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DONBAS: LUHANSK: Gospel of John, Baptist books banned

The unrecognised Luhansk People's Republic banned 12 Baptist books as "extremist", including an edition of the Gospel of John in the widely-used Russian Synodal translation. Officials refused to say why the books are "extremist" and what will happen to those found with them. The ban came a week after the Supreme Court overturned a court order to destroy seized Baptist books.

By Felix Corley

Forum18 (20.12.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2FEeIO5> - The authorities of the unrecognised Luhansk People's Republic in eastern Ukraine have banned 12 Baptist books – including the Gospel of John – as "extremist". The 26 November ban came a week after Luhansk's Supreme Court overturned part of a lower court decision that Christian books seized from a Baptist pastor should be destroyed. The Supreme Court left unchanged the pastor's fine of more than a month's average local wage.



Police raid Krasnodon Baptist church, Sunday 21 April 2019

As well as the Gospel of John, the banned "extremist" books also contain the main hymnbook used by the Council of Churches Baptists, "Songs of Revival", as well as their regular magazine and children's books (see below).

It remains unclear what will happen in Churches which, for example, might read out the first verses of the Gospel of John from the Synodal Russian translation during Christmas services.

The 26 November government decision banning the 12 Baptist books became known on 10 December, when the Justice Ministry's State List of Extremist Materials was published on its website. The decision itself has not been published, with one government official describing it as a "secret document for official use and for limited distribution". It remains unclear therefore why such books are regarded as "extremist" and who made this decision (see below).

Justice Ministry officials in Luhansk refused to tell Forum 18 who initiated the ban and why, insisting that it was "in accordance with the law" (see below).

No official was prepared to explain what would happen to those found by police or state security officers to have copies of the banned Christian books. "Ask the law-enforcement agencies," a Justice Ministry official told Forum 18. "Our job is only to manage the list." The duty officer at the State Security Ministry said "it is difficult to say what will happen" to those found in possession of any of these books (see below).

Pro-Russian rebels seized parts of Ukraine's Luhansk Region in March 2014 and the following month proclaimed what they called the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR). Heavy fighting ensued. The rebel administration, which currently controls about a third of Ukraine's Luhansk Region, has declared a state of martial law.

Pro-Russian rebels similarly seized parts of Ukraine's Donetsk Region in April 2014 and proclaimed what they called the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). Heavy fighting ensued. The rebel administration currently controls nearly half of Ukraine's Donetsk Region. The rebel-held area adjoins the rebel-held area of Luhansk Region.

Worship meetings banned or restricted

The internationally unrecognised authorities of the self-declared Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) in 2018 banned all exercise of freedom of religion and belief without the permission of the authorities. No Protestant community received state permission to exist. Following this, "with great pain" Seventh-day Adventist communities reluctantly decided to halt all their activities to avoid "provoking unpleasantness" and the seizure of church property, including musical instruments and communion vessels. In September 2018 Jehovah's Witnesses were banned. In March 2019, all Baptist Union congregations were ordered to halt public meetings for worship or be punished. "Officials earlier didn't insist that our churches should not meet for worship," Pastor Igor Bandura of the Ukrainian Baptist Union told Forum 18. "But they have now sent a clear message that they will not tolerate such meetings for worship any more".

"We don't have closed communities. Everything here is good. We have received no complaints", an official told Forum 18 in October 2019.



Consecration of Holy Trinity Cathedral, Luhansk, 2013

As is [their right under international human rights law](#), all Council of Churches Baptist congregations (who are not part of Baptist Unions) in all territories they operate in refuse to apply for state permission to exist. The unrecognised LPR authorities' [Religion Law bans all non-Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox churches from applying for state permission to exist](#), and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine – the successor of the Kiev Patriarchate – has not applied for registration for its [Luhansk cathedral and another parish in the rebel-controlled territory](#). Jehovah's Witnesses also did not apply for state permission to exist, pointing out that ["the registration procedure implies the revealing of personal information on the worshippers who could easily become new targets"](#).

[In March 2019 officials raided Protestant Sunday meetings for worship, and in April raided the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's Holy Trinity Cathedral in Luhansk, diocesan offices, and the homes of two priests, taking priests away for interrogation. Such raids have involved the planting by raiders of allegedly "extremist" material, as happened during a February 2019 raid on an independent Baptist Church. Throughout 2019, after raids Protestant pastors have been fined and had property confiscated for leading meetings for worship without state permission.](#)

[Meetings for worship without state permission remain banned in all Protestant churches and Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Halls, and with no permanently resident priest Catholics hold Mass by Skype – meaning that they cannot receive communion, an essential part of the Mass. Rebels leaders have banned clergy from outside rebel-controlled territory from visiting their fellow believers, so many communities are isolated from their fellow believers.](#)

12 "extremist" Christian books

In a 26 November government decision, 12 books published by the Khristianin publishing house run by the Council of Churches Baptists were banned as "extremist". The Justice Ministry then added the 12 books to the State List of Extremist Materials, which it published on its website on 10 December. The List now has 13 entries.

Of the 13 items on the List, the only other book formally declared "extremist" is a collection of songs by a Chechen composer.

The computer formatting of the list is very similar to the [Republican List of Extremist Materials in the neighbouring rebel-held Donetsk People's Republic](#). As of 20 December, the Donetsk List contains 45 entries, including the Jehovah's Witness international website, many Jehovah's Witness publications, and several Muslim works. However, in Donetsk items are banned not by government decision but by the Supreme Court.

The 12 Baptist books banned as "extremist" in Luhansk include the Gospel of John. The Council of Churches Baptists use the 19th century Synodal translation of the Bible into Russian, which is widely used by other Christian Churches in the Russian-speaking world, including the Russian Orthodox Moscow Patriarchate and many Protestant Churches.

Other books on the List include the main hymnbook used by the Council of Churches Baptists, "Songs of Revival", as well as their regular magazine "Herald of Truth" and children's books.

The 26 November government decision banning the 12 books has not been published. An official of the government department handling citizens' calls – who did not give her name – told Forum 18 from Luhansk on 20 December that the decision is a "secret document for official use and for limited distribution". She refused to comment on the content, referring all questions to the Justice Ministry.

Yelena Tsvetkova, the head of the Registration Department at the Justice Ministry, said that the government banning decision is not public. She insisted to Forum 18 from Luhansk on 20 December that all is in accordance with the law. She cited the February 2018 Law on Countering Extremist Activity, which established the List.

The 2018 Law defines "extremist materials" as those calling for or justifying "extremist activity", including the works of leaders of the German Nazi party and the Italian fascist party, espousing ethnic or racial superiority, or justifying war crimes aiming to destroy all or part of an ethnic, social, racial or religious group.

Tsvetkova was unable to say in which category officials have placed the 12 Baptist books. She declined to discuss why the Gospel of John – as part of the Christian Bible widely read in Christian worship meetings and privately – was banned as "extremist". It remains unclear what will happen in Churches which, for example, might read out the first verses of the Gospel of John during Christmas services.

Tsvetkova was also unable to say who had initiated the ban.

What punishment for those with banned Christian books?

Forum 18 was unable to find out from officials in Luhansk what will happen to individuals or communities found to be in possession of any of the 12 banned Christian books.

"Ask the law-enforcement agencies," Yelena Tsvetkova of the Justice Ministry official told Forum 18. "Our job is only to manage the list."

The duty officer at the State Security Ministry in Luhansk said that the Acting State Security Minister, Anatoly Antonov, was not in the office. The duty officer – who did not give his name – told Forum 18 on 20 December that "it is difficult to say what will happen" to those found in possession of any of these books. The duty officer added that he could not say which department of the Ministry handles extremism issues. "You're asking too many questions," he added, and then put the phone down.

Officials at the Interior Ministry in Luhansk (which controls the police) referred Forum 18 to Aleksei Melnik, the head of the office of Interior Minister Igor Kornet. "Anyone who

spreads extremist literature will be dealt with in accordance with the law," Melnik told Forum 18 on 20 December. "There is the Criminal Code and the Administrative Code."

Melnik refused to explain if anyone who possesses the Gospel of John in the Synodal translation will face prosecution or not. He then put the phone down.

Council of Churches Baptists told Forum 18 on 19 December that officials had told them of the ban on 12 of their publications, but had not told them what would happen to them if they are found to be in possession of any of them.

Literature destruction order overturned

On 18 November – just over a week before the government banned the 12 Baptist publications – Judge Oksana Solonichenko at the Supreme Court in Luhansk overturned part of a lower court decision ordering seized Christian books to be destroyed, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.



