches in the Orthodox dioceses in Kirovohrad region and the head of the Vinnytsia diocese, who was notified of suspicion.

Recently, the SBU initiated criminal proceedings over an incident that occurred on 12 November in one of the churches of the Kyiv Cave Monastery. During the service in the church, the song “The bell is floating, floating over Russia, Mother Russia is awakening” was sung.

The Russian Orthodox Church has protested against the SBU’s searches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate, qualifying them as acts of intimidation.

Synod of the UOC/ MP called its priests in occupied territories “heroes who risk their reputation”

On 23 November, the Synod of the UOC-MP released a statement by which it said that the accusations of collaboration between their clergy are groundless and artificial.

“Those bishops and priests who have remained in the occupied territories of Ukraine and continue to perform their pastoral ministry are not collaborators. On the contrary, many of them are real heroes of the Ukrainian people, ” the UOC-MP claims.

As the Synod of the UOC-MP notes, priests of their denomination risk their reputation in order for their people to survive in the occupied territories.

“In the difficult circumstances that developed as a result of the war, they did not leave their flock. Risking their reputation, the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are doing everything possible to ensure that our Ukrainian people survive where war destroys the chances of human life,” the statement reads.

The Synod of the UOC-MP also expressed concern that the process of transition of communities from the Moscow Patriarchate to the OCU continues in the future, which the UOC-MP calls “raiding”, and that the monasteries were visited by the SBU with searches. The UOC-MP is concerned that some of their representatives have faced with serious charges.

“Once again, we strongly urge not to incite an internal war but to unite everyone in order to survive and defeat the evil that stands before us. Only our joint work without internal strife can stop the bloodshed,” the UOC-MP suggests.

As reported, under the procedural leadership of the Donetsk regional prosecutor’s Office, an indictment has been submitted to the court regarding one ‘hero ’ – a priest of the UOC-MP, a resident of the village of Yarova, for collaboration activities (Part 5 of Article 111-1 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine).

This “hero”, the rector of the “Kazan Icon” parish of the UOC-MP Diocese of Horlivka, according to the investigation, in May 2022 colluded with the military of the army of the aggressor country and, on their instructions, organized a gathering of residents in the premises of a local club. Taking advantage of

the respect among the villagers, the priest informed the citizens that the settlement is under the control of the Russian troops and it is necessary to elect a new head of local authorities to interact with the enemy. Under the influence of the personal opinion of the accused, local residents supported the proposed candidacy of the new pseudo-head of the village of Yarova, by a majority vote.

The UOC/MP ordained a new bishop in the liberated Izyum Diocese

On 27 November, Metropolitan Onufriy of the UOC/ MP presided over the Divine Liturgy in the Holy Dormition Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, during which he consecrated Archimandrite Ivan (Ternovetskyi) as the bishop of Izyum and Kupyansky, who is in charge of the Izyum Diocese.

This was reported by the Information and Educational Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Ukraine .

The new bishop was chosen for this ministry by the Holy Synod of the UOC of the Moscow Patriarchate at its last meeting on 23 November.

Bishop Elisey Ivanov, the previous bishop of the Izyum diocese, where a mass grave with 440 bodies was discovered, fled to Russia with the occupiers on the eve of the liberation of the region by the armed forces. On 14 September, he was seen at an Orthodox exhibition in Russia which was blessed by the head of the Belgorod Metropolitanate of the Russian

Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Ivan of Belgorod and Starooskol.

[Further reading about FORB in Ukraine on HRWF website](#)

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