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## **UKRAINE: Russian Orthodoxy, a security issue in Ukraine**

***The politico-spiritual move away from Russian Orthodoxy, presented by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko as a major national security issue, has deeply angered Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has political ambitions in the region, writes Willy Fautré.***

By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers



**Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko takes the Holy Communion during the Orthodox Christmas service in St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, Ukraine, 7 January 2019. [Sergey Dolzhenko/EPA/EFE]**

EURACTIV (22.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2FTHqWQ> - On 6 January, in Istanbul, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew handed the official decree of autocephaly (independence from Moscow) to the head of the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), Metropolitan Epifaniy (Dumenko).

On 15 December, the election of Epifaniy as Metropolitan by the unification council finalised the merge of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate) and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) under the name of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU).

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church that is in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate refused to participate in this process because of a longstanding dispute over legitimacy.

Two months earlier, on 11 October, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople had announced he had decided to grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate) which deemed itself to be the successor of the historical Orthodox Church, created in the aftermath of the conversion and baptism of Prince Vladimir of Kiev in 988, at a time when Moscow did not even exist.

On 14 October, Ukraine's President Poroshenko declared on television that the autocephaly of Ukrainian Orthodoxy is a question of national security. The date of his public announcement was a symbolic one as it is both a religious day (Intercession of the Mother of God) and an official holiday honouring Ukrainian armed forces.

In the meantime, the Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate had invalidated its decree transferring the jurisdiction of the Kyiv Metropolis from Constantinople to Moscow in 1686.

It had also lifted Moscow's disciplinary measures against the heads of the two Orthodox Churches which had respectively broken away from Moscow Patriarchate's ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the early 1990s: Patriarch Filaret (Denysenko) of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate), excommunicated by Moscow in 1997, and Metropolitan Makary (Maletych) of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC).

In immediate response to the autocephaly initiated by Constantinople and in retaliation, the Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate immediately declared the full severance of relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Since the regime change initiated by the overthrow of President Yanukovich in 2014, President Poroshenko and the Ukrainian parliament have expressed serious concerns about the 'ambiguous' stance or silence of the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) regarding crucial national security issues.

They failed to support the Maidan Revolution of Dignity, aiming, among other things, to thwart Moscow's influence and interference in Ukraine's internal affairs. They failed to condemn Russia's annexation of Crimea and the eradication of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Kyiv Patriarchate parishes in the peninsula.

They failed to condemn the Moscow-sponsored separatist war in Donbas. The result was that they were perceived as Trojan horses following the political agenda and interests of Moscow.

On 20 December, 240 Ukrainian parliamentarians approved Bill No 5309 obliging the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate) to indicate in its official name that it is part of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has its seat in Moscow.

The bill provides for specific limitations of the activities of religious organizations under the jurisdiction of a religious centre based in "an aggressor country", which is the case of Russia in the eyes of Kyiv. The first set of restrictions concerns the access to military units for their clergy and chaplains and more can be expected.

Moscow's break from Constantinople is now consummated. After its territorial and political independence, Ukraine is now on the way of conquering its spiritual independence.

Noteworthy is that the Orthodox Church in Poland, an EU member state, has decided not to recognize the OCU's autocephaly. The same negative position was also adopted by the Orthodox Church of Serbia, a European state engaged in a process of accession to EU membership.

Other Orthodox Churches in the Balkans and the EU, which are under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church, are keeping a low profile and are, for various reasons, obviously reluctant to recognise the OCU's autocephaly.

As for the Orthodox Church of Georgia and the newly elected president, they have not taken a position yet about Ukraine's autocephaly, out of fear that the Russian Orthodox Church would recognise the Abkhaz Orthodox Church's independence, which would negatively impact efforts to restore Georgia's integrity.

No doubt that, after losing Ukraine, Moscow Patriarchate will use all its power in Europe, with the support of the Kremlin, to avoid any recognition of Ukraine's autocephaly by its sister churches.

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## **DENMARK/ MOROCCO: Denmark deports Said Mansour, deprived of citizenship, to Morocco**

***Said Mansour is the first Danish citizen to lose his citizenship and be deported because of a terrorism conviction.***



### **Said Mansour convicted of incitement to terrorism.**

By **Susanna Spurgeon**

Morocco World News (05.01.2019) - Denmark has deported Said Mansour, convicted of incitement to terrorism and formerly a dual Moroccan-[Danish](#) citizen, to Morocco.

According to [Danish media](#), Mansour arrived in Casablanca yesterday night, aboard Royal Air Maroc flight 222 from Copenhagen. Danish authorities handed him into Moroccan custody.

Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen tweeted that he was "very satisfied" with Mansour's deportation: "Said Mansour has been handed over to the Moroccan authorities. A final end to a pertinent effort to carry out the Danish Supreme Court's ruling to deport him in 2016.... It sends a clear message that criminal foreigners, who so obviously act against the Danish values and promote terrorism, do not belong in Denmark."

Rasmussen had talked to Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs Nasser Bourita in December about Mansour's deportation, according to Danish news outlet Horsens Folkeblad.

### ***'Justice has been served'***

Danish immigration minister Inger Stojberg was in Morocco this week on a secret trip to make a deal with Morocco on the deportation.

In a statement today, Stojberg said, "Justice has been served." Mansour, she said, was "one of the most fanatic Islamists who we have deported.... He was on the very top of our list."

In an unprecedented 2015 ruling, a Danish court [stripped Said Mansour](#) of his Danish citizenship. The court had convicted Mansour of incitement to terrorism for Facebook posts praising Osama bin Laden and encouraging followers to join the al-Nusra Front, an al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, according to [Al Jazeera](#).

The court sentenced Mansour to four years in prison. Mansour appealed the loss of his citizenship, arguing he would face torture in Morocco.

The Danish Supreme Court in 2016 ruled against Mansour, and the Danish government has since been trying to deport him.

Stojberg today asserted the deportation deal "is completely in order concerning the obligations we have to abide by the international human rights of Said Mansour." The remarks imply Denmark received promises from Morocco that Mansour would not be physically harmed, tortured, or executed.

On December 17, 2018, Danish tourist Louisa Vesterager Jespersen was found murdered with a Norwegian tourist near Imlil, in Morocco's Atlas Mountains. Morocco has arrested 23 suspects in the case and connected it to terrorism.

The Imlil murders may have expedited Denmark's efforts to deport Said Mansour.

Mansour was the first Danish citizen to lose his citizenship and be deported.

In 2007, Mansour received a separate terror conviction and spent 3.5 years in prison in Denmark.

Born in Morocco, Mansour has lived in Denmark since 1983, earning citizenship in 1988. He has four children with a Danish ex-wife and grandchildren living in Denmark.

Morocco does not have an extradition agreement with Denmark. According to a Norwegian source, many Norwegian and Danish criminals come to Morocco to avoid extradition.

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## **MOROCCO: Towards a new approach of violent extremism after the murder of two Scandinavian women?**

HRWF (06.01.2019) - In the aftermath of the brutal murder of two young Scandinavian women in the Atlas mountains a few weeks ago, several journalists and intellectuals in Morocco have questioned the efficiency of Rabat's anti-extremist policy. On 25 December 2018, Morocco World News published an interesting article of Youssef El Kaidi, a PhD candidate at the University of Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdelah Fez, entitled "Terrorism in Morocco, a drastic approach needed now" (<https://bit.ly/2Vzw8wg>). See hereafter large excerpts of his paper (the titles in the text are those of HRWF).

“Morocco has invested significant efforts in both the security and religious fields in order to build its reputation as a peaceful, welcoming, and tolerant country in the otherwise turbulent region of North Africa and the Middle East. Those efforts were consistent and serious, leading ultimately to very positive effects worldwide.(...)”

### ***About the murder of the two Scandinavian women in the Atlas and the prevention of violent religious extremism***

The proactive measures taken by Morocco’s intelligence and security services have made the country impenetrable ever since the inception of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or so it seemed. Does this crime indicate that Morocco has finally been penetrated? Is this terrorist act an indication of more terrorist activity taking place in our country in the coming days? Were the security and religious approaches implemented by the government to fight religious extremism really enough? What measures can be taken next to spare the country from other harsh incidents?

The above questions are pressing and should be thoroughly contemplated and addressed before any strategic move in the fight against religious extremism is made in the future. The religious and security approaches that Morocco has relied upon so far were very instrumental and should not be underestimated or belittled.

The strategic national policy initiated by King Mohammed VI in the aftermath of the 2003 Casablanca attacks to monitor and manage the religious field through the control of mosques, the training of moderate religious scholars and preachers, and the control of *fatwas* by appointing the Supreme Scientific Council were all very successful. Moroccan intelligence and security services have also managed, since 2002, to dismantle more than 183 terrorist cells across the country, according to the Central Bureau of Judiciary Investigations ([BCIJ](#)).