Baptist Pastor Pyotr Tatarenko (holding flowers) and church members, Krasnodon court, 7 October 2019

On 4 August police [raided the Sunday meeting for worship of the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Krasnodon \[official Ukrainian name Sorokyne\], attended by about 40 people. Officials then brought charges against Pastor Pyotr Tatarenko.](#)

Krasnodon police initially considered launching a criminal case against Pastor Tatarenko under Article 253, Part 1 ("Hooliganism, i.e. a crude violation of public order expressed in open disrespect for society") and Article 252 ("Repeated violation of the established procedure for organising or conducting gatherings, meetings, demonstrations, processions or pickets"). Both Articles prescribe punishments ranging from a fine to a maximum five-year prison term.

However, on 13 August police ruled that Pastor Tatarenko had not committed these "crimes" by leading a worship meeting. On 16 August, officers then initiated the case under Administrative Code Article 20.2, Part 2 ("Violation of the established procedure for organising or conducting gatherings, meetings, demonstrations, processions or pickets").

On 7 October, Judge Yuliya Kudrevatykh of Krasnodon Town and District Court [found Tatarenko guilty and fined him 7,000 Russian Roubles](#) (the LPR uses the Russian Rouble). This represents more than a month's average local wage for those in formal work. The Judge also ordered that 20 Christian books seized from Pastor Tatarenko be destroyed.

Judge Kudrevatykh's assistant refused to explain why the Judge had fined Pastor Tatarenko and others for exercising freedom of religion or belief and why the Judge had ordered his books destroyed. "Court decisions cannot be discussed," the assistant told Forum 18 on 20 December. "All was in accordance with the law." Told that the Supreme Court had overturned the book destruction order, the assistant responded: "The Supreme Court is responsible for its own decisions taken in accordance with the law."

Pastor Tatarenko appealed against the decision to the Supreme Court, calling for the fine to be cancelled and the books to be returned. In its 18 November decision, the Court left the fine of 7,000 Russian Roubles unchanged, but cancelled the order to destroy the 20 books, according to the decision seen by Forum 18. Judge Solonichenko ruled that the books - ordered destroyed by the lower court as "material evidence" - were unrelated to Pastor Tatarenko's case.



Baptist Pastor Vladimir Rytikov (in middle) and colleagues, Krasnodon police station, 21 April 2019

The Supreme Court decision notes that the Christian books had been "voluntarily" handed over by another local Baptist Pastor Pavel Rytikov on 9 August and had not been mentioned in the police report of the 4 August raid on the church meeting.

Local Baptists told Forum 18 on 19 December that Pastor Tatarenko is not intending to appeal further.

Baptists said the 20 seized Christian books have not been returned and officials have not told them what they intend to do with them. They insisted that Pastor Tatarenko will not pay the fine.

Council of Churches Baptists have adopted a policy of civil disobedience in all the countries where they operate, refusing to pay fines handed down to punish them for exercising freedom of religion or belief.

After Pastor Rytikov refused to pay a similar fine, the same Judge Kudrevatykh on 18 October ordered him to conduct 20 hours' community service.

On 7 November, in a separate case, Pastor Rytikov lodged a further appeal to the Supreme Court against a 20 June fine for leading worship, according to his appeal seen by Forum 18. He lost his first appeal at the Supreme Court on 21 October.

Baptists told Forum 18 that the last time police raided any of their communities was in August.

Ukraine Religious Freedom Act

A bill to oppose violations of religious freedom in Ukraine by Russia and armed groups commanded by Russia

USCIRF (16.12.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2EzZpQx> - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) welcomes the introduction of the Ukraine Religious Freedom Support Act (H.R. 5408), which calls on the President to take into account Russia's religious freedom violations in Russia-occupied Crimea and Russia-controlled Donbas when determining "country of particular concern" (CPC) designation under the International Religious Freedom Act. The bill also urges the U.S. government to place visa sanctions on Russian officials responsible for these violations, along with their families.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Ukraine Religious Freedom Support Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress makes the following findings:

- (1) Russia invaded the Crimea region of Ukraine in February 2014, continues to occupy and control that region, and has exercised control over part of the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine since April 2014 through non-state armed groups and illegal entities it has established, instigated, commanded, and supported, including with military and intelligence personnel on the ground from Russia, such as the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic.
- (2) International humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions, to which Russia is a signatory, requires Russia to respect and protect the religious freedom of the inhabitants of the territory it occupies and controls, or controls through organized non-state armed groups it commands, and holds Russia responsible for violations of religious freedom in this territory.
- (3) According to the Department of State's International Religious Freedom Reports, and other reporting, violations of religious freedom in the Crimea region of Ukraine since Russia invaded and occupied the territory have included abduction, detention and imprisonment, torture, forced psychiatric hospitalizations, fines, restrictions on missionary activities, confiscations of property, including churches and meeting halls, expulsions and obstructions to re-entry, denying registration of religious groups, vandalism, fines, and banning peaceful religious groups, and targeted groups have included Muslim Crimean Tatars, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, formerly the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Protestant Christians, and Jehovah's Witnesses.
- (4) According to the Department of State's International Religious Freedom Reports, violations of religious freedom in the part of the Donbas region of Ukraine controlled by armed groups commanded by Russia have included detention and imprisonment, torture,

confiscation of property, including churches and meeting halls, physical assaults and threats of violence, vandalism, fines, restrictions on missionary activities, religious services, ceremonies, gatherings, and literature, and banning of peaceful religious groups, and targeted groups have included the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, formerly the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Protestant Christians, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

(5) The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended by the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, requires the President to—

(A) designate a foreign country as a country of particular concern for religious freedom when its government has engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom in that country over the previous 12 months;

(B) to take 15 actions, or commensurate actions in substitution, following the designation of a country as a country of particular concern for religious freedom; and

(C) designate a foreign country on a "Special Watch List" when its government has engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom in that country over the previous 12 months.

(6) On November 28, 2018, the Secretary of State designated Russia on the "Special Watch List".

(7) The National Security Strategy of the United States issued in 2017, 2015, 2006, 2002, 2000, 1999, 1998, and 1997, committed the United States to promoting international religious freedom to advance the security, economic, and other national interests of the United States.

SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.

It is the policy of the United States to consider—

(1) any alien who, while serving as an official of the Government of Russia, was responsible for or directly or indirectly carried out particularly severe violations of religious freedom in the territory of Ukraine that Russia occupies and controls, or controls through non-state armed groups it commands, and

(2) the spouse and children, if any, of such alien, to have committed particularly severe violations of religious freedom for purposes of applying section 212(a)(2)(G) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(2)(G)) with respect to any such alien and spouse and children of such alien.

SEC. 4. DESIGNATION OF RUSSIA AS A COUNTRY OF PARTICULAR CONCERN FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.

For purposes of making a determination of whether to designate Russia as a country of particular concern for religious freedom under section 402 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6442), the President shall consider any particularly severe violation of religious freedom in the territory of Ukraine that Russia occupies and exercises controls, or controls through non-state armed groups it commands, during the period of time that is the basis for the determination and designation, to be a particularly severe violation of religious freedom that the Government of Russia has engaged in or tolerated.

CRIMEA: Court orders parish to destroy its chapel

A Crimean Court ordered the Orthodox Church of Ukraine to destroy its wooden chapel in Yevpatoriya, built before the 2014 Russian occupation. The parish is challenging the 6 November decision. A Judge again fined Imam Aydar Islyamov one week's average wages for leading Friday prayers at a Mosque. Prosecutors lodged "missionary activity" charges after failing to find Land Code violations.

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (09.12.2019) <http://bit.ly/2sihQGa> - The Orthodox Church of Ukraine fears that the authorities in the western Crimean city of Yevpatoriya will demolish a small wooden chapel it built between two blocks of flats in 2013, before Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea. The city court ruled on 6 November 2019 that the Church is using the site illegally and that it should demolish its chapel within one month.

The Church complains it learnt about the court hearing only on that day. Its lawyer said the Church is appealing against the decision (see below).

Ukrainian journalist Oleksandra Yefymenko visited the Yevpatoriya church during Sunday liturgy on 1 December, which was attended by "a large number of parishioners" squeezing into the small church. Many had come specially from other cities of Crimea, she told Forum 18 (see below).

Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea is not recognised by Ukraine or internationally.

The Russian authorities in Crimea use the wide range of available laws and regulations to punish communities that meet for worship in places the authorities do not like.

The United Nations Human Rights Committee has called on the Russian government not to evict the Orthodox Church of Ukraine congregation from its rented accommodation in the Crimean capital Simferopol while the Committee considers an appeal by 62 parishioners. The premises serve as the Crimean Diocese's Sts Volodymyr and Olga Cathedral.

On 18 November a Russian arbitration court rejected the Diocese's latest appeal against a court order to annul the rental agreement and evict the Cathedral. On 28 November, the Diocese lodged a last-ditch appeal to Russia's Supreme Court in Moscow.

