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OSCE held a round table in Odessa on the development of interfaith dialogue

The role of dialogue in strengthening the security of religious and other communities was a key theme of the regional roundtable in Kyiv.



Institute of Religious Freedom (05.11.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1MINNxt> - A meeting organized by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) was held November 3, 2015, reports the Institute of Religious Freedom. The event was attended by over 40 representatives of churches and religious communities, civil society organizations, regional administration and office Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as international and national experts in the field of freedom of religion and belief. The participants discussed the nature, forms, role and purpose of dialogue and explored factors promoting efficiency, transparency and sustainability. "Effective dialogue could promote the exchange of views and experiences with the aim of better mutual understanding - said Kishan Manocha, Senior Advisor ODIHR on freedom of religion or belief. It can create space to address differences and tensions in peaceful and constructive manner and contribute to the collective, shared responsibility for the welfare of all.

The Executive Secretary of the Human Rights Conference of European Churches Elizabeth Kitanovych (Belgium) said: "In terms of human rights, dialogue between different religious and other communities should be as comprehensive. This demand reflects the universal nature of freedom of religion or belief as a human right." Invited as a national expert and the moderator of one of the sessions Maxim Vasin, Executive Director of the Institute for Religious Freedom, said: "The process to achieve common goals in the dialogue can be effective only if its members understand and agree on the need to work on the principles of equality and not for self-promotion, and the common result that will be useful to society. Not waiting for initiatives from the authorities, churches and religious organizations can take steps in establishing contacts among themselves to joint efforts in social service, charity, confirmation of high moral standards in society. "

On the need for inclusion in the educational process in schools on mutual respect and peaceful coexistence with religious diversity said Dr. Norman Richardson, teacher education and religious diversity of Stranmillis University College in Northern Ireland.

Among other participants of the round table discussed issues of incitement of religious hatred in the media and through false or low-quality journalistic materials. It was also accentuated the necessity of better communications churches and religious communities

and society, including through media resources and timely commentary of significant events.

Representatives of churches have offered practical issues on which to engage in dialogue and joint efforts to combine assistance to homeless persons, rehabilitation of prisoners, minimizing conflicts during public events and more.

Special attention was paid to the inclusiveness of the dialogue. In particular, taking into account the views of religious minorities and the participation of a few newly established religious communities in the dialogue process.

Director of the Department of Religious and Ethnic Affairs of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine Andriy Yurash noted that the Ministry intends with OSCE ODIHR held in Kyiv on December 8-9 this year Ukrainian ethnic and inter-religious forum. For its part, Head of the Department for Nationalities and Religions Odessa Regional State Administration Yaroslav Riznikova announced its intention to resume the work of the churches and religious organizations of the region at the head of the regional state administration formed in 2005. It has also supported the idea of Odessa prayer breakfast attended by representatives of local authorities and different denominations and study visits of representatives of ODA to various churches and religious organizations of Odessa region. Round table, the third of its kind, was organized in the framework of OSCE ODIHR "Promotion Security religious and other communities in the regions of Ukraine." One of the main objectives is to promote dialogue between religious and other communities and between these communities and the state.

Ukrainian religious leaders think religion law contains Soviet-like restrictions

Constitutional Court to review procedure for organizing public religious meetings

RISU (05.11.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1MCTtV4> - Ombudsman Valeria Lutkovskaia introduced into the Ukrainian Constitutional Court a representation concerning the unconstitutionality of part 5 of article 21 [see below] of the Ukrainian law "On freedom of conscience and religious organizations."

The representation by the plenipotentiary for human rights of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet says that the permitting procedure for arranging public peaceful assemblies of a religious nature provided by the law does not accord with article 39 of the Ukrainian constitution, the Institute of Religious Liberty reports.

"Public religious meetings, including public worship services, religious rituals, ceremonies, processions, etc. are in essence public peaceful assemblies," Ombudsman Valeria Lutkovskia is sure.

The constitutional representation notes that exercise of the right to freedom of worldview and religious confession in the form of a public worship service, religious ritual, ceremony, or procession should be carried out on the basis of constitutional norms contained in article 39 of the Ukrainian constitution regarding conduct of peaceful assemblies. This means that any public worship service should be conducted on the condition of a prior notification of a body of executive authority or body of local self-administration, and restrictions on the exercise of this right may be established only by a court.

"It is good that attention has been turned to this problem at the highest level. This explicitly discriminatory norm has remained in the law almost 20 years now, and some representatives of local government are happy to use the 'right' to issue permits for public peaceful assemblies of believers as was the case in soviet times. I hope that the judges of the Constitution Court will finally remove this misunderstanding," Maksim Vasin, the executive director of the Institute of Religious Liberty and member of the Consultative Council under the plenipotentiary for human rights of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, commented on the ombudsman's initiative.

Previously the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations and experts of the Institute of Religious Liberty recommended to parliament the removal of these unconstitutional provisions of the law and introduction of a procedure for arranging peaceful assemblies of believers and religious organizations that is like that for other citizens and institutions of civil society.

As the IRL reported, according to the position of the Ukrainian Constitutional Court, the right of citizens to assemble peacefully, without weapons, and to conduct meetings, rallies, processions, and demonstrations is one of the constitutional guarantees of a citizen's right to freedom of worldview and religious confession and the right to thought and speech and the free expression of one's views and convictions.

Additional information: The fifth part of article 21 of the law "On freedom of conscience and religious organizations" reads as follows:

"In other cases, public worship services, religious rituals, ceremonies, and processions are conducted with the permission for each time of a relevant local governmental administration or executive body of a village, town, or city council. Request for issuing said permission is submitted no later than ten days before the scheduled time for conducting a worship service, ritual, ceremony, or procession, except in instances of intolerable delay."

from Ukrainian law "[On freedom of conscience and religious organizations](#)"

Article 39 of the Ukrainian constitution reads as follows:

"Citizens have the right to assemble peacefully without arms and to hold meetings, rallies, processions and demonstrations, upon notifying in advance the bodies of executive power or bodies of local self-government.

"Restrictions on the exercise of this right may be established by a court in accordance with the law and only in the interests of national security and public order, with the purpose of preventing disturbances or crimes, protecting the health of the population, or protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons."

from [Ukrainian constitution](#) (1996)

Ukraine acknowledges right of conscientious objection

Supreme specialized court requires review of sentence of conscripted believer

Institute of Religious Liberty (07.10.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1Qn4hGm> - The Supreme Specialized Court of Ukraine issued yet another decision in favor of a believer who had been sentenced to two years incarceration because of the impossibility of performing military service because of religious convictions.

Thanks to this ruling of the court, the believer will be released from a SIZO [investigation cell] and again placed under house arrest for the time of a reconsideration of the case in an appellate court, the Institute of Religious Liberty [IRL] reports.

As the IRL reported, on 13 March 2015 a Vladimirets district court of Rovno province, under the chairmanship of Judge V.A.Porovsky, in criminal case No. 556/127/15-K sentenced to two years incarceration (without mitigation) a believer who reported the impossibility of his performing military service on the basis of his religious convictions.

While doing so, the judge referred in the text of the sentence to the fact that "the accused did not present to the court evidence of the fact that a member of the church of KhVE (Christians of Evangelical Faith) cannot bear arms and defend the motherland." At the same time, the deputy military commissar of the Vladimirets ORVK [Unified District Military Commissariat] for mobilization reported in the court session that he was not authorized to engage "in the return home of members of the KhVE and other sectarians," since this is done by the provincial military commissariat.

"It is evident that the representation of a member of the church of KhVE in the negative image of a 'sectarian,' not only by an official of the ORVK but even in the text of the judicial decision, made his constitutional right to alternative (noncombat) service of secondary consideration," Maksim Vasin, the executive director of the Institute of Religious Liberty, commented regarding this sentence.

Moreover, the appellate court of Rovno province, while reviewing this criminal case on the basis of an appeal from the accused, said that he had failed to comply with the requirements of part 2 of article 9 of the Ukrainian law "On alternative (noncombat) service." However, this article does not directly pertain to cases of conscription and was applied by military commissariats by analogy, and thus nonobservance of this procedure cannot be the basis for criminal punishment, the IRF expert thinks.

In the end, the Supreme Specialized Court of Ukraine, on review of civil and criminal cases on 29 September 2015 in criminal proceeding No. 12014180050000848 ordered the cancellation of the decision of the appellate court of Rovno province and sent the case for a new consideration in the appellate court.

The basic reason for such a decision was that the appellate court had not examined in the proper way all of the circumstances of the case and the arguments of the defense. In particular, it did not take into account the state of health of the defendant and the practice of the European Court for Human Rights in cases regarding the right to refuse military service on the basis of religious considerations and the substitution for it of alternative (civilian) service.

A lawyer of the juridical center Law and Justice, Dmitry Slipenko, who defended the believer in this case, considers the decision of the Supreme Specialized Court of Ukraine to be expected and just.

"The appellate court substantially violated the requirements of criminal procedural law since it did not examine the arguments of the accused to the effect that he did not have the intent to avoid the summons to service. Being a believing person, he simply tried to take advantage of his constitutional right to substitute alternative (noncombat) service for his military obligation at the time of mobilization. During the second consideration, the appellate court will be forced to take into account these and other directives of the Supreme Specialized Court of Ukraine and, as expected, acquit the accused," the attorney said.

We recall that this year the Supreme Specialized Court of Ukraine, in another criminal case, confirmed the right of believers to alternative service on the basis of religious convictions, even in the time of mobilization. (tr. by PDS, posted 9 October 2015)

Evangelical pastor abducted by Kremlin-backed militants in Luhansk and released four days later

By Willy Fautre, *Human Rights Without Frontiers* (30.09.15) - Taras Sen, Pastor of the Church of the Christian Evangelical Faith, has been abducted by militants from the so-called Luhansk People's Republic.

The Church reports that Taras Sen was taken hostage on Sunday 27 September in the city of Sverdlovsk in the Luhansk oblast by armed militants [and released on 1 October](#). It should be noted that on 29-30 September 2015 a conference of the OSCE/ODIHR was held in Warsaw on problems of crimes based on hatred, discrimination, and persecution of Christians and other believers, where the incident involving Pastor Taras Sen was mentioned.

Pastor Taras and his colleagues of the Church [are known to](#) have been constantly providing food and other aid to the needy since the military conflict broke out.

There were a number of abductions of religious figures during [summer](#) 2014 but that had stopped [since then](#).

In June 2014, four members of an evangelical church in Sloviansk were kidnapped and subsequently assassinated. (See [their burial at http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/07/26/eight-christians-executed-by-terrorists-buried-in-the-donbas/](#))

On 3 July, Father Tikhon, a Greek Catholic priest was abducted by members of the Russian Orthodox Army and released after 10 days being tortured and humiliated by his kidnapers. Father Tikhon is the secretary of the inter-faith Council of Churches and Religious Organizations of the Donetsk Oblast, and he was one of the organizers of a prayer 'marathon' in Donetsk.

On 8 July, a priest from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, Yury Ivanov, was abducted by militants of the so-called Russian Orthodox Army.

On 15 July 2014, a Polish Roman Catholic priest from Horlivka, Father Viktor Wąsowicz was taken hostage by Kremlin-backed militants while driving his own car to a church service. He managed to make a phone call saying that he had been abducted. He was finally released ten days later.