The recent murder of two Scandinavian tourists, however, has raised concerns about Morocco’s counterterrorism approach, which had previously inspired many countries at the regional and international levels. The dismantling of dozens of terrorist cells every year should have been seen as an indicator of the strong existence of the terrorist ideology in Morocco. The successful and decisive intervention of Morocco’s intelligence services before those terrorist cells could translate their ideology into brutality and bloodshed does not change the fact that the mechanisms by which that ideology works and spreads are still operating.

Therefore, terrorists and religious extremists could even be around us anywhere on any day, in private and public places, waiting for the right time and the right place to put their radical beliefs into action. The claim made by one of the arrested suspects in a video declaring his allegiance to ISIS prior to the murder of the Scandinavian tourists should be taken seriously. He said, addressing the leader of ISIS, Abu-Bakar Al-Baghdadi: “You should know that only God knows of the exact number of the followers you have in Morocco.” How can we track down and prevent those followers? What about those who firmly hold the ideology but do not belong to organized terrorist cells?

### ***Fighting against the roots of violent religious extremism***

We need to understand that religious extremism is an ideology and the fight against it should be at the intellectual and educational levels first and foremost. Morocco, despite the efforts that have been made, was remarkably lenient with the discourses of hate, intolerance, and bigotry which surface in schools, the media, and public spaces.

We have repeatedly seen videos circulating on social media by prominent Wahhabi leaders in Morocco demonizing and threatening intellectuals such as Ahmed Assid, Rachid Aylal, and others by accusing them of heresy. Somehow, those people were never arrested or tried (\*). Perhaps the pressures by Islamic forces (Islamic parties, Islamic groups, conservative civil society, etc.) in the country put the state in a difficult and complicated position. Those conservative forces have always fiercely objected to reforms interpreting them as secular and anti-Islam, starting from the *Modawana* (family code) in 2003 to the Islamic education school curriculum reform in 2018.

The recent terrorist attack near the tranquil and peaceful village of Imlil in the High Atlas Mountains awakens us to the bitter truth that terrorism is a constantly looming threat for Morocco. Thus, a more drastic and comprehensive approach should be implemented with zero tolerance to bigots, extremists, and the advocates of hate and terror in the name of religion.

Morocco should address the conditions conducive to the emergence and spread of terrorism by fighting poverty and social disparity in the country. Moreover, strengthening the educational system and building students' cultural awareness, promoting the culture of peace and coexistence through educational programs and curricula, ensuring humans rights and the rule of law, and promoting the universal values of peace, justice, co-existence, integrity, love, and cross-cultural dialogue would be a few steps in the right direction.

May the souls of Louisa Vesterager Jespersen and Maren Ueland rest in peace, and may peace, love, and prosperity prevail in the world."

(\*) [HRWF comments](#)

A few days ago, Sheikh Kettani, an Islamist preacher, heavily criticized Moroccan channel 2M for airing on New Year's Eve a comedy show allegedly degrading Qadi Ayyad, an Islamist scholar in the 11th and 12th century. He also called on Ulama council's scholars and intellectuals to condemn and raise voices against this act. Sheikh Kettani was a former political prisoner. In September 2003, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison for alleged connections to the Casablanca bombings in 2003. Eight years later, Kettani was granted a royal pardon due to efforts of his lawyer, Mustapha Ramid, who also obtained the pardon of other Islamists along with promises to renounce violence and extremism. In 2012, Ramid became Morocco's Minister of Justice as a member of the Party of Development and Justice (PJD) advocating Islamism. The PJD is the main party in the government with almost 1/3 of the seats in the parliament.

In 2017, another controversial cleric, Sheikh [Abdellah Annahari](#), stirred up controversy once again on social media by claiming that celebrating New Year's Eve was "undoubtedly Haram." In a video shared on his Facebook account, the Salafist preacher declared that celebrating the New Year would be an "unforgivable sin" and that all New Year's commercial activities should be strictly prohibited. "Whoever celebrates the New Year is no different from Christians and their religion of debauchery," Annahari said.

"Buying or selling the fir tree is Haram, taking a picture next to Santa Claus is Haram, partying is Haram and even sending New Year wishes is Haram," he shouted while violently stumping his cane. Annahari also claimed that celebrating any non-Muslim festivity will lead to imitation of the "infidels' creeds". The Oujda-based cleric, who is well known for his provocative statements, went as far as describing as "zebras" Moroccans who exchange hugs during their celebrations. (More about Annahari on Morocco World News: <https://bit.ly/2Re4OW6> - <https://bit.ly/2VswULL>)

The Islamist ideology is alive and well in politics and society in Morocco.

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