On 8 November, a Magistrate's Court in Simferopol District fined Imam Aydar Islyamov one week's average local wages for leading Friday prayers at a Mosque in a home in the village of Ukrainka (Kurtsy in Crimean Tatar) near Simferopol on 11 October which was raided by armed Russian security personnel. He was punished under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"). A municipal official told Forum 18 that an inspection had found that Islyamov had not violated the Land Code. The Prosecutor's Office official who led the case in court refused to explain why an individual should be punished for leading worship (see below).

The Prosecutor's Office, OMON riot police and officers of the Police's Anti-Extremism Centre raided Friday prayers on 5 July and again on 25 October at a mosque in the village of Zarechnoe, also in Simferopol District. After the first raid, Prosecutors similarly brought a case against Imam Arsen Kantemirov under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part

4. However, on 7 October the Magistrate cancelled the case because it had been lodged outside the deadline for such administrative cases.

Neither of these two Simferopol District Mosques have Russian state registration. The Crimean Justice Ministry has rejected the registration application from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's Simferopol parish, most recently on 20 September. It claimed there were "violations" in the documents presented. A Justice Ministry official insisted to Forum 18 that "nothing in principle" obstructs the registration of communities of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (see below).

Another community which has been repeatedly denied Russian state registration is the Tavrida Muftiate, a body independent of the state-backed Crimean Muftiate. The Justice Ministry has registered ten of its mosque communities independently, but refuses to register the Tavrida Muftiate as a centralised religious organisation (see below).

Court orders chapel destruction

The Kiev Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church built a small, wooden chapel between two blocks of flats in the western Crimean city of Yevpatoriya in 2013. This was before the 2014 Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea. The now Kiev-based lawyer for the Church, Sergei Zayets of the Regional Centre for Human Rights, told Forum 18 that the chapel was built on land belonging to the community of those living in the flats.

According to court documents seen by Forum 18, the wooden chapel is 5.5 metres (18 feet) by 5.5 metres and its height to the top of the gold-painted cross on the wooden onion dome is just over 10 metres (35 feet).

After the Russian annexation, the Russian-backed Yevpatoria city administration began moves to have the chapel demolished. Officials began with written warnings.

On 17 September 2019, the municipal authorities, including its Municipal Control Department, brought a suit to Yevpatoria City Court, seeking the demolition of the chapel. It claimed that the Diocese had never gained approval for the chapel's construction.

Judge Galina Lobanova at the City Court ruled on 6 November that the Church is using the site illegally and that the Church must demolish its chapel within one month of the decision coming into force, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

The Church complains it learnt about the court hearing only on that day. Its lawyer, Zayets, told Forum 18 that, as the hearing took place in the absence of representatives of the parish, it has lodged a request to the same Yevpatoria City Court for a re-examination of the decision taken in absentia. "This method has in the past proved more effective than an appeal to Crimea's Supreme Court," Zayets told Forum 18.

Following the creation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and its recognition by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in January 2019, the Crimean Diocese of the Kiev Patriarchate became part of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Members of the Yevpatoriya parish then stuck a notice on the window of the chapel door: "Our Church is canonical".

Ukrainian journalist Oleksandra Yefymenko visited the Yevpatoriya church during Sunday liturgy on 1 December, which was attended by "a large number of parishioners" squeezing into the small church. Many had come specially from other cities of Crimea, she told Forum 18 on 3 December.

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine lawyer, Sergei Zayets, told Forum 18 that it later added information about the threatened destruction of the Yevpatoriya chapel to its 28 August

appeal to the United Nations Human Rights Committee about the threatened eviction of its cathedral from the rented premises in Simferopol.

Kirill Vavrenyuk, first deputy head of Yevpatoriya Municipality, insisted that the chapel is not a place of worship. "Some people, provocateurs, call it a church, but the court decided it was not," he told Forum 18 from Yevpatoriya on 2 December. He insisted that it had been a court decision, not his own, that the chapel must be destroyed. "They had no documents to build a church there."

Asked if the Municipality was seeking the destruction of any other buildings because they do not have full documentation, Vavrenyuk told Forum 18 he did not know.

Asked if the chapel would be ordered destroyed if it belonged not to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine but to the Moscow Patriarchate, Vavrenyuk chose not to answer. He told Forum 18 that he was unaware of the Church's appeal to the UN Human Rights Committee.

Punished again for leading Friday prayers

On 11 October, Imam Aydar Islyamov led Friday prayers as he has done since 2016 in a Mosque in a home in the majority Crimean Tatar village of Ukrainka (Kurtsy in Crimean Tatar) in Perovo Settlement in Simferopol District, on the south-western edge of Crimea's capital Simferopol. Armed Russian security personnel - some of them masked - arrived in armoured cars, telling those at Friday prayers that they were there to "check the electricity meters and the mosque's documents", the Crimean Solidarity monitoring group noted the same day. Officials questioned witnesses as they prepared a possible prosecution.

On 15 October, at the request of the Prosecutor's Office, the chief specialist of Simferopol District Municipal Control Department examined the land plot for the building (which the court decision describes as a mosque) where Friday prayers are held. The land is owned by Perovo Village Administration.

"We control land use, and we found no violations of the Land Code," Sergei Sayenko, head of the Municipal Control Department, told Forum 18 on 9 December. He pointed out that the land is allocated in the urban development plan as a place of worship. "So Islyamov has the right to apply for it to be recognised as such."

The authorities then accused Imam Islyamov of violating Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") for leading Friday prayers on 11 October. On 24 October the case was handed to Simferopol District's Magistrate's Court No. 76, according to court records.

On 8 November, Judge Tatyana Syanova found Imam Islyamov guilty and fined him 5,000 Russian Roubles, about one week's average local wages, according to the decision seen by Forum 18. An official at the Magistrate's Court refused to discuss Islyamov's case, but told Forum 18 that he had not appealed against the punishment.

Imam Islyamov denied any wrongdoing in court. He added that he would register his use of the land.

The Prosecutor's Office official who led the case in court, Aleksandr Bogdan, supported punishment for Imam Islyamov.

Bogdan refused to explain why an individual should be punished for leading worship. "I give no comments on my activity," he told Forum 18 on 3 December. Asked if he had been present at the Mosque on 11 October he put the phone down.

The authorities accused Imam Islyamov on the same charges of conducting "missionary activity" for leading Friday prayers on 11 May 2018. The same Judge Syanova fined him 5,000 Russian Roubles on 20 June 2018.

Imam Islyamov's 2018 prosecution under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26 was one of 23 prosecutions brought against individuals for ill-defined "missionary activity", of which 19 ended with punishment. Many of those punished were prosecuted for sharing their faith on the street or for holding worship at unapproved venues.

The Mosque community had lodged a registration application, but Crimea's Justice Ministry had "left it without consideration", according to the court decision.

Yelena Shadrina of Crimea's Justice Ministry would not discuss the Mosque's registration application and why it had been rejected. But she confirmed to Forum 18 that no religious communities in Perovo have Russian state registration.

Registration denials "all done on basis of law"

In addition to Imam Islyamov's Mosque in Simferopol District, some other religious communities in Crimea have tried in vain to gain registration with the Russian Justice Ministry.

The Simferopol community of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine finally decided it would seek Russian state registration after insisting for many years that it would not do so after the Russian annexation of the peninsula. It reluctantly lodged an application for the Simferopol parish without any mention of any subordination to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in mid-March 2019.

"The question now arises," Archbishop Kliment told Radio Free Europe's Krym Realii on 23 March, "either we register in accordance with the demands of the Crimean authorities, or we lose the diocese and everything that we had before 2014. I can't take such a risk."

Archbishop Kliment submitted to Crimea's Justice Ministry the same statute another community had used to register a congregation in 2014, soon after the Russian annexation of Crimea. The only difference was that in the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's case, no affiliation with a hierarchical body was given.

The Crimean Justice Ministry issued its first refusal, signed by the then deputy head Irina Demetskaya, on 12 April. The second refusal, dated 1 August, was signed by the then head Valery Pesenko. Demetskaya again signed the third refusal on 20 September.

Another community which has been repeatedly denied Russian state registration is the Tavrida Muftiate, a body independent of the state-backed Crimean Muftiate. The Justice Ministry has registered ten of its mosque communities independently, but refuses to register the Tavrida Muftiate as a centralised religious organisation.

"The bishop applied for registration because there was no other way to preserve the religious community," its lawyer Sergei Zayets of the Regional Centre for Human Rights told Forum 18 from Kiev.

"We want to have registration as a centralised religious organisation to be able to present ourselves publicly," a Muftiate official told Forum 18 from Crimea on 2 December. "We want to be able to hold conferences and undertake projects. We have repeatedly applied, but each time they turn us down, most recently in November 2019."

The Muftiate official also noted that the Justice Ministry will no longer register any of its mosques. "There's an unwritten regulation," the official claimed. The official added that their Mosques have not faced raids or fines.