According to the 'constitution' of the 'Luhansk People's Republic' issued on 16 May 2014 "the leading and dominant faith is the Orthodox faith ... as professed by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). The historical heritage and role of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) are recognized and respected, including as a main pillar of the Russian World doctrine".

This concept of a supposed 'Russian World' – encompassing Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, as well as Russia itself – is promoted by Russian President Vladimir Putin and the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill.

Ukrainian nationalists storm Hasidic encampment

Far right-wing activists storm tent encampment of ultra-Orthodox visitors in Uman, causing damage estimated at half a million dollars. 'They attacked on Shabbat because they knew we couldn't respond,' says Jewish association head.

Ynetnews (08.09.2015) - <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4698397,00.html>
- Several dozen Ukrainian nationalists stormed a tent encampment of ultra-Orthodox visitors in Uman over the weekend, destroying equipment and dismantling parts of the fence surrounding it. A police force was dispatched to the area, but according to witnesses, the officers failed to intervene.

"On Shabbat, when they knew we wouldn't be able to respond or activate the communication device, they simply knocked down the fence, pushed the light poles and security cameras and caused damage estimated at half a million dollars," Eliezer Kirshboim, chairman and director of the Jewish association in Uman told Yedioth Ahronoth. "We are approaching the High Holidays, and this disrupts all our work arrangements."

Although the information about the incident was transferred to the highest diplomatic ranks, no suspects have been arrested yet.

Kirshboim added that anti-Semitic right-wing activists were seeking to "harass the Jewish Hasidim" in order to gain political points among the local public. "Whoever harasses the Hasidim more has a better chance of winning the elections in October," he said.

According to Kirshboim, the current mayor was "appointed" by members of the nationalist Svoboda party following the revolution in Ukraine. "There is crazy state of anarchy here," he said. "All they want is a bribe and to prove that they are harassing Hasidim."

The Hasidim say that although they recently invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in the city's development, the authorities are still hostile towards them. "We are under the impression that their goal is that the Hasidim won't come to Ukraine at all," Kirshboim said.

Attorney Genadi Beloritski, who represents the Hasidim, explained that although they have made a great contribution to the city's development, the nationalistic groups have a lot of influence on the local authorities and continue to disrupt their activity in the area.

As an example, he pointed to the fact that the authorities have failed to grant the Hasidic tent encampment license, although the Hasidim own 70 percent of its area.

High court of Ukraine upholds right to conscientious objection during military mobilization

JW.org (28.08.2015) - <http://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/ukraine/human-rights-conscientious-objectors/> - Ukraine's high court has affirmed that conscientious objectors have the right to alternative service even in times of civil unrest and war. This decision has broad implications for human rights, both in Ukraine and abroad.

Vitaliy Shalaiko, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, was accused of evading military service during mobilization because he requested alternative service when summoned for conscription. Both the trial court and the appeal court had acquitted him, but the

prosecutor appealed to the High Specialized Court of Ukraine for Civil and Criminal Cases. On June 23, 2015, the high court dismissed the appeal, thereby finalizing the lower courts' decisions.

The high court affirmed that "the trial court was fully justified in referring to the corresponding provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights and the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights." The high court also agreed with the trial court that the case of *Bayatyan v. Armenia* applied. This case was decided by the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights on July 7, 2011. That landmark judgment held that conscientious objection to military service based on sincerely held religious beliefs falls under the protection of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In the case of *Vitaliy Shalaiko*, Ukraine's high court made clear that the rights of conscientious objectors are protected even if a country mobilizes for armed conflict and not just when there are routine call-ups for military service. The high court's decision is final, with no further appeal available.

This final ruling relieves Mr. Shalaiko of much anxiety. He states: "I understand my country's interest in safeguarding its citizens by military mobilization. While my conscience does not permit me to perform military service, I am nevertheless willing to do my part in performing alternative civilian service. I am grateful that the courts have recognized that my refusal of military service is based on my sincere religious beliefs."

A Decision That Benefits Many

Thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout Ukraine have faced the issue of neutrality during mobilization. Those who face criminal charges for evading military service can now rely on the legal precedent established in *Vitaliy Shalaiko's* case.

Mr. Shalaiko's attorney, Mr. Vadim Karpov, noted: "In simple terms, the high court explains that as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mr. Shalaiko could not be prosecuted for refusing military service. Even in a country such as Ukraine, which is divided by war and instability, it is significant that norms of international law on freedom of religion and on freedom of conscience have been applied."

Ukraine Sets an Example in Respecting Human Rights

The courts of Ukraine have recognized that conscientious objection to military service is a fundamental human right that merits protection even during military mobilization. It is neither a selfish evasion of duty nor a threat to national interests and security. In affirming the rulings of the lower courts, the high court has upheld human rights for all Ukrainians. Ukraine has set an example for countries that punish conscientious objectors who refuse military service for reasons of conscience.

International community should give adequate assessment of Moscow patriarchate's responsibility for incitement and developments in Crimea and Donbas, Andriy Yurash says

Interviewed by Tatiana Kalenychenko

Religious Information Service of Ukraine (11.08.2015) - http://risu.org.ua/en/index/expert_thought/interview/60777/ - he issues of freedom of conscience and religion, and of religious persecution were considered in the second session of the OSCE Human Dimension, held on July 2-3 in Vienna, capital of Austria. Although the main tendencies were highlighted by executive director of the Institute for

Religious Freedom (IRF) Maxym Vasin in his report, we decided to talk in more detail to another event participant - Head of the Department for Religions and Nationalities to the Ministry of Culture Andriy Yurash.

Tell us, please, about the whole event and your impressions from it.

At the OSCE session in Vienna, I was personally invited to take part in the so-called side event to the main meeting, which was to focus on issues of religious freedom both at the Assembly level and within the framework of the rest of events. As the "religious" issues, so to say, have been the focus of all the participants, I just had to take an active part in all the discussions regarding Ukraine. I was even authorized to speak twice on behalf of the Ukrainian delegation at the main session in response to absurd and blatantly propagandistic statements of the Russian delegation.

Which exactly?

Firstly, there was a need to voice very clearly the Ukrainian position on freedom of conscience and religion in the areas annexed to and controlled by the Russian Federation. The relevant statement by the Ukrainian delegation and the realistic stance supported by figures and statistical presentation made by the Ukrainian delegation caused anger and self-justification remarks of the Russian representatives. It was not just indignation on the part of our ideological and political opponents, but a flood of inappropriate, unrealistic, propagandistic comments that were deliberately designed to fit their own propagandistic campaign.

At first we even thought that, given the absolute unrealistic nature of the statements made by Putin's delegates, they were not even worth to engage into discussion with. However, understanding the need of objective and unbiased information for the rest of participants, we gave answers and made all the necessary comments in every case. In every case we draw a line under the debate.

Head of the Russian delegation Hrihoriy Lukyantsev, Deputy Head of the Department for Compatriot Affairs and Human Rights under the Russian Foreign Ministry, put forward the usual Russian propaganda theses on the extraordinary significance of the so-called traditional values and, therefore, support of the tradition-based forms of religiosity. Regarding the Crimean issue, he limited himself to formalistic statements that the issue was closed, the peninsula was in the Russian jurisdiction, and this, in his opinion, was an exclusively open and perfect field functioning in accordance with the OSCE norms and principles.

Instead, Father Roman Bohdasarov, one of the leading present-day advocates and mouthpieces of the Moscow Patriarchate, who in 2010 was acting head of the secretariat of the Interreligious Council of Russia and is Deputy Chairman of the Synodal Department for Church and Society Relations, demonstrated particular aggressiveness and irresponsible bias. Unlike the professional diplomats who tried to maintain decency at least formally, this church "Goebbels" did not choose diplomatic explanations, and engaged in overt inculcation.

In particular, without any remorse he resorted to completely intolerant statements, officially proclaiming the discriminative principles in determining church organizations. For example, he clearly defended the necessity and appropriateness of the division of religious organizations into the so-called historical and non-traditional ones, and among the Orthodox Churches – into the allegedly canonical and schismatic ones. The American delegation immediately drew attention to the inadmissibility of such level of thought and reasoning. Since the comments made by the Russian delegation member in the spirit of the cold war, had relation to Ukraine, we had to systemically refute and clarify relevant theses.

Having got the opportunity to respond to verbal orgy of Fr Bohdasarov, I started from the fact that we could not but respond to discriminatory remarks and approaches to issues of religious freedom. This is even more unacceptable at the assembly that focuses the establishment and development of completely opposite approaches and principles - equality of churches and religious organizations, tolerant attitude to any and all manifestations of religious consciousness and its practical expression. The session, which as it is should demonstrate the principle of tolerance, cannot function under a completely different paradigm!

In the conversation with Russian representatives we indicated the impossibility of ranking religious organizations by officials or government officials, because it can lead to selectivity in the state's attitude towards the entities of state-religious interaction. But they tried to defend and insist on their own point of view. In particular, the Russians often used the term "canonicity" and "schism." Our remark that there is no such problem on the agenda of the Ukrainian legislation, as to determine which of the religious organizations is, relatively speaking, "right" and which is not, caused painful reaction of the Moscow representatives. This remark of mine provoked a violent reaction from the already mentioned Father Roman Bohdasarov, who once again gave a categorical "no", saying that one cannot compare a "canonical" church, which, according to him, has 15 000 parishes and, in his definition, a public organization with 300 parishes, established by "citizen Denisenko". We responded with official figures, which were supported by documents and proved the absurdity of these figures.

I just provided the undeniable official and statistical information that does not need any comments. The way in which Russian ideologues and propagandists act and the propagandist tricks they employ to give every reason to believe that there are no limits for propaganda, and they resort to manipulation and lies. Of course, there is no objection that the UOC in the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, which was defined as a unique "canonical and historical" church by Fr Bohdasarov, has the largest number of religious organizations in Ukraine today - about 12,600, and not 15,000, as stated by the spokesman of the Moscow Patriarchate. But the Church (UOC KP) led by Patriarch Filaret together with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church have in total not 300, but about 6,200 parishes. The difference between the realities of church life of modern Ukraine and the statement of the Russian church propagandist is more than 20 times.

I believe that the OSCE should not forget and react appropriately to the activities of religious organizations that do not only proclaim but affirm the principles of exclusivity and violation of the principles of equality, but also cause interchurch or inter-religious conflicts, as well as conflicts in political arena by their particular actions. The responsibility of religious organizations in terms of inciting and supporting the conflict must be appropriately acknowledged and condemned by the international community.

Were the issues of Crimea and the persecution of religious freedom in the peninsula additionally raised?

Shortly after the speech at the plenary session, during the discussion of the results of special Ukrainian side event I had to hold forth on the Crimean issue in the context of establishment of the so-called Tauride Muftiate, whose emergence was artificially provoked by the Russian authorities, as a form of pressure and influence on the Religious Administration of Muslims of Crimea. The discussion was initiated by the American delegation, which displayed impressive knowledge of the situation.