Yelena Shadrina of the Registration Department for Non- Commercial Organisations at Crimea's Justice Ministry in Simferopol would not discuss in detail the registration rejection of the Simferopol parish of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. "The documents were not in accordance with the law," she claimed to Forum 18 on 2 December. "We conducted a legal expert analysis and our rejection letter included references to the law explaining the violations. They could correct them."

Asked if there is any reason why her Ministry would not register communities of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Shadrina responded: "There is no reason in principle why they cannot be registered." She insisted that any registration decisions would be unrelated to the issue of the Church's property.

Shadrina similarly refused to discuss in detail the registration rejections of the Tavrida Muftiate. "They committed violations in their documents and the reasons for the rejection are given in the letters," she insisted to Forum 18.

Shadrina refused to discuss the specifics of registration denials, noting that she handles thousands of non-commercial organisations and cannot remember all of them. "All is done on the basis of the law," she insisted to Forum 18.

Several other communities function without Russian state registration. Among these are communities of the Council of Churches Baptists, who choose not to seek state registration on principle.

Also unregistered are communities of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad under Metropolitan Agafangel (Pashkovsky). "Our parishes function as in the Soviet Union," he told Forum 18 from the Ukrainian city of Odessa on 3 December. "If you don't function loudly, they don't touch you."

Banned as "extremist"

Among religious communities banned as "extremist" under Russian rule in Crimea are Jehovah's Witnesses and the Muslim missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat. Any activity by any of their adherents risks criminal prosecution.

After more than 15 months in pre-trial detention following his October 2017 arrest by the Russian FSB security service, the Crimean Supreme Court jailed local Muslim Renat Suleimanov for four years. He was punished on "extremism"-related charges for alleged Tabligh Jamaat membership. He is serving his sentence in a labour camp in Russia, where he has spent months in a prison punishment cell. Three others on trial with him were given two and a half year suspended sentences, when they will live under restrictions.

The first criminal trial of a Jehovah's Witness in Crimea since Russia annexed the peninsula in 2014 began in the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi with a closed preliminary hearing on 6 September. Sergei Filatov is facing "extremism" charges, which he denies. Repeated hearings have been postponed because witnesses failed to appear. The next hearing at Dzhankoi City Court is due on 10 December, according to court records.

Filatov headed the Sivash Jehovah's Witness community in the town of Dzhankoi, one of two Jehovah's Witness communities in the town registered by the Russian authorities in April 2015. Both communities were liquidated in May 2017 following Russia's nationwide ban on Jehovah's Witnesses. "I no longer meet my friends because it might cause them

problems," Filatov told Forum 18. "We simply ask the authorities to respect our rights to meet together and read the Bible. We're not law-breakers and we're not against the government."

Also on trial on "extremism"-related charges is another Crimean Jehovah's Witnesses, Artyom Gerasimov from Yalta. His trial began at Yalta City Court with a preliminary hearing on 20 September. Repeated hearings have been postponed because witnesses failed to appear. The next hearing is due on 11 December, according to court records.

An "extremism"-related criminal case was also launched against fellow Yalta Jehovah's Witness Taras Kuzio. He remains a suspect. Viktor Stashevsky from Sevastopol is facing a similar "extremism" prosecution instigated by the Russian FSB security service.

CRIMEA: UN call to halt Cathedral eviction

The United Nations Human Rights Committee is considering an appeal by 62 parishioners of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's Sts Volodymyr and Olga Cathedral in the Crimean capital Simferopol. Russian courts ordered the eviction of the community from the building it has rented since 1995. The UN Committee warned Russia not to evict the community while it considers the appeal.

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (04.12.2019) - <http://bit.ly/36o7iEo> - The United Nations Human Rights Committee has called on the Russian government not to evict the Orthodox Church of Ukraine congregation from its rented accommodation in the Crimean capital Simferopol while it considers an appeal by 62 parishioners. The premises have served since 1995 as the Crimean Diocese's Sts Volodymyr and Olga Cathedral. A court decision to evict the community has now gone into force, though the Diocese is now challenging it in Russia's Supreme Court in Moscow.

"The additional information received from the authors suggests that the State party authorities are still proceeding to the eviction of the authors despite the Committee's request," the UN Human Rights Committee wrote on 20 September in a letter seen by Forum 18.

The Human Rights Committee bluntly repeated its request to the Russian authorities not to evict the community from its Simferopol cathedral while it considered the appeal. "The Committee reminds the State party, that a failure to implement the interim measures is incompatible with the obligation to respect in good faith the procedure of individual communications established under the Optional Protocol [to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights]" (see below).

The community's lawyer Sergei Zayets insisted to Forum 18 that Russia should heed the UN request and not evict the community, despite an 18 November Russian arbitration court ruling against it.

Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea is not recognised by Ukraine or internationally.

Ukrainian journalist Oleksandra Yefymenko said Sts Volodymyr and Olga Cathedral is still functioning and services are continuing. "But unfortunately this won't last long," she told Forum 18 from Crimea on 3 December. "The Crimean Diocese has lost in all the courts and they will be evicted from the building. This is my prediction."

Following the Russian annexation of Crimea, the new authorities sharply increased the rent the community had to pay for the building in central Simferopol. In court proceedings, the authorities claimed the community owed tiny amounts of unpaid Ukrainian rent and also that – as an unregistered religious organisation under Russian law – the Diocese was not allowed to rent state-owned or municipally-owned property (see below).

The Russian authorities amended the law on renting state property in Crimea in July 2018 to require that any rental contract for state-owned or municipally-owned property with an organisation that had state registration under Ukrainian law but which failed to gain registration under Russian law after the 2014 annexation be cancelled through the courts (see below).

In his explanation presented to the Crimean State Council justifying the amendment, the head of Crimea's Russian-backed government Sergei Aksyonov noted several Ukrainian-owned companies in such a position, but made no mention of the Orthodox congregation in Simferopol.

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine also fears that the authorities in the western Crimean city of Yevpatoriya will demolish a small wooden chapel it built between two blocks of flats in 2013. The city court ruled on 6 November 2019 that the Church is using the site illegally and that the chapel should be demolished. The Church complains it learnt about the court hearing only on that day. Its lawyer said it is challenging the court decision.

Ukrainian journalist Yefymenko attended Sunday liturgy at the Yevpatoriya church on 1 December. "Representatives of the Russian special services may come to such liturgies under the guise of parishioners, and record those who visit places of worship of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine," she told Forum 18.

Obstructing, punishing worship

The Russian authorities in Crimea use the wide range of available laws and regulations to punish communities that meet for worship in places or in ways the authorities do not like.

On 8 November, a Magistrate's Court in Simferopol District fined Imam Aydar Islyamov one week's average local wages for leading Friday prayers in a home in the village of Ukrainka on 11 October.

The Crimean Justice Ministry has rejected the registration application from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's Simferopol parish, most recently on 20 September. It claimed there were "violations" in the documents presented. A Justice Ministry official insisted to Forum 18 from Simferopol that "nothing in principle" obstructs the registration of communities of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

Another community which has been repeatedly denied Russian state registration is the Tavrida Muftiate, a body independent of the state-backed Crimean Muftiate. The Justice Ministry has registered ten of its mosque communities independently, but refuses to register the Tavrida Muftiate as a centralised religious organisation.

Massively increased rent

The Kiev Patriarchate Ukrainian Orthodox Church, as it then was, has rented premises that earlier housed the Officers' Club in central Simferopol since 1995. It is there that its Simferopol and Crimea Diocesan Sts Volodymyr and Olga Cathedral and offices are located. The Diocese has three floors of the building, with the sanctuary on the middle floor.

Almost all the Kiev Patriarchate's dioceses and parishes – including in Crimea – joined the Orthodox Church of Ukraine when it was recognised as canonical by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in January 2019.

In 1996 ultimate ownership of the Simferopol building was transferred from a disbanded military base to the Crimean Property Fund. In 1997, under a Crimean Supreme Council decree, rent was set at the symbolic level of 1 Ukrainian Hryvnia (0.5 Norwegian Kroner, 0.05 Euros or 0.08 US Dollars) a month.

Five of the Kiev Patriarchate's churches in Crimea were forced to close within months of the March 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea.

The Sts Volodymyr and Olga Cathedral – which is next to the offices of the Property Fund - appears on a list of state-owned property in an attachment to a 15 March 2000 Crimean Supreme Council decree. A 16 May 2001 Supreme Council decree – seen by Forum 18 - governs the Church's use of the building, whose size it gives as 1,475.7 square metres (15,900 square feet).

However, on 18 April 2014, the State Council (which replaced the Supreme Council) adopted a new decree – which remains on the Russian-backed Crimean government website – amending the 2001 decree. It confirmed the Diocese's rental of the premises until 2050 but changed the basis on which rent is levied.