We had to highlight key points regarding Crimea that Russians made. The delegation of the Russian Federation insisted that it was their area of responsibility, and therefore it made no point raising the issue of Crimea's allegiance to Ukraine. According to their logic, religious organizations operating in Crimea belong to the legal framework of

Russia, which is, supposedly, one of the best in Europe. On this occasion, I had to resort to facts which reveal the falsity of the Kremlin propaganda. In the appropriate context, I brought in just a few theses: according to Ukrainian statistics in early 2014 there were 2086 religious organizations, and the report that Russia submitted to UNESCO in early 2015 mentioned the activities of around 1,000 organizations in the peninsula. That is, merely in a year the network of religious organizations, according to official Russian statistics, halved! Approximately one thousand of religious organizations, i.e. 50% of the network simply disappeared from the religious map of the peninsula! Do you need extra facts to record and prove a phenomenal level of violations of the rights of religious organizations?

We know that almost 700 of them were operating without registration, which is perfectly legal under Ukrainian law. These were predominantly Muslim communities and more than two hundred Protestant communities. Instead, the Russian legislation does not allow for unregistered religious communities as such. Even more tragic is the case of those 300 organizations operating under valid official registration. Thus, we face an indisputable fact that the networks of many churches and religious institutions, including the UOC - Kyiv Patriarchate, UGCC, and many Protestant denominations were radically reduced. All these facts, being presented at the plenary meeting of the OSCE, did not cause the desire of the Russian delegation to refute or deny them. Instead, they received full recognition and understanding by all delegations and other participants in the meeting.

Is it possible to say that the religious factor was involved in developments in Crimea or the East?

As a direct example I recalled the situation in the Ukrainian Crimea and Donbas, where territorial annexation in the first case and tough military action in the second case included the religious factor as one of the absolutely evident assumptions - the totalitarian-revanchist ideology of the Russian world, advocated by the specific religious organization. In the practical political and ideological plane, Putin embodied the ideologies that the head of the Moscow Patriarchate had suggested a few years ago. Therefore, the responsibility of this religious organization for provoking the events in Crimea and Donbas has yet to be properly assessed by the international community, and relevant conclusions from the situation are yet to be made. Playing up to aggressor or provocateur (regardless of whether he wears religious robes to conceal his aggressive, expansionist objectives or not) is the way of encouraging it to more aggressive actions and more violence.

We had an opportunity to further discuss religious freedom at a separate seminar on Ukraine. Together with IRS executive director Maxym Vasin and Oxford University professor Ms. Nazila Haneyeya we approached from different perspectives the question of relations between religions in Ukraine. Maxim Vasin, for example, spoke clearly and in greater detail about all the features of Ukrainian legislation, which creates the most favorable context for the development and activity of religious organizations in our country.

Instead, I deliberately concentrated on the four problematic points that often arose as the most controversial and contradictory. First, I tried to focus most substantively on the causes, circumstances and forms of the so-called "government interference" in the religious field, which is actually a form of government response to the challenges of the moment and the way to solve the most urgent needs of the religious communities. Moreover, the Russian delegation permanently charged us with alleged government interference in religious affairs. The second question I was trying to cover was the so-called "seizure" of churches that the Moscow Patriarchate leaders are incessantly talking about. They unilaterally and unequivocally interpret the cases where at a level of individual parishes local communities decide to change their church jurisdictional affiliation. The third point was the question of possible forms of government response to

separatist rhetoric of some religious leaders and activists. The fourth point of my presentation was to discuss the problem, which obviously aggravates in the religious space of Ukraine every month - strengthening of confrontational narrative in rhetoric and documents in separate churches. Instead of coming to terms, some communities consciously chose escalation.

As you can see, all those are not the formal, but the essential problems of our current religious segment. No one either in Ukraine or abroad has any doubt that the Ukrainian state guarantees religious organizations their rights to maximum free existence.

We have to think about the inevitable reverse effect: it is necessary to set up mechanisms that would make impossible any situations where religious groups interfere in the political processes and provoke conflict. I reiterate: Ukraine is now at war, we are witnessing the occupation of some territories, and I have no doubt that the current situation has a religious backdrop. Since 2009, during his numerous visits to our country, Patriarch Kirill began inculcating the ideology of the "Russian world", which has been used and is now used by Putin and militants in Donbas at a more practical level. Therefore, one of the most chauvinistic fundamentalist religious concepts underpins the current cataclysm in Ukraine. It is clear that anyone who preaches or embodies these principles, including particular religious leaders, should bear full responsibility for what they have done.

And what accountability mechanisms do you think of?

The laws of each state, including Ukraine, envisage that if a particular person is preaching separatism, he must be punished, regardless of being a secular or religious figure. In this case, the spiritual leader appears as an ordinary person that directly or indirectly advocates the violation of territorial integrity. Similarly, when it comes to cases where someone calls to hate someone else, where someone's right to existence is denied or someone is offended on religious grounds. All these are grounds for lawsuit, and they must be qualified in terms of criminal law. Special legislation is hardly necessary in such cases. It is the liability in the context of our state law.

Have you noticed the reaction of other delegations to your speeches, except the US and Russia?

I had a long conversation with a representative of Canada, obviously, they were in constant interaction with the Polish delegation. Overall, more than a dozen officials expressed their support for us in many ways. So it was enough to describe the situation to attest how deliberate and demonstrative everything was that happened in the Hofburg Castle (which hosted the OSCE meeting).

Without any exaggeration, the Ukrainian perspective was most often referred to in the main session, and representatives of our country were given the opportunity to convey their views to the public the greatest number of times. In addition to plenary sessions, four relevant background or seminars (side events) were planned. Three of these were to be dedicated to Ukraine. I have a rather detailed account on one of the seminars. In addition, on the first day there was an extremely productive meeting themed "When God becomes a weapon: persecution on religious grounds in the framework of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine", presenting the English version of a booklet prepared through the efforts of the Kyiv office of the Center for Civil Liberties and the IRS.

On the second day of the meeting, the third workshop was to take place on the initiative of a certain pro-Russian organization, which intended discuss the issue of so-called "persecution" of particular religious organizations of the Ukrainian state. However, faced with proactive and convincing position of the Ukrainian delegation, the organizers cancelled their seminar a few hours before the beginning.

The nature of the discussions in the first and second day of the session showed that not only Ukrainians, but no one else was willing and was unlikely to passively accept the propaganda that the Russian Federation and its satellites are seeking to impose. Actually, in this context, the two above events were organized to tell about the real situation in Ukraine in terms of prospects and guaranteeing freedom of conscience in contrast to exploiting the myths imposed on Ukraine from outside.

The OSCE leaders, seeing the efficiency of this approach, immediately offered us help in organizing regular joint events in Ukraine.

The main thing, according to leaders of the OSCE, is that such actions serve the main purpose of the activity – ensuring guarantees for the freedom of conscience. The first of a series of meetings held in Ukraine at the national level was held in May in Kyiv when we managed to gather almost all regional heads of departments responsible for implementing the state policy on religion. Now we are at the stage of coordination of the concept of the inter-religious forum that has not taken place in the capital of Ukraine for decades.

It would be very interesting.

Yes, therefore we discuss the approximate dates of the planned forum in order to most effectively implement the idea. The evidence for success and productivity of our cooperation with the OSCE also lies in the fact that we have been asked to attend the next session in Warsaw in late September, where the issue of combating discrimination will be traditionally raised. As Ukrainian delegation in Vienna displayed maximum activity at two levels - speaking at the plenary session and during special side events, a similar scheme was agreed to be applied in Poland.

And what were the conclusions of the Vienna meeting? May scenarios of some or advice be drawn up from them?

Ukrainian issue is a key priority for the OSCE and it could be felt both at the level of declarations and at the level of practical priorities. No one doubted why it happened so that Ukrainian-Russian issues were central. According to the degree of intensity and impact, next came the focus on the problems of the Turkish minority in Greece and of the Greek minority in Turkey, to circumstances of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and so on.

Our legislation is very liberal and extremely productive in terms of religious freedom. It is clear that there are specific and controversial challenges. And I was very pleased and honored that we were able to explain the mechanisms of state response to these challenges to international experts. It is important that these are no formalities that simply remain on paper, but real solutions to conflict situations. But even more important is that the mechanisms we proposed were accepted and supported by prominent international monitoring and analytical structures of both the OSCE and other organizations.

International experts have acknowledged that we understand the challenges that Ukrainian society faces in the religious sector, and are trying to support all entities in bringing to life their aspirations and expectations. For example, some of the opponents of the current government blame the executive power in Ukraine that the Prime Minister of Ukraine Arseniy Yatsenyuk wrote letters to Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, allegedly interfering in religious affairs. But we have explained that the government, being responsible for the development of the religious situation, is ready to write the like

messages or letters to any religious structure if needed and if it will contribute to solving the urgent needs of a particular denomination.

The executive agencies are currently actively engaged, among the other, in drawing up documents, including to foreign structures, concerning the organization of the Hajj for Ukrainian Muslims in the framework of the so-called Ukrainian quota. Therefore, it is logical and natural that such a scheme or a method of enforcement is used by authorities in the case of the Orthodox, the most conflict religious environment in Ukraine.

If one part (besides the much greater part than its opponents) of the Ukrainian Orthodox seeks to enter into Eucharistic communion with Constantinople Patriarchate and to get recognition from the Universal Orthodox community, the state's task is to facilitate this process, including by writing appropriate letters. If the rest of the Orthodox environment expresses desire to continue to remain under the auspices of the Moscow Patriarch, we will be appealing to Patriarch Kirill with a request to keep the part of the Ukrainian Orthodox under his jurisdiction.

That is, a direct obligation of the state is to help every religious group implement their constitutional rights to those forms of religious expression, which they deem appropriate.

Therefore, the government shall do what it can to guarantee the rights of believers. I do not even want to resort to the purely theological arguments, because they may not be motivational in the terms of a state. I think everyone involved in the religious environment understands that no autocephaly in the world was implemented without relevant involvement of the government. Therefore, those who blame the state for allegedly interfering in religious affairs, actually make a conscious substitution of concepts, thus supplying fuel for the Russian and pro-Russian agitation machine.

Previously the AUCCRO claimed that the final transition to the partnership model of relations between power and religious organizations is to take place. Is this process advancing and is this model of cooperation being implemented?

We want to implement it. Our department has recently turned to the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations with proposals and motivation explaining that the period when we were in confusion should stay behind. For example, in the course of the last meeting, the AUCCRO touched so many issues that have direct relevance to the executive power, which indicates that public authorities and religious communities will inevitably come to terms. The above include the controversial issues of mobilization and the law that allows religious organizations to establish educational institutions, the integration of new Council members or the temporary replacement of older ones, and permissions for priests to cross the line of confrontation in the ATO area, allocation of land resources and so on. All these numerous issues were directed straight to me as the leader of the relevant unit of executive power that directly regulates these issues. Thus, leaders of religious organizations had the opportunity to directly and immediately get answers to these complex questions.

Just immediately after that meeting our Department proposed to the AUCCRO to restore the Department's status of the permanent observer in an advisory capacity. This is to ensure that both parties of interaction - both government agencies and religious organizations - have the opportunity to understand and be aware of any problems at the stage of their occurrence. This will be useful and profitable for most churches as well, as they will see the authorities' response to controversies, and the state will get better chances to minimize conflicts in the religious plane. Thus, state officials will be capable to respond not at the stage of extinguishing fire, but at a stage when there is an opportunity and capability to prevent the occurrence of new outbreaks, escalation of religious controversies.