Archbishop Kliment (Kushch), head of the Diocese, told Forum 18 in June 2014 that the change would result in the Diocese having to pay about 160 Russian Roubles per square metre per month (236,112 Roubles, then equivalent to 42,990 Norwegian Kroner, 5,145 Euros, or 7,000 US Dollars a month). "We're a non-commercial organisation – how can we pay commercial rates? We live on donations."

No Russian registration, no rental

The Russian-controlled Crimean State Council amended the Crimean Law on the Particulars of Regulating Property and Land Issues in Crimea on 31 July 2018. This required that any rental contract for state-owned or municipally-owned property with an organisation that had state registration under Ukrainian law but which failed to gain registration under Russian law after the 2014 annexation be cancelled through the courts.

In his explanation presented to the Crimean State Council justifying the amendment, the head of Crimea's Russian-backed government Sergei Aksyonov noted several Ukrainian-owned companies in such a position, but made no mention of the Orthodox congregation in Simferopol.

Courts order eviction

On 31 January 2019, the Crimean Property and Land Issues Ministry asked the Federal Tax Service and Justice Ministry in Crimea if the Diocese of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine had brought its documents into line with Russian law (i.e. if it had Russian registration). Finding that it had not, the Ministry wrote to the Diocese on 5 February cancelling the rental agreement and asking when Ministry inspectors could visit the premises to arrange the "return" of the building.

On 14 February the Ministry wrote to the Diocese demanding it pay what it said was unpaid rent and interest of 8.19 Ukrainian Hryvnia (then 2.6 Norwegian Kroner, 0.27 Euros or 0.30 US Dollars). The Ministry received no reply. However, on 26 February, the Diocese paid 40 Russian Roubles (16.50 Ukrainian Hryvnia, 5.25 Norwegian Kroner, 0.55 Euros or 0.60 US Dollars) to meet the rent and interest demanded by the Ministry.

On 20 March, the Ministry brought to Crimea's Arbitration Court a suit against the Diocese to oust it from the Simferopol premises it was renting. Judge Vadim Shkuro, who heard the case, issued an initial decision mostly in favour of the Ministry on 28 June 2019 and a full decision (seen by Forum 18) on 5 July.

The Ministry argued in court that the Diocese owed unpaid rent and interest on the rent for the period November 2016 to February 2019 of 8.19 Ukrainian Hryvnia. It called for the November 2002 rental agreement to be cancelled and for the Diocese to hand back the building to the Ministry.

The Ministry stressed in court that the "motivation" for the suit was the Diocese's failure to bring its documents into accord with Russian law, including the amended Crimean Law on the Particulars of Regulating Property and Land Issues in Crimea (see above).

The Diocese rejected the accusations, insisting that the Ukrainian Crimean Property Fund (which the Russian authorities liquidated in July 2014) was a party to the agreement, not the Russian-controlled Crimean Property and Land Issues Ministry. It also pointed to an April 2014 Crimean State Council awarding the rental of the property to the Diocese until 2050.

The Court ruled that the Ministry was a party to the 2002 rental agreement (even though it did not exist then). It claimed that under Ukrainian law, the Diocese still had to pay the rent in full and on time. However, it noted that the Diocese had made the February 2019 payments to meet this. It also found that the Diocese was using the premises not in accordance with the rental agreement, because as a Ukrainian legal entity but an unregistered Russian entity, the Diocese was since January 2016 restricted in what activity it could perform.

Judge Shkuro ruled to annul the 2002 rental agreement and oblige the Diocese to hand back the premises. He rejected the demand that the Diocese owed unpaid rent. He required the Diocese to pay in procedural fees 12,000 Russian Roubles (4,500 Ukrainian Hryvnia, 1,725 Norwegian Kroner, 170 Euros or 190 US Dollars).

The Diocese appealed against the decision to the 21st Arbitration Appeal Court in Sevastopol. However, in an initial decision on 29 August and a full decision on 5 September, a panel of three Judges chaired by Andrei Tarasenko rejected the appeal, according to the decision seen by Forum 18. The Diocese did not send a representative to the hearing. The court decision came into force on 29 August when the 21st Arbitration Appeal Court handed down its initial decision.

The Diocese appealed further, to the Central Region Arbitration Court, based in the Russian city of Kaluga. However, in an initial decision on 14 November and a full decision on 18 November, a panel of three Judges chaired by Lyudmila Leonova dismissed the appeal, according to the decision seen by Forum 18. Again, the Diocese did not send a representative to the hearing. The Diocese was given two months to make a final appeal to Russia's Supreme Court in Moscow.

The Diocese lodged a Supreme Court appeal on 28 November, Sergei Zayets of the Regional Centre for Human Rights, originally from Crimea but who now works from the Ukrainian capital Kiev, told Forum 18 on 4 December.

"You are looking at this case from the wrong angle"

Yevgeniya Sheltik of the Property and Land Issues Ministry's Legal Department represented it in court both in Sevastopol and Kaluga.

"The Arbitration Court decision came into force on 29 August," Sheltik told Forum 18 from Simferopol on 2 December. "The court bailiffs are the service that enforces court decisions, not the Ministry."

Asked why the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's Cathedral should be evicted from the building it has been renting since 1995 and for which it had agreement to rent until 2050, Sheltik responded: "You are looking at this case from the wrong angle." She did not explain what she meant. She then added: "My competence is to give policy advice to the Ministry. My job was only to appear in court in the case."

Asked why an agreement made with the Ukrainian authorities before the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 was no longer valid, Sheltik got angry, apparently over the reference to the annexation of Crimea. She then put the phone down.

Forum 18 was therefore unable to ask Sheltik if the Russian authorities will abide by the United Nations request that they not take action to evict the community while the Human Rights Committee considers the parishioners' appeal (see below).

UN Human Rights Committee calls to halt eviction

Meanwhile, on 28 August, 62 parishioners lodged an appeal to the United Nations Human Rights Committee. Sergei Zayets of the Regional Centre for Human Rights represents the applicants.

On 6 September the Human Rights Committee asked the Russian government as an interim measure "not to evict [the first applicant] and his congregation from the building of their Church in Simferopol, while their case is under consideration by the Committee", according to the Committee's 6 September letter to Zayets seen by Forum 18.

On 6 September the Human Rights Committee also asked the Russian government to provide its response to the appeal within the next six months.

Because of the court case and the Russian authorities' apparent determination to evict the community, the parishioners submitted further information to the Human Rights Committee.

"The additional information received from the authors suggests that the State party authorities are still proceeding to the eviction of the authors despite the Committee's request," the Committee wrote on 20 September in a letter seen by Forum 18.

The Committee bluntly repeated its request to the Russian authorities not to evict the community from its Simferopol cathedral. "The Committee reminds the State party, that a failure to implement the interim measures is incompatible with the obligation to respect in good faith the procedure of individual communications established under the Optional Protocol [to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights]."

The Committee also asked the Russian government not to make public the names of the parishioners who had submitted the appeal.

CRIMEA: Six Tatar Muslims sentenced to 76 years in prison on fabricated charges



12.11.2019 from left Refat Alimov, Arsen Dzhepparov, Vadim Siruk, Emir-Usein Kuku, Muslim Aliev, Inver Bekirov Photo Crimean Solidarity

By Halya Coynash

KHPG (13.11.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2pj1Jr1> - "Does it not strike you as strange that in the 23 years Crimea was under Ukrainian rule, there were no 'extremists' nor 'terrorists', and no 'acts of terrorism', but as soon as Russia arrived with its FSB, there was suddenly all of that?" [The question was asked](#) in his final address to a Russian court by Crimean Tatar human rights activist Emir-Usein Kuku, one of six Ukrainian political prisoners from occupied Crimea sentenced to horrific terms of imprisonment on 12 November on 'terrorism' charges without any crime.

There was nothing in this case that could remotely warrant criminal charges in a law-based democracy, and all six men - [Muslim Aliev](#); [Inver Bekirov](#); [Refat Alimov](#); [Arsen Dzhepparov](#); [Emir-Usein Kuku](#) and [Vadim Siruk](#) - had long been recognized as political prisoners by [the Memorial Human Rights Centre](#) and as prisoners of conscience by [Amnesty International](#). The charges all hinged on unproven allegations that the men were 'involved' in the peaceful pan-Islamist movement Hizb ut-Tahrir which is legal in Ukraine and most other countries. Russia's Supreme Court ruling declaring it a 'terrorist' organization was handed down in secret and probably as a method of enabling Russia to send Uzbek asylum-seekers back to face religious persecution in Uzbekistan. No explanation has ever been provided as to why Russia alone has labelled a movement which is not known to have committed any act of terrorism anywhere in the world as 'terrorist'. In occupied Crimea it has been increasingly using such cynical 'trials' and monstrously long sentences as a weapon against Crimean Tatar civic activists and journalists in particular, and against Crimean Tatars in general.