Ukrainian Orthodox priest and nun killed

Russian Orthodox Church upset by murders of clergy in Kiev

RIA Novosty (29.07.2015) - The murders in Kiev of two representatives of the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow patriarchate in the past several days, against the backdrop of the slanderous campaign in several Ukrainian news media directed against it, provokes concern, RIA Novosti was told by the vice-chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow patriarchate, Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, commenting on news reports appearing on Wednesday about the violent death of Sister Alevtina of the St. Florus convent.

"This news evokes profound sorrow and concern for the fate of the clergy and persons religious of the Ukrainian Orthodox church. Today news has arrived about the death in the hospital of priest Roman Nikolaev, who also was a victim of criminals acting in not completely clear circumstances. Considering that this is happening against the background of a slanderous campaign in several Ukrainian news media, directed against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, such incidents evoke special alarm," Balashov said.

Sister Alevtina was found "dead with marks of violence in Kiev," the synod's Information Department of the Moscow patriarchate reported on Wednesday. Its chairman, Vladimir Legoida, expressed condolences to the sisters of the St. Florus Holy Ascension convent located in the center of Kiev and a relative of the deceased nun. Legoida said, "those who did this horrible crime placed themselves outside the Ukrainian people, who from antiquity have revered those who are standing before God."

"Sister Alevtina was a 62-year-old teacher who was tonsured not long ago. We have been told that she was supposed to go to the hospital and she asked her nephew to transport her, but before visiting the doctor she stopped in at her apartment. And there her nephew found her murdered," the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate press service, Vasily Anisimov, told RIA Novosti. He said the church does not yet know whether a criminal case has been opened.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate website reported that Wednesday a 41-year-old Kievan priest, Roman Nikolaev, died without recovering consciousness. He was the rector of the church of the Great Martyr Tatiana of the Obolonsk deanery, who in the night of 26 July was shot twice in the head in Kiev by unidentified persons. One of the reasons for the attack was a visit by residential thieves, although news media reported that this version has not been confirmed, since nothing was stolen from the priest's home.

Targeted for religious beliefs in Eastern Ukraine

JW.ORG (10.07.2015) - Motivated by religious hatred, armed groups in eastern Ukraine have abducted and mistreated 26 of Jehovah's Witnesses since August 2014. Many Witnesses live in the region, and they are well-known for their public ministry and political neutrality. Some members of armed groups have capitalized on the recent lack of law and order in the region and have singled out the Witnesses for brutal treatment. *

Incidents of violence

- On May 21, 2015, police officers in the town of Stakhanov detained two male Witnesses, both over the age of 60, because of their religious activity. They were charged with "disturbing the peace" and given a 15-day sentence. While in police

custody, the two Witnesses were accused of espionage and were repeatedly interrogated about the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. Congregation members pleaded with the local prosecutor to release the men, but he refused to grant their request. Family and fellow Witnesses were initially denied access to the two men but were later allowed to provide food, clothing, and medicine three times a week. One of the Witnesses was released on June 2, 2015, and the other the next day—with an order to leave the region.

- On May 17, 2015, armed men in the Novoazovsk area detained four of Jehovah's Witnesses, blindfolded them, and took them at gunpoint to the local military headquarters. For two hours they viciously beat the Witnesses and subjected them to mock executions. They demanded that the youngest Witness join their army and that all of the Witnesses confess the Orthodox faith as the only true religion. The Witnesses were released after spending a night in a cramped, makeshift jail.



Some of the injuries to two of the Witness men abducted and beaten in the Novoazovsk area

- On January 22, 2015, three armed men kidnapped a Witness from his workplace in Donetsk. His family was unable to confirm where he had been taken or under what pretext. While detained, he repeatedly explained his politically neutral position and was released after nine days.
- On August 9, 2014, an armed member of the local militia abducted two Witnesses in Stakhanov, Luhansk region. Held captive for six days, they were beaten repeatedly and subjected to mock mutilation and staged executions. They were also denied adequate food, water, clothing, and medical care. Their abductors attempted to force them to renounce their faith, repeat Orthodox creeds, and venerate icons, making it clear that religion was the issue. Despite this cruel treatment, the Witnesses refused to compromise.

Jehovah's Witnesses live by their religious beliefs and refuse to fight, campaign, or provide monetary support for either side of the military conflict in Ukraine. Armed groups have attacked the Witnesses because of their neutral stand and because they do not adhere to Orthodox beliefs. The assaults are a brutal attempt to force them to renounce their faith.

Perseverance in spite of persecution

Since control of this region is still in dispute, no legal remedies are currently available to the Witnesses. They have reported these and similar incidents to the international community, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture.

Despite the difficulties that Jehovah's Witnesses may endure in eastern Ukraine, they are determined to remain neutral, and they continue to worship discreetly. They remain hopeful that local authorities will uphold the fundamental human right to freedom of religion.

Jehovah's Witnesses broadcast special meeting into war zone of Ukraine

JW.org (06.07.2015) — Jehovah's Witnesses in Ukraine held a special meeting on February 14, 2015, designed to give pastoral support to more than 17,000 of their fellow worshippers living in the war-torn region of eastern Ukraine. The two-hour program was video streamed live from the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Lviv to eastern Ukraine and other locations throughout the country. The meeting was especially timely, since a deadly rocket attack on the port city of Mariupol on January 24, 2015, damaged 3 of the Witnesses' homes and 58 of their apartments. One Witness was seriously wounded in the attack and another, who was only 16 years old, was killed.

In cooperation with the branch office in Russia, the Ukraine branch office arranged to record the entire program on video and stream it to Witnesses in Belarus and Russia. As a result, another 186,258 Belarusian and Russian Witnesses saw the program in addition to the 150,841 Ukrainian Witnesses, bringing the grand total to 337,099 viewers.

Gustav Berki, a spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses in Ukraine, explains: "The reports on our relief efforts in Ukraine were a great comfort to those in the war zone. It was also a great assurance to learn how the relief committee in Rostov-on-Don, Russia, is caring for our friends who are refugees."

A spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, Yaroslav Sivulskiy, comments: "Jehovah's Witnesses are well-known around the world for being peaceful and remaining neutral in political affairs. This meeting included discussions highlighting the Biblical basis for our neutrality. It helped underscore why, whether we are Russian, Ukrainian, or citizens of any other nation, we do not take sides in military conflicts."

To date, the Ukraine branch office has set up 14 Disaster Relief Committees to care for those affected by the war. These committees have provided more than 149 tons of food and 21 tons of clothing to fellow believers and to non-Witnesses in the region. The committees have arranged housing for more than 7,600 refugees and have been able to repair or rebuild a number of damaged or destroyed homes and Kingdom Halls (places of worship). For example, in the city of Mariupol, merely two days after the attack, a Disaster Relief Committee was able to arrange for 160 volunteers to begin repair work on 34 damaged apartments.

Mr. Berki further outlined how the relief initiatives supervised by the branch office in Ukraine provide for more than immediate physical and material needs. He states: "In addition to this special meeting, traveling ministers continue to visit the 136 communities of Jehovah's Witnesses in the war zone. And, as is always the case in congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses around the world, local elders are making a concerted effort to provide comfort and spiritual encouragement to those under their care."

See pictures at <http://www.jw.org/en/news/releases/by-region/ukraine/war-zone-jw-broadcast-meeting/>

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Muslims not persecuted like many Christians in Ukrainian rebel regions

Mufti: Muslims in occupied Donbass territory not pestered

RISU (28.05.2015) - In the occupied territories of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, Muslims in the main are not pestered and their treatment on the part of militants is neutral. This was said in an interview with Radio Liberty by the mufti of the Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of Ukraine "UMMA," Said Ismagilov of Donetsk.

"Muslims of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions in the main are not pestered. I do not know why. Possibly because Islam is recognized as an official state religion in Russia, or they are not viewed as 'agents of the State Department,' or because there are many Muslims from the Caucasus and other regions of Russia among the militants," he said.

The mufti said that the attitude toward Muslims in the occupied territory now is cautious.

"This cannot compare with the attitude toward protestants and Orthodox of the Kiev patriarchate. With regard to the attitude toward Muslims, there is not targeted persecution on religious grounds," the clergyman added.

Mufti Said Ismagilov also noted that Muslims have managed to retain their property in the occupied territories.

"The fact is that religious property is most often owned by the local religious communities. Periodically they receive instructions on what to do. Representatives of the so-called DPR say that pretty soon a code will be developed and it will be necessary to reregister in accordance with rules adopted on the occupied territory. However, when believers ask what will be its legal basis and by what kind of laws it will be done, they do not receive a specific answer. Today the property of Muslim communities remains in the hands of Muslim communities," the mufti emphasized. (tr. by PDS, posted 29 May 2015)

Moscow Patriarchate rapidly losing out in Ukraine and beyond

Jamestown Foundation, Volume 12/ Issue 94 (20.05.2015) - The Moscow Patriarchate is rapidly losing influence in Ukraine and may be dissolving from below. These trends could open the way to the formation of a single autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church, independent of Moscow, and undermine the influence of Patriarch Kirill and his Church at home and abroad. More than half of all the parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate and a significant share of its bishoprics, including many whose incumbents were selected by Kirill, are in Ukraine. Thus, the likelihood that many if not most of them will soon shift their allegiance to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church not only will represent a significant reduction in the size and wealth of the Moscow Patriarchate but also will reduce Kirill's influence in the Kremlin and in Orthodox Church discussions worldwide.

Were the Moscow Patriarchate to lose all of its parishes and bishoprics in Ukraine—something that is not likely to happen overnight—the Russian Church would cease to be the largest Orthodox denomination in the world. But even if only a sizeable share of them do—and there are indications that is already happening—the influence of the Moscow Church and Patriarch Kirill, personally among the Orthodox and as a spokesman for Orthodoxy in conversations with the leaders of other Christian denominations, will fall. Furthermore, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church emerging from this shift would become a major player in the Orthodox and Christian worlds. As a result, Moscow is going to fight this as much as possible and deny the obvious as long as it can.

In late April 2015, Patriarch Filaret, the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, called for the unification of all Orthodox churches in Ukraine so that Russia could no longer influence that country through its religious institutions. In turn, the Ukrainian GORDON news agency asked four experts to discuss these developments, which have the potential to determine not only the outcome of the struggle for Ukraine but also the fate of Orthodoxy as a political and moral force in Russia and more generally. Their judgments, rather than the notoriously unreliable statistics about religious affiliations, are especially valuable in that regard (Gordonua.com, May 12).

Vladimir Fesenko, the head of the Kyiv Center for Applied Political Research, argues that “the current leadership of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has made a very serious error by shifting from formal neutrality” about the conflict in Ukraine to open support for the Russian side and opposition to the Ukrainian. “This can have very sad consequences for this Church and for its place” in Ukraine. As he asserts, it has already alienated many of the Orthodox parishioners, who are voting with their feet, as well as part of the clergy, who are increasingly critical of their bishops and of the Moscow patriarchate.

Andrey Zubov, a Russian commentator who used to teach at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), says that the influence of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine is falling so rapidly that even many of the hierarchs in Ukraine itself are now thinking about shifting to the Ukrainian Church. Unfortunately for them, their parishioners do not know that their priests and bishops feel this way and are leaving the Russian Church even more rapidly than the hierarchy is shifting its own feelings. For rank-and-file members of the Moscow Patriarchate churches in Ukraine, he says, the key event was the decision of Patriarch Onufria not to stand in honor of those Ukrainians who had died defending their country. That was an insult that few are prepared to forget and that many feel they must respond to by leaving the Russian Church.

Father Bogdan Timoshenko, the head of the social services department of the Peryaslav-Khmelnytsky and Belotserkovsky bishopric of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate, says that his experience tells him that over the course of the last

year, churches subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate “are losing their positions very quickly.”

Moscow Patriarchate churches are not so much transferring their alliance, although that is happening, as losing their memberships to Kyiv Patriarchate congregations. What that means, Father Timoshenko says, is that the Moscow Church is disintegrating and dissolving and is ever less in a position to talk about uniting with the Ukrainian one.

As a result, the Ukrainian priest continues, there will soon be “a single Orthodox church in Ukraine, strong and recognized by the entire world,” the product of the collapse of the Moscow Church there and the shift of its members, priests and hierarchs to the Kyivan one, rather than any formal unification.

And finally, Aleksandr Paliy, a Ukrainian political scientist and historian, argues that the Moscow Patriarchate has brought all this on itself by becoming a political weapon for the Kremlin rather than an organization supporting genuine religious faith. Ever fewer Ukrainians identify with the Moscow Patriarchate. When people cease to believe in a Church, he suggests, it ceases to exist—and that is what is happening to the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine.

Evidence of religious persecution in the occupied Donbas

IRF (13.05.2015) - A new report, “When God Becomes The Weapon”, provides a detailed, unsettling first-hand account of religiously motivated persecution in rebel-controlled areas in eastern Ukraine.

The report has been prepared by the Center for Civil Liberties (CCL) and International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) in the framework of the Civic Solidarity Platform with assistance of the Institute for Religious Freedom, Kyiv.

The new report, which is based on field monitoring undertaken by the CCL and IPHR, documents widespread and serious violations of the rights of religious believers, except the Moscow patriarchy Orthodox Church, in the conflict-affected areas of Ukraine.

The Orthodox religion is used as an ideological foundation of ‘state building’ by the rebel groups and anything that is non-Russian Orthodox is seen as alien. Since the conflict began in 2014, dozens of places of worship have been seized.

Monitors dispatched by the CCL and IPHR have also collected evidence of abductions, unlawful deprivation of liberty, torture and ill-treatment and even killings in the “crusade” against non-Orthodox believers. Because of these attacks believers have been forced to flee or to practice their religion in secret.

The methodology used in preparing the report includes: witness and victim testimony, interviews with clergy from the region and church authorities, interviews with experts and specialists on religion, desk research, as well as an analysis of available audio and video material.

The CCL and IPHR urge the Ukrainian authorities to formalize the process of instituting a declaration under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute, which would confer jurisdiction to the International Criminal Court for the prosecution of crimes against humanity committed on Ukrainian territory. This would serve the interest of the victims affected by the current conflict, including religious believers, and help put an end to rampant impunity in the region.

The report is available here:

http://www.irf.in.ua/files/publications/2015.04_Report_Religious_persecution_in_occupied_Donbas_eng.pdf

Survey depicts Christian population of Ukraine

Sociologists: Majority of population of Ukraine identify themselves with Kiev Patriarchate

Religiia v Ukraine (10.04.2015) - On the website of the foundation "Ilya Kucheriv Democratic Initiative" the results of a study were published, which was conducted in 11 regions of Ukraine by the foundation jointly with the sociological service "Ukrainian Sociology Service" from 25 December 2014 to 15 January 2015, commissioned by the International Center of Policy Studies. The data published give evidence that a majority of the population of Ukraine identify themselves primarily with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev patriarchate, Religiia v Ukraine reports.

During the study, 4413 respondents were questioned (400 in each of the regions of Ukraine, 401 in Transcarpathia and Bukovina, 402 in the center, and 410 in Polesie).

Project developers identified eleven historical regions for the survey: (1) Volhynia (Volyn and Rovno provinces); (2) Galicia (Ivano-Frankovsk, Lvov, and Ternopol provinces); (3) Southwest (Transcarpathia and Chernovitsy provinces); (4) Podolie (Vinnitsa and Khmel'nitskii provinces); (5) Polesie (Zhitomir, Kiev, Sumy, and Chernogov provinces); (6) Center (Cherkasy, Kirovograd, and Poltava provinces); (7) Slobozhanshchyna (Kharkov province); (8) Lower Dniepr (Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhie provinces); (9) Black Sea Coast (Nikolaev, Odessa, and Kherson provinces); (10) Donbass (Donetsk province); (11) City of Kiev.

The survey was not conducted in Luhansk province and in annexed Crimea. The survey used a quota selection that represented the population of identified regions of Ukraine by region, type of settlements, age, and sex, over the age of 18. The maximum margin of error for each region does not exceed 5%.

Among the conclusions reached are the following:

"The majority of the population of Ukraine identify themselves primarily with the Orthodox Church of the Kiev patriarchate—44%; 21% identify themselves with the Orthodox church of the Moscow patriarchate; with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, 11%; 8% are followers of other religions and 9.5% are atheists. . . .

"Laity of a majority of the regions identify themselves with the Orthodox Church of the Kiev patriarchate. The only region where a clear majority consider their allegiance to be to the Orthodox Church of the Moscow patriarchate is the Donbass—55% (represented in the survey by Donetsk province). In Galicia, the majority of the population belong to the Greek Catholic Church (67%). The most heterogeneous complex of believers turns out to be in the Southwest, where 34% identify themselves with the Greek Catholic Church, 32% with the Orthodox Church of the Moscow patriarchate, and 22% with the Orthodox Church of the Kiev patriarchate. Atheists are just in Slobozhanshchyna (19%) and the Donbass (17%).

"The idea of the creation of a United Local Orthodox Church finds support in the west of Ukraine, in Volhynia, Galicia, and the Southwest. In the other regions, indifference or an ambivalent attitude predominates, but a negative attitude toward this is also insignificant. On the whole, throughout Ukraine 28% support the idea of the creation of a United Local Orthodox Church, 14% oppose it, 35% are indifferent, and another 23% do not have a settled opinion.

"As to the recognition of which church would be able to have a claim to be a "united church of the Ukrainian people," the greatest percentage was given to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev patriarchate, 37%, although 31% think such a church is "one of many churches of Ukraine." In Galicia, the "church of the Ukrainian people" is considered to be the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. But the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow patriarchate is not recognized to be "the one Ukrainian [church]" in any of the regions.

"In all Ukraine, with the division of believers among several Christian churches, there is no substantial prejudice by believers toward other churches. Thus, only 7% of Ukrainians consider the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev patriarchate to be "schismatic," and 19% consider the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow patriarchate to be "the church of the aggressor state" (the only region where this position predominates is Galicia, where 42% maintain this idea)."

In addition, according to the data of this study, the volunteer movement has outpaced the church in terms of the trust of the population of Ukraine. (tr. by PDS, posted 11 April 2015).

A Ukrainian Orthodox priest (Kyiv Patriarchate) from Kherson released from captivity in Donetsk People's Republic (DPR)

RISU (08.04.2015) http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/terrorism/59672/ - Chaplain Father Ihor Petrenko, Kherson resident, was released from captivity of DPR fighters. This was reported in the Cathedral of Purification of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Kyiv Patriarchate in Kherson, where the released clergyman serves.

"So far we know only that Father Ihor will come to Kyiv along with other 15 released prisoners. We do not know when he can return to Kherson," we were told in the temple.

According to Radio Liberty journalist, the priest disappeared on February 14 on Mariupol - Donetsk highway, 30 kilometers from Donetsk. In a car there was the priest's assistant, Kherson volunteer Vadym Perepada, they were carrying humanitarian aid for Ukrainian military servicemen. Father Ihor went to administer the sacraments of confession and Communion to soldiers.

According to locals, a car, resembling Father Ihor's car, got to one of the DPR checkpoints near the village of Olenivka. A few days ago it was reported that the priest was alive.

On April 6 in the night separatists released 16 Ukrainian soldiers from captivity. Advisor to the Chairman of the Security Service of Ukraine Markiyan Lubkivsky reported that militants are still holding prisoners about 400 citizens of Ukraine.

Churches will obtain right to establish educational institutions

Risu (20.03.2015) http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/state/legislation/59495/ - The Committee on Science and Education decided to support Bill No.1447 on the establishment of national standard education institutions by religious organizations.

The lively discussion on this matter took place during a meeting of March 18, 2015, the Institute of Religious Freedom reports.

The initiators of the Bill were MPs Pavlo Unguryan, Lilia Hrynevych and Victor Yelenskyy (Popular Front fraction).

The law draftsmen propose to equalize religious organizations in rights with the public, charitable and other organizations and individuals who have the right to establish private schools. They cite the extensive experience of church schools in the developed countries such as the UK, Germany, France, USA, Belgium, and Poland.

"Previously the Parliament ignored this world experience because of the perception of Lenin's antagonistic principle of separation of church and state when religious organizations were ousted from public life. So far the principle of equality and non-discrimination has been ignored, as only the right of churches to establish educational institutions remains restricted," said co-author of the initiative Victor Yelenskyy.

In response, the First Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine Inna Sovsun said: "The Ministry of Education adheres to Lenin's position on the separation of church and state."

She said religious organizations have the right to establish religious schools to train priests, and as for the rest, it is necessary to observe the constitutional principle of "separation of church and learning process." The official Ministry of Education suggested that high quality education in church schools in Western countries is related only to the fact that they are the oldest, and at the time of their creation there had been no other options for establishing educational institutions.

Among the threats that the granting of right to churches to found schools is fraught with, Inna Sovsun noted "the issue of content of learning and how religious schools will be able to provide adequate teaching of the evolution theory, and how it will coincide with religious teachings, which will also be included in the educational program."

Supporting Bill No. 1447, Executive Director of the Institute for Religious Freedom Maksym Vasin said that the right of parents to raise a child according to their own religious or philosophical beliefs is enshrined in international treaties ratified by Ukraine. The expert also gave the example of Slovakia, where the right of churches to establish schools was restored only in 1990, but since then they have become the most successful in the country.

Committee members also raised the issue of abuse on the part of the so-called sects and problems of politicization of some religious organizations.

UGCC priest Roman Nebozhuk replied that abuse can occur in different schools founded by whomsoever and the state should prevent religious hatred or violation of children's rights in any and all schools through its regulatory authorities.

As a result, the Committee on Science and Education decided to support the bill as a basis in the first reading with the aim of further improvement.

"Educational institutions founded by religious organizations will be licensed and shall comply with national standards to ensure the scientific nature of education. The issues of interaction of church and state are not excluded by the provisions of the Constitution of Ukraine," said Committee's chairman Lilia Hrynevich.

Ukrainian rebels seize Baptist house of worship

Baptist church building commandeered a second time in Luhansk Province

Baznica.info (05.03.2015) - The pastor of the "House of Prayer for All Peoples" church of the city of Antratsit, in Luhansk province, reports that yesterday, 4 March, unidentified persons with weapons arrived at the church and left after sizing up the building. Somewhat later, at 16.00, they arrived again and announced that it was necessary to evacuate the building. The armed people said that the reason for the seizure is that the building is necessary for housing fighters from the vicinity of Debaltsevo.