All the men, who have been imprisoned since February or April 2018, were charged either with 'organizing' a Hizb ut-Tahrir group (under Article 205.5 § 1 of Russia's criminal code) or with (the lesser charge of) 'involvement' in this group (Article 205.5 § 2). Then in January 2017, the FSB [suddenly added](#) another charge of 'attempting violent seizure of power in Russia' (Article 278). The Memorial Human Rights Centre has noted on many occasions that this extra charge is often used against men who refuse to 'cooperate' with the FSB. All the Ukrainian Muslims arrested in occupied Crimea have rejected any such 'cooperation'. It should be stressed that, as well as the preposterous nature of the charges

against the men, Russia is in breach of international law since it is applying its legislation on occupied territory.

Although this was the second time Russia used its flawed 'Hizb ut-Tahrir' charges in occupied Crimea, the first had received far too little attention from international NGOs. The gratuitous violence during the arrests on 11 February 2016 (of Aliev; Bekirov; Kuku and Siruk) and the fact that Kuku was a well-known human rights activist made the international community finally take notice.

Although Kuku's previous persecution under Russian occupation is best known, there are reasons for seeing the arrests of all six men and the sentences passed by 'judges' Roman Viktorovich Saprunov; Dmitry Viktorovich Merkulov and Roman Vladimirovich Podolsky (from the Southern District Military Court in Rostov) as extremely cynical.

[Muslim Aliev](#) was the informal leader of the independent 'Alushta' Muslim Community which had on many occasions had come into conflict with the Muftiate of Crimea. The Mufti, Emirali Ablaev chose to collaborate with the Russian occupation regime and has been rewarded with semi-official status. Aliev's family is convinced that it was his religious 'dissidence' that prompted his arrest.

The 48-year-old father of four was charged with 'organizing' a Hizb ut-Tahrir group, and **sentenced to 19 years in a maximum security prison.**

55-year-old [Inver Bekirov](#) is the oldest of the men. He was initially accused with the lesser charge of 'involvement'. Then, on 21 August 2018, the 'court' in Rostov [suddenly announced](#) that it was proposing that the prosecutor change the charges against Bekirov to the more serious charge of 'organizing' a Hizb ut-Tahrir. Judges are not supposed to act as prosecutors, and Russian judges in such cases never act independently so it is quite possible that this was done merely in order to abort a trial at a point when the FSB torture methods used to obtain 'evidence' had just been exposed. It is also known that the FSB officer (and former Ukrainian turncoat) Alexander Kompaneitsev, who has played a malignant role in all these prosecutions and in the torture of supposed 'witnesses', had threatened to arrest Bekirov's nephew, Refat Alimov, unless he gave false testimony, which he was unable to do.

He was sentenced **to 18 years' in a maximum security prison.**

[Emir-Usein Kuku](#) had very clearly been persecuted for his human rights activities, with this earlier involving a sinister attempt to abduct him. On that occasion, on 20 April 2015, it is likely that the crowd who gathered in response to his cries for help saved his life.

He was sentenced **to 12 years' in a maximum security prison.**

[Vadim Siruk](#) (30) is an ethnic Ukrainian convert to Islam, and his family are not alone in believing that he was arrested as a warning to other converts, and as an attempt to claim that Russia was not targeting Crimean Tatars.

He was sentenced **to 12 years' in a maximum security prison.**

[Arsen Dzepparov](#) (29) was probably arrested in April 2016 because he had refused to act as an FSB informer, providing false testimony against the men who had already been arrested. Dzepparov was then only 26, however he and his wife, Zarina, already had a small daughter. How could he ever explain to little Evelina what conscience and honour mean, [he asked](#), if he denounced other men who also have families and children?

He was sentenced **to 8 years' in a maximum security prison.**

Refat Alimov, at 28, is the youngest and the only man who does not have his own family. It seems extremely likely that he was arrested as Bekirov's nephew.

He was sentenced **to 7 years' in a maximum security prison**.

The indictment in each of the cases had essentially accused the men only of practising their faith, and the defence demonstrated time and time again that the 'evidence' had been falsified and the 'secret witnesses'' testimony could not be trusted. The 'judges' should have certainly acquitted all of the men, and were clearly aware of this since all of the sentences were lower than those demanded by the prosecutor, substantially so in the case of the four men accused of 'involvement'.

These sentences will, of course, be challenged. Until the appeal hearing, the men will probably remain imprisoned in Rostov.

Footnote: The title is from HRWF. The original title of KHPG is *The terrorist threat Russia brought to Crimea: six victims receive huge sentences*.

Recommended reading

EU Observer : <https://euobserver.com/tickers/146595>

The Moscow Times: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/11/12/russia-jails-6-crimean-tatar-activists-for-terrorism-sparking-condemnation-a68143>

CRIMEA: Inver Bekirov: 'If a Muslim observes his faith, the FSB makes him a terrorist'



Inver Bekirov during a court hearing - Photo Anton Naumlyk

By Halya Coynash

Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (11.11.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2pfvzN3> - A Russian prosecutor has demanded a record 20.5 year sentence against 55-year-old Crimean Tatar Inver Bekirov because the latter discussed religious issues with friends at the school where he worked as a guard. His lawyer, Sergei Novikov has repeatedly criticised the shoddy indictment in which neither the time, nor the place of Bekirov's alleged 'crime' are specified, and in which his impugned activities have nothing at all to do with the 'terrorist' charges laid.

The 'terrorism' charges against him and five other Ukrainian Muslims are based solely on a highly suspect Russian Supreme Court ruling from 2003 which declared the peaceful pan-Islamist movement Hizb ut-Tahrir 'terrorist'. The court provided no grounds and acted in secret, with human rights groups only learning of the ruling after it was too late to appeal it. Hizb ut-Tahrir is legal in Ukraine and most countries, and Russia is totally alone in calling it 'terrorist'.

During a court hearing in April 2019, Bekirov gave [a succinct description](#) of the flawed charges against him and the other men.

"I would like to draw the court's attention to the fact that our prosecution has been fabricated by the FSB. This includes the widespread method of blurring concepts. If, for example, a Muslim practises his religion, he becomes a 'potential terrorist'. Talking about Islam is 'recruitment' and stopping a person from committing sins is 'encouraging tendentious thinking'. If a person begins to follow his religion, he's part of a 'cell'. You officially buy Muslim literature in a shop, and they claim that you deliberately knew and 'kept prohibited literature in your home". In Ukraine, when they prohibited books in Russian, the media and certain politicians began shouting that 'this is fascism'. When in Russia they began prohibiting Muslim literature, the question must arise what that is?"

Bekirov is the oldest of the six men from the Yalta region on 'trial' at a military court in Rostov-on-Don. He is married with three grown daughters and a grandson. He was arrested, together with human rights activist [Emir-Usein Kuku](#); [Muslim Aliev](#) and [Vadim Siruk](#) after armed and unnecessarily rough searches of their homes on 11 February 2016.

This initially seemed a remake of the FSB's first Crimean prosecution of Ukrainian Muslims for totally unproven 'involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir'. Each had one person designated 'organizer' of a Hizb ut-Tahrir cell', under Article 205.5 § 1 of Russia's criminal code, with this carrying a possible life sentence. The other three were accused of 'involvement' in such a supposed cell, under Article 205.5 § 2 (10-20 years). These appalling sentences are purely because Russia has labelled Hizb ut-Tahrir 'terrorist'. There is no evidence that Hizb ut-Tahrir has been guilty of any act of terrorism anywhere in the world, and none of the men is accused of any actual crime. Indeed, despite the Supreme Court ruling, it was only in 2013 that Russia began prosecuting people under terrorism legislation and handing down horrific sentences.

Unlike the arrest of the first four Muslims from Sevastopol at the beginning of 2015, the Yalta arrests did attract international attention, mainly because of Kuku's involvement in a human rights organization and previous harassment by the occupation regime. It also became clear that the same former Ukrainian turncoat, now working for the FSB, Alexander Kompaneitsev had played a thoroughly sinister and illegal role in the persecution of Kuku, Bekirov and two young men arrested on 18 April 2016: Bekirov's nephew, [Refat Alimov](#) and [Arsen Dzhepparov](#). Bekirov had been directly threatened that if he refused to give false testimony against the other men, his nephew would be arrested.

Neither in this prosecution, nor others of Ukrainian Muslims, has even one defendant agreed to 'cooperate' with the FSB. It was quite likely in revenge for their refusal to be broken that, in January 2017, a new change, under 278 of Russia's criminal code, of "attempting violent seizure of power in Russia" was added, with this carrying a near-guaranteed increase in sentence of from 12 to 20 years.

All Russia's Hizb ut-Tahrir 'trials' are profoundly flawed, however this one stood out for the number of overt and identifiable falsifications. It was possibly because a 'secret witness' was uncovered, together with the torture almost certainly used to obtain his 'testimony' that the first attempt at a trial was aborted, with the case sent back to the prosecutor.