At the present time, the church is attended by 70 adults as well as children. In a week various worship services are conducted here: two Sunday, prayer, sister, children's, and youth services. The church regularly distributes free lunches for residents of Antratsit. "Pray for us and help us to recover the House of Prayer," the pastor asks.

It is known that back in September 2014 the church faced an illegal invasion of the House of Prayer. At that time, three persons entered the building with weapons in their hands and identified themselves as Don cossacks. They rudely "requested" that the premises be vacated within 20 minutes and they declared that the building already did not belong to the church. Then all attempts to get a response from local representatives of militias and cossacks proved unsuccessful. But after some time the House of Prayer was nevertheless returned to the church. Whether the building will be returned to the church this time or not is unknown. Believers are asked to support them in prayer. (tr. by PDS, posted 5 March 2015)

Russian forces destroy one of Donbas' largest Orthodox churches



One of the largest Orthodox churches in Ukraine's Luhansk Oblast was destroyed by heavy shelling by the Russian army and its proxy terrorist forces.

Village Troitske in Luhansk Oblast in Ukraine's Donbas was on the frontline during the fighting for Debaltseve, so it suffered from practically non-stop shelling and witnessed several tanks assaults by terrorists and the Russian regular army. Most village residents have left their homes to safer areas, there are only about 300 people in Troitske now, compared to over 1000 before the war. The power lines are broken down, electricity poles toppled, stores are closed, public transportation is absent. Food to Troitske is being delivered with humanitarian aid cargo. One of this deliveries (20 tons of food) was accompanied by Hennadiy Moskal, head of Luhansk regional state administration.

"Since the beginning of February, Troitske was shelled by Grads and artillery mercilessly, there are many destroyed residential houses, there are casualties among civilians," says Hennadiy Moskal.

"Moreover, the terrorists severely damaged a stone orthodox church that was constructed in 1840. There are numerous shell craters around the church, some shells landed directly into the building, piercing the roof, and exploded inside. The altar is completely destroyed, icons were cut with shrapnel, holy books are lying on the ground... It is one of the biggest orthodox churches in Luhansk Oblast, which survived two wars – a civil war and World War II, and also Soviet rule. Neither German occupants nor communist atheists managed to destroy it. It was destroyed by those who call themselves protectors of the 'orthodox world'. There was no sense of shelling church and school. Ukrainian troops were not stationed here. The nearest army location is 3 km away, on the outskirts of Troitske."

In total, 8 Ukrainian orthodox churches were damaged by Russians in Luhansk region, reports [Religious Information Service of Ukraine](#).

Jehovah's Witnesses religious buildings seized in Eastern Regions of Ukraine

RISU (04.03.2015) - http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/vandalism/59335/
As of January 2015, armed groups have forcibly taken possession of 14 Kingdom Halls (houses of worship) belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses in Ukraine, informs their official page and gives full list of buildings seized. The seized buildings are located in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the eastern part of the country, where a violent conflict has raged for many months. These armed men have targeted Jehovah's Witnesses because of prejudice and disregard for the Witnesses' right to freedom of religion and association.

The seizures of Kingdom Halls are not random acts but are discriminatory attacks against the Witnesses and their religious beliefs. The commander of one group of men declared

his intention to “get rid of all Jehovah’s Witnesses” because, in his view, the Orthodox Church is the sole religion permitted in the region. Another commander stated, “It’s all over for Jehovah’s Witnesses.” Despite these threats, Jehovah’s Witnesses are determined to remain active throughout Ukraine.

For more than 20 years, Jehovah’s Witnesses in Ukraine have enjoyed freedom of worship. Vasyl Kobel, one of Jehovah’s Witnesses at their branch office in Lviv, stated: “We have regularly gathered in our houses of worship for Bible reading and prayer, and we have always endeavored to be a positive influence in the community in which we live. But in recent months, the lives of the Ukrainian people have been adversely affected by the turmoil in the east of the country. Jehovah’s Witnesses are no exception; we are also victims of the violence.”

Mr. Kobel spoke on behalf of the 150,000 of Jehovah’s Witnesses who live in Ukraine. Thousands of Witnesses have fled the war zone in recent months. But the approximately 17,500 Witnesses who remain in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions are trying to carry on their daily activities in the midst of a violent conflict. Because their Kingdom Halls have been seized, thousands of Witnesses have no building in which to gather for worship, and they are forced to meet in cramped conditions in private homes. Other Witnesses must now travel up to two hours each way to attend religious services.

List of Jehovah’s Witnesses places of worship seized in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions

HRWF (10.03.2015) – Since July 2014, armed men representing the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR) have seized 14 Kingdom Halls (places of worship) built and paid by Jehovah’s Witnesses and are establishing the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) as the sole authorized religion in the regions under their control. *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int’l* condemns this religious cleansing policy implemented against all non-Orthodox religions in the territories of Ukraine conquered by the separatists. Jehovah’s Witnesses are against the use of violence and refuse to perform military service. Noteworthy is that a number of their confiscated places of worship have been converted into military barracks. Pictures of the seized Kingdom Halls are to be found at <http://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/ukraine/donetsk-luhansk-religious-buildings-seized/>. The list hereafter comes from the same source.

Town of Horlivka Donetsk Region 75 Akademika Koroliova St.

On July 5, 2014, armed men seized the Kingdom Hall. They used it as their barracks and to store ammunition, but abandoned it in September 2014. The Witnesses returned and used the Kingdom Hall for their religious meetings.

On October 12, 2014, armed men interrupted a religious service at the Kingdom Hall and ordered all in attendance to stop their religious activities. They stated that the Orthodox religion was the only religion permitted in the region and that they would soon “get rid of all of Jehovah’s Witnesses.” The men use the Kingdom Hall as their barracks.

City of Donetsk 10 Karamzina St.

On August 13, 2014, armed men broke into the Kingdom Hall and used it as their barracks.

On August 19, 2014, the men stole the sound equipment and vacated the building. The Witnesses returned and again started using the Kingdom Hall for their religious meetings.

On October 18, 2014, after a religious service, representatives of the 4th Oplot battalion came to the Kingdom Hall and announced to the Witnesses present that they were seizing it.

On November 18, 2014, armed men demanded that the Witnesses sign a certificate transferring ownership of the Kingdom Hall to the Commandant's Office of the Pertovskiy and Kirovskiy District. The men use the building as barracks.

**Town of Rovenky
Luhansk Region
84-A Dzerzhynskoho St.**

On September 23, 2014, armed men from the George battalion broke into the Kingdom Hall and forbade the Witnesses to return. The armed men use it as their barracks.

**Town of Antratsyt
Luhansk Region
4 Komunarska St.**

On September 16 and 26, 2014, unknown individuals broke into the Kingdom Hall, stole electronic equipment, and wrote on the wall, "Orthodox Cossacks!"

On September 25, 2014, a local TV channel reported that the Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses have been seized to serve other purposes, e.g., as a kindergarten.

**Town of Horlivka
Donetsk Region
3a Viliamsa Akademika St.**

At the end of June 2014, armed men broke into the Kingdom Hall, stole electronic equipment, and installed new locks. They use it as their barracks.

**Town of Horlivka
Donetsk Region
4 Hertseny St.**

Since 2013, this building has repeatedly been the object of vandalism and arson attacks. The last attempted arson took place on June 5, 2014.

On September 30, 2014, a local TV station interviewed the "new owner" of the building, who stated that the building was seized from Jehovah's Witnesses for use as a boxing school.

**Town of Zhdanivka
Donetsk Region
14 Komsomolska St.**

On October 7, 2014, referring to a commandant's order, men of the Horlivka armed group seized the Kingdom Hall. The Horlivka Deputy Commandant stated that the Orthodox religion is the only religion permitted in the region and that all others are forbidden.

On November 21, 2014, the squad commander of another armed group took control and told Jehovah's Witnesses that his subordinates would now take charge of the Kingdom Hall since it is now on Russian soil.

**City of Donetsk
53-A Ostrovskoho St.**

On October 26, 2014, armed men from *Shakhtar* battalion of the DPR broke into the Kingdom Hall and now use it as their barracks.

**Town of Perevalsk
Luhansk Region
9-A Kosinova St.**

On November 5, 2014, armed men led by the Deputy Chief of the Military Commandant's office, entered the building and announced to the Witnesses present that they were seizing it for use as a dining hall. The deputy chief stated "It's all over for Jehovah's Witnesses", and then told them they would no longer be able to engage in their religious activity.

**Town of Makiivka
Donetsk Region
17 Pecherska St.**

On November 5, 2014, armed men from the Rus battalion, broke into the Kingdom Hall. They ordered the Witnesses to give them the keys to the Hall and never to return. The following day, the commander's deputy removed the Kingdom Hall sign and replaced it with the battalion's flag.

On November 26, 2014, the battalion abandoned the building.

**Town of Krasnyi Luch
Luhansk Region
37 Radianska St.**

On December 5, 2014, armed groups broke into the Kingdom Hall. They placed the building under armed guard and parked military vehicles in the yard.

**Village of Telmanove
Donetsk Region
112 Pervomaiska St.**

On November 4, 2014, armed men broke into the building, and placed it under armed guard.

On December 11, 2014, the men brought ammunition into the building and now use it as their barracks.

**Town of Zuhres
Donetsk Region
1 Cherniahovskoho St.**

On December 20, 2014, the town's commander announced that he was siezing the building. He ordered Jehovah's Witnesses to give him the keys to the Hall and never to return.

Town of Horlivka

**Donetsk Region
105a Vitchniana St.**

On November 29, 2014, armed men entered the Kingdom Hall and announced to the Witnesses present that they were seizing it. One of the men stated that the DPR government forbids the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses and permits only the Orthodox religion in the region. He ordered all the religious literature of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Hall to be burnt and forbade the Witnesses from returning to the building. The men used it as their barracks.

In December 2014, the armed men abandoned the building.

Court of Appeal upheld a believer's right to alternative service

RISU (02.03.2015) -
http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/faith_and_weapon/59297/ -
Dnipropetrovsk Regional Court of Appeal upheld the judgment of acquittal for a believer who asked to enroll to alternative service during mobilization.

The court's decision was announced on February 26, 2015 after the second appeal hearing, according to the Institute of Religious Freedom.

Thus, the Court of Appeal disagreed with the arguments of the Prosecutor of Novomoskovsk, Dnipropetrovsk region, who sought a guilty verdict for a member of Jehovah's Witnesses religious community for avoiding military service. Representatives of the prosecution are convinced that the law on mobilization clearly defines the categories of people who may be relieved of military duty, and believers in the list there.

Instead, the defendant relied on the provisions of part 4 of Article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine and the European Court of Human Rights, which established the right of believers to assign to alternative (non-military) service as a substitute for military service.

The decision of the Court of Appeal has entered into force. However, given the persistence of prosecutors in this case, it can be expected that the prosecution will use the given time limit of three months for filing an appeal with the High Specialized Court for Civil and Criminal Cases.

"In this case, the provisions of the Constitution of Ukraine should be used as norms of direct effect, even in the presence of inconsistencies in other legislation. Thus, judicial decisions and cassation appeal is entirely predictable," believes executive director of the Institute for Religious Freedom Maksym Vasin.