Certainly the excuse given for sending the case back was extraordinarily lawless. In August 2018, the Rostov court [suddenly announced](#) that it was returning the case to the prosecutor, demanding that the charges against Bekirov be made more severe. Forget justice being blind and judges – impartial arbiters. Here the judges made it abundantly clear that they were working directly with the prosecution.

In explaining why Bekirov should now also face the more serious charges of 'organizing a Hizb ut-Tahrir cell', the court claimed that the illicit recording made in the school where

Bekirov worked indicated that Bekirov could be said to have organized meetings and given the other defendants instructions.

Whatever the real reasons for aborting the first trial, the decision officially taken by presiding judge **Nikolai Yurevich Vasilchuk**, together with **Valery Sergeevich Opanasenko** and **Stanislav Vladimirovich Zhidkov** has led to a situation where Bekirov is facing a sentence long and harsh enough to make it a likely death sentence.

Please write to Enver Bekirov; Muslim Aliev; Refat Alimov; Arsen Dzhapparov; Emir-Usein Kuku; and Vadim Siruk.

The letters tell them they are not forgotten, and show Moscow that the 'trial' now underway is being followed.

Letters need to be in Russian, and on 'safe' subjects. If that is a problem, use the sample letter below (copying it by hand), perhaps adding a picture or photo. Do add a return address so that the men can answer.

Example letter

Привет,

Желаю Вам здоровья, мужества и терпения, надеюсь на скорое освобождение. Простите, что мало пишу – мне трудно писать по-русски, но мы все о Вас помним.

[Hi. I wish you good health, courage and patience and hope that you will soon be released. I'm sorry that this letter is short – it's hard for me to write in Russian., but you are not forgotten.]

Addresses

The men have been split up, with Aliev and Kuku in SIZO-4, the other men in SIZO-1 (the differences are small, so please copy carefully). The address each time, should have the man's full name, and year of birth.

Enver Bekirov

344010, Россия, Ростов-на-Дону, ул. Максима Горького, 219 СИЗО-1.
Бекирову, Энверу Небиевичу, 1963 г.р

[In English: 344010 Russian Federation, Rostov on the Don, 219 Maxim Gorky St, SIZO-1
Bekirov, Enver Nebiyevich, b. 1963]

MuslimAliev

344082 Россия, Ростов-на-Дону, Большая Садовая ул., 31
Алиеву, Муслиму Нуриевичу, 1971 г.р.

[In English: 344082 Russia, Rostov on the Don, 31 Bolshaya Sadovaya St., SIZO-4
Aliev, Muslim Nurievich, b. 1971]

Refat Alimov

344010, Россия, Ростов-на-Дону, ул. Максима Горького, 219 СИЗО-1.
Алимову, Рефату Маметовичу, 1991 г.р.

[In English: 344010 Russian Federation, Rostov on the Don, 219 Maxim Gorky St, SIZO-1
Alimov, Refat Mametovich, b. 1991]

Arsen Dzhepparov

344010, Россия, Ростов-на-Дону, ул. Максима Горького, 219 СИЗО-1.
Джеппарову, Арсену Бармамбетовичу, 1991 г.р.

[In English: 344010 Russian Federation, Rostov on the Don, 219 Maxim Gorky St, SIZO-1
Dzhepparov, Arsen Barmambetovich, b. 1991]

Emir-Usein Kuku

344082 Россия, Ростов-на-Дону, Большая Садовая ул., 31
Куку, Эмиру-Усеину Кемаловичу, 1976 г.р.

[In English: 344082 Russia, Rostov on the Don, 31 Bolshaya Sadovaya St., SIZO-4
Kuku, Emir-Usein Kemalovich, b. 1976]

VadimSiruk

344010, Россия, Ростов-на-Дону, ул. Максима Горького, 219 СИЗО-1.
Сируку, Вадиму Андреевичу, 1989 г.р.

[In English: 344010 Russian Federation, Rostov on the Don, 219 Maxim Gorky St, SIZO-1
Siruk, Vadim Andreevich, b. 1989]

DONETSK-LUHANSK: Persecution of non-Orthodox believers in separatist Ukrainian regions

Militias close another two Evangelical churches in occupied Donetsk Oblast.

RISU (11.11.2019) - <https://bit.ly/34Wewyy> - In Makiivka, representatives of the so-called "MGB DNR" [Ministry of State Security of the Donetsk People's Republic] forbade parishioners of the local "Word of Life" church to assemble, the well-known pastor and volunteer, Sergei Kosiak, told the Vchasno news agency.

He said the militias came to the home of the pastor of the "Word of Life" church in Makiivka and warned that if he conducts church meetings in the future they will be penalized.

A similar situation occurred involving one of the evangelical church of Khartsyzk.

"The occupying power demands that all churches in ORDLO [separate districts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts] be reregistered in accordance with the laws of the fake republics," Sergei Kosiak explained. "At the same time, registration is being conducted in such a way that makes it not so simple to do. In the occupied Luhansk region not a single evangelical church has been registered. In the so-called "DNR" evangelical churches are being registered, but at the same time some of the churches for certain reasons are being refused registration in principle on the basis of the laws of the militias."

Sergei Kosiak noted that the occupying authority is trying to close churches that are functioning "illegally," and clergy are being fined and even charged with extremism.

"According to the law of the fake republics, the fine for an 'illegal meeting' is from 500 to 10 thousand rubles (192 to 3847 hryvnia), and a second fine is up to 200 thousand rubles (76940 hryvnia), Sergei Kosiak reported. "If a church continues to meet, then they may act even more brutally. For example, in the so-called 'LNR' there was a case where a Jehovah's Witnesses pamphlet and the book Cross of Hitler were planted on a priest. In ORDLO this is forbidden literature and the priest was charged with the creation of an extremist organization."

(tr. by PDS, posted 11 November 2019)

CRIMEA: Four months in Russian prison punishment cell

Prison officials in Russia's Kabardino-Balkariya Region will not say why they put Crimean prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov in a punishment cell in July, where he remains. Suleimanov was jailed as an "extremist" as an alleged adherent of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim movement. The criminal trial of Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov has begun. Imam Rustem Abilev was fined three months' average wages.

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (30.10.2019) - <https://bit.ly/34iQFZC> - Prison officials in Kamenka in Russia's Kabardino-Balkariya Region have refused to say why in early July they placed Crimean prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov in a punishment cell, where he remains nearly four months later. Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea is not recognised by Ukraine or internationally. On 16 October 2019, Suleimanov's lawyer lodged a case against Russia, the occupying power, to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg against his four-year "extremism" jail term as an adherent of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement.

Suleimanov was arrested in Crimea and placed in pre-trial detention in October 2017, and in January 2019 was jailed for four years for having met with other Muslims to discuss their faith.

"At lessons we studied ayats [verses] from the Koran, the value of praying the namaz, and the zikr [reciting devotional phrases as a reminder of Allah]," one of the three other men charged with Suleimanov (who were given two and half year suspended sentences) told the court. "These lessons were not conspiratorial and took place in mosques".

In May the Russian authorities transferred the 49-year-old Muslim prisoner of conscience from occupied Crimea to a labour camp in Russia.

The first criminal trial of a Jehovah's Witness in Crimea since Russia annexed the peninsula in 2014 has begun in the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi. The trial of Sergei Filatov on "extremism" charges began with a closed preliminary hearing on 6 September (see below).

Filatov headed the Sivash Jehovah's Witness community in the town of Dzhankoi, one of two Jehovah's Witness communities in the town registered by the Russian authorities in April 2015. Both communities were liquidated in May 2017 following Russia's nationwide ban on Jehovah's Witnesses. "I no longer meet my friends because it might cause them

problems," Filatov told Forum 18. "We simply ask the authorities to respect our rights to meet together and read the Bible. We're not law-breakers and we're not against the government."

Three other Crimean Jehovah's Witnesses - Artyom Gerasimov and Taras Kuzio from Yalta, as well as Viktor Stashevsky from Sevastopol – are facing similar "extremism" prosecutions instigated by the Russian FSB security service (see below).

Gerasimov and Kuzio were arrested in March 2019 during FSB security service raids on at least eight Jehovah's Witness homes, during which religious literature including Bibles that have not been banned were confiscated. Stashevsky was arrested on 4 June 2019 during FSB raids on at least nine homes. All are accused of continuing Jehovah's Witness activity.

A Sevastopol court fined Imam Rustem Abilev, who was arrested in April 2019, about three months' average local wages for alleged "public calls for extremist activity" (see below).