As reported by the IRS, in November 2014, the court acquitted the believer of Novomoskovsk and confirmed his right to alternative service. The first meeting of Dnipropetrovsk Regional Court of Appeal in this case will be held on 19 February 2015.

In March 2014, the Institute for Religious Freedom published on its website the 'Clarifications for believers on mobilization and conscription for military training'.

The war and the Orthodox churches in Ukraine

By Maksym Bugriy

Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume 12, Issue 30 (18.02.2015) - On January 28, a village parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate) in Ternopil province published a letter to the Ukrainian Church's primate, Metropolitan Onufriy. In the letter, the priests and lay activists strongly criticized recent controversial statements made by the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill I of Moscow. The authors of the letter added that Onufriy's inaction was adding to the split in Ukrainian Orthodoxy ([Religion.in.ua](#), January 28).

This conflict is one example of the ambiguous situation in which the Ukrainian Orthodox Church finds itself, especially following Russia's aggression and war against Ukraine last year. The Ukrainian Church's affiliation with the Moscow Patriarchate has caused ever more people to negatively associate the former with the Kremlin's policy. In contrast, Patriarch Filaret, the leader of Kyiv Patriarchate Church, which is not formally recognized as a "canonical" Orthodox Church internationally, acts particularly pro-actively in support of the Ukrainian authorities in Kyiv. On February 3, Patriarch Filaret campaigned for United States security assistance for Ukraine during his visit to Washington, DC ([Religion.in.ua](#), February 4). At the same time, Patriarch Filaret denies any accusations of him being engaged in politics, justifying his Church's activism as supporting the Ukrainian nation ([Censor.net.ua](#), October 22, 2014).

Yet, political considerations may explain the growing numbers of Ukrainian Orthodox Christians moving to the Kyiv Patriarchate and away from the Moscow-linked Church. According to a May 2014 opinion poll by Razumkov Center, 70 percent Ukrainians considered themselves Orthodox faithful. But among those, the share belonging to the Kyiv Patriarchate Church increased from 26 percent to 32 percent year-on-year. Whereas, the share of the Moscow Patriarchate-affiliated slightly decreased from 28 to 25 percent ([Dzerkalo Tyzhnia](#), May 15, 2014).

The complexity of the situation has since prompted 30 parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to transfer their allegiance to the Kyiv Patriarchate; although a Moscow Patriarchate representative stated the number was actually only ten. Furthermore, several clerics of churches in Rivne, western Ukraine signed a declaration calling for the creation of a single Orthodox church in the province—a move promoted by the Kyiv Patriarchate. Later, they withdrew their signatures ([Patriarchia.ru](#), January 15).

Meanwhile, Patriarch Filaret has openly declared that priests serving at Moscow Patriarchate churches are supporting the separatists and Russia in the occupied Ukrainian territories of Donetsk and Luhansk provinces, while other confessions have been virtually banned from these territories ([Lb.ua](#), October 12, 2014). Likewise, Filaret's Church as well as other denominations, unlike Orthodox parishes connected with the Moscow Patriarchate, have been encountering numerous problems in Crimea since the peninsula was annexed by the Russian Federation ([RISU](#), September 24, 2014).

A series of public remarks by Russian Orthodox Church leader Patriarch Kirill over the past year have been worrying for both the Ukrainian state and nation. For example, last Christmas, he predicted a split within Ukraine and even referred to the Gospel passage in Mark 3:24, "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand." Furthermore, Kirill publicly questioned the Ukrainian government's Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO), characterizing it as the use of force by political groups ([TASS](#), January 7).

In line with the official Kremlin view, Patriarch Kirill considers the war in Ukraine's east to be an internal conflict—"fratricidal and internecine." He promotes the united people of

Rus—a spiritual entity that is broader than ethnic or state concepts in Europe’s East (Patriarchia.ru, June 17, 2014). In another instance, Kirill has even called eastern Ukraine the “historical Rus’s southern borders” (Patriarchia.ru, August 25, 2014). These views echo Vladimir Putin’s numerous statements that the Russians and Ukrainians were a single people and that Moscow has historical claims on “Novorossiya” (“New Russia”—the territory of modern-day southeastern Ukraine) (see EDM, July 2, 2014).

Thus, consistent with the Kremlin’s narrative of the West’s geopolitical rivalry with Russia, Patriarch Kirill repeatedly blames the Ukrainian Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church and the Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate for seeking to harm “canonical Orthodoxy.” Archbishop Yevstratiy, the spokesperson of Kyiv Patriarchate, has speculated that this charge, illustratively published by Kirill in an August 14 letter, was encouraged by a hawkish faction within Patriarch Kirill’s circle. While a more moderate group surrounding Kirill presumably encouraged that the letter be deleted from the Moscow Patriarchate’s official website out of fears of the backlash such publicly voiced sentiments would inspire in Ukraine (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, August 20, 2014).

Furthermore, Kirill seeks to underscore the Russian Orthodox Church’s role in the Soviet Great Patriotic War victory over Nazi Germany. This emphasis helps to accentuate the Russian government’s present-day interpretation of the post-Maidan Ukrainian elite as having fallen prey to fascism (Patriarchia.ru, January 22).

But it is not true that the authorities of the Moscow Patriarchate-linked Ukrainian Orthodox Church have simply been unwaveringly repeating Russian dogma. On the contrary, some of the public messages from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have been pro-Ukrainian. In a March 1, 2014, interview, Church spokesperson Archpriest Heorhiy Kovalenko used the term “aggression” and condemned Russia’s military intervention in Crimea (Hromadske TV via YouTube, March 1, 2014). On another occasion, Kovalenko rejected his Church’s affiliation with Moscow and called the Moscow Patriarchate “the Church of the Soviet Union” (Tsn.ua, October 26, 2014). Father Kovalenko is no longer the Church’s spokesperson as of September 2014, but he continues to head the Educational Department.

Additionally, a high-ranking member of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), Metropolitan Antoni of Boryspil and Brovary, said in a recent interview that his Church conducts religious services for the Ukrainian military and hospital patients. He also asserted that the Church supplies the Ukrainian military with life supporting and saving equipment, such as warm clothing, medicine or body armor (Patriarchia.ru, January 10). However, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church prays for peace at its liturgies, but not for the Ukrainian government or military, as was a common custom before the conflict.

The controversies around the Ukrainian Orthodox Church allow competing political factions to use the opportunity to raise their own profile. Most recently, the Kyiv City Council deprived the Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox Church of its tax-free status in the capital (Interfax-Ukraine, January 28). However, Mayor Vitaliy Klichko vetoed this decision (Ipress.ua, January 29).

These religious issues could, at some point, present the opportunity to politically undermine Ukraine’s social cohesion. But they are even more hurtful to Ukrainian Orthodoxy, which is the second largest Orthodox Church in the world by the number of worshippers. As religious expert Olexandr Sagan notes, “Orthodox institutions in Ukraine (and worldwide) have entered into a stage of depression/stagnation, resulting in the transformation of Orthodoxy into the largest donor to other faiths, including non-Christian faiths” (RISU, January 25).

Ukrainian Orthodox parish transfers from Moscow to Kiev patriarchates

Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in Poltava joins Kyiv Patriarchate

Glavkom (04.02.2015) - In the small village of Sukhoe in the Kobeliaki district of Poltava province parishioners of the church of the apostles Peter and Paul adopted the decision to change the canonical subordination of the church parish. It previously belonged to the church of the Moscow patriarchate but now it has decided to transfer to the Kiev patriarchate. This was reported on the website of the church of the Holy Pious Prince Yaroslav the Wise.

A parish meeting was conducted and in accordance with the Ukrainian law "On religious organizations" the charter in a new version was submitted for registration.

On 20 January another meeting was held where the subsequent fate of the parish and church building was decided.

After a prayer service and a panikhida, the meeting of the parish decided to address every resident of the village in order to confirm once again its affiliation with the Kiev patriarchate.

"Residents of the village, by their decision, confirmed the desire to construct a new and free Ukraine along with the local Orthodox Church of the Kiev patriarchate," the website of the church reported. (tr. by PDS, posted 5 February 2015)

Donbas and Crimea: new challenges for religious freedom in 2014

IRF (03.02.2015)

http://www.irf.in.ua/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=424%3A1&catid=36%3Acom&Itemid=55 -

From the very beginning to year of 2014 the Ukrainian society faced extraordinary trials that also affected religious freedom. Previously, the international observers mentioned Ukraine mostly as a state with a high level of religious freedom among the other Eastern European countries. But now there are news from the occupied Crimea and Donbas torn by war, dismaying by brutality of religious persecution and complex issues of survival believers of different faiths.

These areas of Ukraine, which have become targets of Russian aggression in the socio-political crisis and a place of hostilities with the involvement of Russian troops and weapons, are an exception to the national context. In addition to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, other fundamental rights and freedoms that are generally accepted in the democratic world have in fact ceased to operate.

Religious persecution in Donetsk and Luhansk regions controlled by Russian-backed separatists

It should be noted that in February 2014 separatism in the Donbas and Crimea was often justified by the Russian media with alleged harassment of Russian language, culture and Moscow Orthodoxy etc. In a joint appeal as of March 1 heads of the largest churches and

religious organizations of Ukraine stated: "In our country there is no harassment on the basis of language, nation or religion. Therefore, we testify that all attempts of Russian propaganda to represent the events in Ukraine as a "fascist revolution" and "the victory of extremists" are completely untrue. "

The Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (UCCRO) also repeatedly stood up to protect the religious peace: "In no case a conflict on religious grounds may be allowed. Our large Ukrainian family must be unique in diversity ." Later, after the formal approval of Russian President's decision to send troops to Ukraine, the AUCCRO stated that "bringing of foreign military forces to Ukraine is a threat not only for our country but for the peace and tranquility on the European continent as a whole."

At the same time, on May 16, representatives of the self-proclaimed "People's Republic Donetsk" (DNR) adopted their own "Constitution," which identified religious intolerance basis for separatists' policy. Article 9 of this document states: "The initial and predominant faith is the Orthodox faith ... practiced by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Historical experience and the role of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) are recognized and respected, including the core pillars of the "Russian World". Organization of a battalion of the "Russian Orthodox Army," was announced in Donetsk, indicating the intention of separatists to impose 'dominant faith' with weapons in their hands on the territory of Donbas.

Since then and the end of 2014 in the territories of eastern Ukraine, controlled by militants, the growth of religious intolerance towards all Christian churches, except the communities Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) was recorded. The preferred targets of militants were religious communities of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals, Baptists, Adventists, Charismatics, etc.), which, according to official statistics, represent about 33% of all religious communities of Donetsk region.

Pro-Ukrainian position, to use of Ukrainian language or symbols also became to source of danger to life and health of citizens from xenophobically motivated separatists of Donbas. The situation in the cities of Luhansk region, under the control of local separatists of self-proclaimed "People's Republic of Luhansk" (LNR) and Russian military forces is quite similar.

In the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine motivated kidnapping pastors and priests, their brutal interrogations with beatings and torture, mass seizure of churches and houses of worship and their exploitation for military and other purposes became a standard practice of separatists.

On May 15, the Kyiv Patriarchate issued a special statement that reported the presence of "numerous facts of threats to life and health of clergy and faithful of the UOC-KP, hindering to activities of the Church in the eastern regions of Ukraine by terrorists and separatist forces controlled and encouraged Russia." The statement indicated that armed individuals broke into the temples of the UOC-KP with the requirement to immediately move to the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, the terrorists announced death penalty to the Kyiv Patriarchate priests that under current conditions poses a real threat to the life of the clergy and faithful of the UOC-KP in Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

An egregious example of religious intolerance occurred in Slovyansk of Donetsk region, where on June 8, 2014, the two sons of Pastor Olesandr Pavenko and two deacons of the Pentecostal religious community "Transfiguration" were captured hostages and their personal cars were seized by armed militants of DNR during the worship service dedicated to the Holy Trinity. The next day all four believers were shot. In order to hide the traces of the crime, the fighters burned some of the victims in one of the cars, and buried other in a collective grave with the separatists who deceased in fight.

According to local residents and the media, on June 14, a pastor of the Protestant Church "Renovation", head of the City Council of Churches Serhiy Skorobahach died of artillery shelling.

On May 16 in Slovyansk the militants of DNR seized the Bishop of Evangelical Association "Church of God of Ukraine" Oleksiy Demydovych and interrogated him about 7 hours. On May 23, in Donetsk Serhiy Kosyak, pastor of Pentecostal religious community "Assembly of God" was severely beaten at the headquarters of "DNR" after attempts to negotiate the extension of the street prayer marathons in the city center. On May 27, a Roman Catholic priest from Poland Pavel Vitek was kidnapped by armed separatists in Donetsk during the street prayers and was released after one day of captivity through the efforts of diplomats.

On June 21, armed separatists took hostage Mykola Kalynychenko, pastor of the Evangelical Church "Word of Life" in Shakhtarsk of Donetsk region, who was later released, but his car was seized. On June 26, gunmen burst into the room of evangelical "Church of Winners" in the city of Druzhkivka, Donetsk region and took to their headquarters Pastor Pavlo Liska and his wife, who were released after nearly a week of captivity.

On July 3, the DNR militants in Donetsk took captive a Greek Catholic priest Tikhon (Serhiy) Kulbaka, and held him for 12 days, during which they abused him. On July 8, in Donetsk, the separatists kidnapped a UOC-KP archpriest Yuri Ivanov, and held him hostage for three weeks. On July 15, in Horlivka in Donetsk region the DNR militants seized a Roman Catholic priest Victor Vonsovych and held him for 11 days in captivity.

On August 8, in Donetsk, separatists took prisoners two Protestant pastors. Oleksandr Khomchenko was severely beaten and punished five days of forced labor on charges of espionage against the DNR and pastor Valery Yakubenko was released by militants after days of interrogation. In October the same happened to pastor of the congregation of the Church of Seventh Day Adventists Serhiy Litovchenko who was held captive for 20 days in by the DNR militants in Horlivka.

On October 14, the capture by separatists of assistant pastor of the Church "Good News" Serhiy Saykov and his 14-year-old son Daniel in Krasnodon Luhansk region was reported. They were released after 4 days of brutal interrogation on suspicion of spying for Ukrainian army. After that, the family was forced to leave Luhansk region for western Ukraine.

These facts attest targeted religious persecution in the separatist-controlled territory in eastern Ukraine. These unbearable conditions for religious practice endanger the lives and health of many priests and believers.

Religious oppression is exerted in the Crimean peninsula occupied by Russia

According to official statistics of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, in early 2014 in Crimea, there were 2083 religious organizations, which in 1409 had the status of legal entities and 674 enjoyed the right of religious activity without state registration. In the city of Sevastopol there are 137 more registered religious organizations.

Under various pretexts, such as combating extremism, the occupation authorities of Crimea persecute people belonging to the pro-Ukrainian religious organizations. The Russian legislation on the activities of religious organizations and combating extremism was the basis for searching the believers and religious communities to ban religious literature, to require re-registration of all religious communities. Russian authorities are trying in different ways to subjugate Ukrainian religious communities of Crimea to Russian religious centers.

Perhaps the most egregious case occurred on March 15, 2014, when the Greek Catholic priest Mykola Kvych was illegally arrested by the Crimean authorities directly in the parish of the church of the Assumption in Sevastopol during communication with parishioners. This was accompanied by a deliberate desecration of the temple and shrines, further illegal actions towards the priest, violence, searches of private apartments, interrogation for 8 hours with elements of torture.

Mykola Kvych endured death threats because of his denominational affiliation and communication and in connection with Ukrainian language that he was forbidden to use during the interrogation. The priest faced the prospect of being sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment under the law on false charges of extremism. For these reasons, on March 16, he was forced to leave Crimea.

Because of this kind of threat and the increasingly spreading atmosphere of hatred to pro-Ukrainian religious communities, all priests of the UGCC in March had to take their families to safety outside the Crimea. Similar challenges faced the priests of the Roman Catholic Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kyiv Patriarchate, and others.

Soon Archbishop Klyment of the Crimean Diocese of the Kyiv Patriarchate reported the violation by the authorities of Crimea of prior written guarantees of religious freedom. It was a promise of immunity to the Kyiv Patriarchate parishes in Crimea, granted by notorious terrorist Girkin (Strelkov), who had been in charge of the security sector on the peninsula before the seizure of Slovyansk.

In particular, on April 13, the temple of the Intercession of the Mother of God church in the village of Perevalne was actually withdrawn from the Kyiv Patriarchate. Since April 21, the Russian military, who took guard of the training unit of the Naval Forces of Ukraine in Sevastopol, banned access to the temple of the Holy Martyr Clement of Rome and its rector and parishioners.

In addition, the Crimean authorities adopted a ruling to raise an incredible level of rent for the UOC-KP for the use of the Cathedral of St. Volodymyr and Princess Olga in Simferopol.

Similarly, Muslims in Crimea, most of whom are representatives of the Crimean Tatar people complained about religious oppression. Mustafa Dzemilev reported the violation of the right to privacy of Muslims in the performance of religious rites and visiting mosques, as FSB officers visited the mosque and were unlawfully collecting data, looking for possible extremists. The Muslim religious leaders complained that in the Crimea an information war against the Crimean Tatars began, and the situation in the area of information regarding the Crimean Muslims is being escalated.

As a result, on June 13, in the village of Luhove, Simferopol region of Crimea, unknown persons set on fire the Chukurcha-Jami mosque and drew a Nazi swastika near it.

On June 24, in the village of Kolchuhino, Simferopol region a Russian unit of Berkut special forces broke into the building of madrassas of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Crimea (SDMC), when there were 13 students and two teachers. They seized several computers and arrested deputy director of the madrassas Ayder Osmanov. According to the press secretary of the SDMC, a search was conducted by the Russian Center for combating extremism, and all the previous days a fierce information training for the search of "extremists."

There are more recent cases of religious intolerance towards Muslims of Crimea. In the evening of November 12, attackers knocked the window and entered the mosque in the

village of Sonyachne, Sudak district. They dragged some wood into the room and tried to make fire on the ground floor of the mosque.

The requirement to re-registration of Ukrainian religious communities in Crimea under the laws of Russia Federation

A separate problem was the requirement of occupation authorities for mandatory re-registration of all religious organizations in Crimea in accordance with Russian legislation before 1 January 2015. Federal Law № 124-FZ as of 05.05.2014 provides a slightly modified procedure of re-registration of legal entities in Crimea, which contains many restrictive rules.

According to the certificate of the Ministry of Justice (which is not a legislative act), to set up a local religious organization in Crimea it is not required to provide documents confirming the existence of a religious group in a particular area for at least 15 years, as provided by federal law. However, the believers of Crimea are forced to comply with the other provisions of Federal Law№ 125-FZ“On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations” dated 26.09.1997, which significantly restricts their freedom of religion unlike the laws of Ukraine.

As an example, religious organizations in Crimea have faced the following problems:

1. Re-registration of religious organizations in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation is possible only under two conditions: 1) entry into a centralized religious organization of a relevant religious confession; or 2) state religious examination in the manner prescribed by order № 53 of the Ministry of Justice as of 18.02.2009 "On State Religious Expertise".
2. In accordance with the requirements of the Ministry of Justice, in reregistration of centralized and local religious organizations the original version of the current Statute of the religious organization registered in accordance with Ukrainian legislation shall be provided along with the a document confirming its registration as a legal entity (for review, followed by a return to the applicant) . Such a requirement is not provided by the legislation of the Russian federation that gives reason to see this hidden risks for believers and religious communities.
3. In accordance with Federal Law № 125-FZ as of 09.26.1997,only the Russian citizens may establish a religious organization with legal entity status. Therefore, this requirement makes the believing Crimean residents adopt Russian citizenship, and in case of failure they are effectively being denied the right of association in a religious organization with capacity of a legal person.

Attention should be also paid to the emergence of threat to the preservation of property rights and access to places of worship and other buildings of religious communities in Crimea that have not been re-registered because: 1) they are not part to any existing centralized religious organization; 2) they have not passed the state religion expertise; 3) non-compliance of the new version of their Statutes with the requirements of Russian legislation; 4) to believers’ refusal to adopt Russian citizenship.

Moreover, in contrast to Ukrainian law, which does not impose any conditions for religious communities without a legal entity status, Federal Law № 125-FZ as of 09.26.1997requires the founders to be subject to a full procedure of establishing a religious community, even for the activities without a legal entity. Obviously, this requirement is correlated with the restriction of state registration of independent religious groups that have existed less than 15 years, and makes it prevents the activities of communities not being a part of a Russian religious center.

As a result, re-registration of religious organizations in Crimea mean that they can not continue to refer in their work on Ukrainian law, because under Federal Law№ 124-FZas

of 05.05.2014, "their personal law is the right of the Russian Federation."

Another problem for the Crimean believers is to Russian policy towards foreigners. The Federal Migration Service of Russia has not extended the term of the residency for foreign nationals working in the Crimean religious communities. As an example, the Roman Catholic parish in Simferopol remained without its parson Fr Peter Rosohatsky who is a citizen of Poland and has worked in Crimea for 5 years. The Greek Catholics face similar problems, as they complained of forced rotation of priests due to the limitations in staying on the peninsula for a period not exceeding three months.

Conclusions

Since March 2014, religious persecution in the cities in eastern Ukraine controlled by Russian-backed separatists (in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions) acquired monstrous proportions and shapes - the murder and torture of religious leaders and the faithful, seizure of other religious buildings (churches, houses of worship, monasteries, rehabilitation centers, etc.) and their use by militants, including as fire-positions. Almost all Christian communities and religious leaders faced threat to their lives and health, with the exception of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and some others.

At the same time, the military aggression of Russia in the Crimean peninsula, followed by annexation has led to complex legal issues related to the inability of the religious organizations registered under the laws of Ukraine to operate on the peninsula. The Russian government officially demanded reregistration of religious communities in Crimea in accordance with the Russian law and their entry into the Russian religious centers and subordination of all entities to the jurisdiction of Russian law.

These challenges to religious freedom that Ukrainian state faces, are beyond the internal political competence as they are related to aggressive military actions of militarist Russian state. Therefore only effective joint efforts of the whole international community can help restore religious freedom in the occupied Crimea and Donbas, which sometimes is closely connected with the right to life.