Imam Abilev, a dentist who works as a village imam part-time, founded and with other Muslims built the Hayat (Life) Mosque in the village of Shturmovoe. The mosque was officially registered by Russian authorities in June 2016 as part of the Crimean Muftiate. After Imam Abilev's April 2019 arrest, the FSB security service claimed using recordings of public village Friday prayers that Abilev conducted "closed lessons". "Local residents and activists say Rustem Abilev cannot have called for extremism," Radio Free Europe journalist Taras Ibragimov told Forum 18 on 24 April. "They insist he is not an extremist and don't believe the FSB allegations." Ibragimov told Radio Free Europe's Krym Realii service that "Friday prayers are obligatory for Muslims and all villagers would gather for them." He found it "strange" that any imam would use Friday prayers if he wanted to conduct any "alternative meetings".

Investigators had Suleimanov, Filatov, Stashevsky and Abilev added to the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose accounts banks are obliged to freeze, apart from small transactions (see below).

In both July and October, officers of the Interior Ministry Anti-Extremism Centre raided Friday prayers at a mosque in Zarechnoe near Crimea's capital Simferopol. They were accompanied on the first raid by the OMON riot police, after which the imam narrowly avoided being fined for alleged "missionary activity". On the second raid they were accompanied by a Prosecutor's Office official. He refused to discuss anything with Forum 18 (see below).

Annexation, restrictions imposed

Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea is not recognised by Ukraine or internationally. The peninsula is now divided between two Russian federal regions, the Republic of Crimea (with its capital in Simferopol) and the port city of Sevastopol.

After the annexation Russia imposed its restrictions on freedom of religion and belief. Many religious communities have been raided, and many individuals have been fined for possessing books – such as the Muslim prayer collection "Fortress of a Muslim" - which have been banned as "extremist" in Russia.

Russia's Supreme Court banned the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement in 2009. The ban was extended to Crimea following Russia's 2014 annexation of the peninsula.

In April 2017, Russia's Supreme Court declared the Jehovah's Witness Russian headquarters in St Petersburg and all 395 local organisations "extremist", banned all their

activity, and ordered their property seized by the state. The ban was immediately imposed in Russian-occupied Crimea, where 22 communities were liquidated.

Religious communities and individuals in Crimea continue to be fined for not displaying the full name of their registered religious organisation at their place of worship, for meeting for worship without Russian state permission or advertising their faith. Forty such administrative prosecutions are known to have been brought in 2018 of which 28 ended with punishment.

Suleimanov: Punishment cell

Since early July, soon after his 20 June arrival at a labour camp in Russia and the end of the compulsory quarantine period, prisoner of conscience Renat Rustemovich Suleimanov (born 30 August 1969) has been in a punishment cell. Those close to him do not know why he has been given this additional punishment.

According to "unverified information", the camp administration is planning to hold Suleimanov in the punishment cell for six months, his lawyer Roman Martynovskyy told Forum 18. If true, that would mean that he would not be freed from there to normal prison conditions until January 2020.

On 18 May, prison officials began the transfer of Suleimanov from the Investigation Prison in the Crimean capital Simferopol to serve his sentence at a labour camp (correctional colony) in the village of Kamenka near Kabardino-Balkariya's regional capital Nalchik in the Russian North Caucasus.

Prison officials refused to give any information about Suleimanov. "We don't give such information by telephone," an official of the prison's Special Department told Forum 18 on 30 October. Asked about conditions in punishment cells, the official responded: "Conditions there are good." She said the prison Head, Salikh Gurizhev, was not in the office.

Prisoner of conscience Suleimanov was arrested in October 2017, accused of membership of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, which Russia's Supreme Court banned in 2009. The ban was extended to Crimea following Russia's 2014 annexation of the peninsula.

Suleimanov, a Crimean Tatar, was born in exile in Kazakhstan's then capital Almaty. When the Crimean Tatars were allowed to return to Crimea, he settled in the village of Molodezhnoe just north of Crimea's capital Simferopol. He is married with three young daughters.

Suleimanov and three friends met openly in mosques to discuss their faith. "At lessons we studied ayats [verses] from the Koran, the value of praying the namaz, and the zikr [reciting devotional phrases as a reminder of Allah]," one of the men told the court at their trial. "These lessons were not conspiratorial and took place in mosques."

Fifteen months after his arrest, Crimea's Supreme Court in Simferopol finally convicted Suleimanov and the three other men on 22 January 2019. All four were sentenced under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2. This punishes organisation of or involvement in "the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity".

The Judge jailed Suleimanov for four years in an ordinary regime labour camp, followed by one year under restrictions. He handed the other three men suspended sentences, with

one year under restrictions. Suleimanov's appeals to Russia's Supreme Court in Moscow failed.

Forum 18 has been unable to find out whether Suleimanov has access to the Koran and other religious literature in punishment cell and whether he can pray unimpeded. "There's no contact from there," his lawyer Martynovskyy told Forum 18. "His letters are thoroughly checked."

Suleimanov's labour camp address:

361424 Kabardino-Balkariya
Chegemsky raion
Pos. Kamenka
Ul. D.A. Mizieva 1
Ispravitel'naya Koloniya No. 1
Suleimanovu Renatu Rustemovichu

Suleimanov: European Court appeal

Suleimanov's lawyer Roman Martynovskyy and his colleagues at the Regional Centre for Human Rights, originally based in Sevastopol but now in the Ukrainian capital Kiev, lodged a case against Russia to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg on 16 October, he told Forum 18 from Kiev on 28 October. The Court confirmed to Forum 18 that it has received the case, but has not yet assigned an Application Number to it.

Suleimanov's case argues that the Russian authorities violated his rights under Article 6 ("Right to a fair trial"), Article 7 ("No punishment without law"), Article 9 ("Freedom of thought, conscience and religion"), Article 10 ("Freedom of expression"), Article 11 ("Freedom of assembly and association") and Article 13 ("Right to an effective remedy") of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Filatov: Trial begins

The first criminal trial of a Jehovah's Witness in Crimea since Russia annexed the peninsula in 2014 has begun in the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi. The trial of Sergei Viktorovich Filatov (born 6 June 1972) began under Judge Mariya Yermakova at Dzhankoi District Court with a closed preliminary hearing on 6 September, according to court records. Seven further open hearings have been held, but at least three of them were adjourned as witnesses failed to attend.

Filatov – who is married with four children – is not under arrest but had to sign a pledge not to leave the area.

In a case brought by the Russian FSB security service, Filatov is being tried under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"). Punishments are: a fine of 400,000 to 800,000 Roubles; or 2 to 4 years' income; or 6 to 10 years' imprisonment with a ban on working in one's profession of up to 10 years and restrictions on freedom for 1 to 2 years.

Filatov was one of eight Dzhankoi Jehovah's Witnesses whose homes were raided in November 2018. The FSB accused him of continuing the activity of the local Jehovah's Witness community, which had been liquidated as "extremist". Filatov rejects the accusation against him. He told the Investigator that believers meet together not as an

organisation but as private individuals under the guarantees enshrined in the Russian Constitution.

The FSB Investigator who prepared Filatov's case - Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin – did not answer his phone between 28 and 30 October.

At the 6 September hearing, Filatov renounced the services of the state-nominated lawyer as he could not afford the fees, Jehovah's Witnesses noted. Judge Yermakova rejected Filatov's request for Oleg Zakharchuk to be his public defender, but agreed to it at the 12 September hearing. She also agreed for the lawyer's fees to be paid by the state budget.

On 25 September, the court questioned the only witness who turned up, a local school teacher who had occasionally attended Jehovah's Witness meetings before the 2017 Russian Supreme Court ban. However, as he had not attended after that, he was unable to answer any questions about Filatov's activity since the ban.

On 3 October, the court questioned a "secret" witness. However, the witness "didn't understand what was being considered, didn't remember anything and had nothing to recount", Jehovah's Witnesses noted.

Three other Jehovah's Witness criminal cases

Three other Jehovah's Witnesses are facing criminal prosecution in the Crimean peninsula on "extremism" charges under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity").

On 15 March, Russian FSB investigators launched a criminal case against Artyom Vyacheslavovich Gerasimov (born 13 January 1985) and Taras Grigoryevich Kuzio (born 19 June 1978) from the southern Crimean town of Yalta. Five days later, officers raided eight Jehovah's Witness family homes in and around Yalta. Both men had to sign a pledge not to leave the area.

On 4 June, Russian FSB investigators launched a criminal case against Sevastopol resident Viktor Vladimirovich Stashevsky (born 11 July 1966). That evening, FSB officers raided at least nine local homes, with a further follow-up raid on 7 July. He had to sign a pledge not to leave the area.

The FSB Investigator handling Stashevsky's case - Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin – did not answer his phone between 28 and 30 October.

Abilev: Convicted, fined

The Russian FSB security service, which brought an "extremism"-related criminal case against Rustem Enverovich Abilev (born 18 May 1984), has succeeded in having him punished. Abilev is Imam of the Khayat (Life) mosque in the village of Shturmovoe on the eastern edge of the city of Sevastopol.

FSB officers arrested Imam Abilev on 15 April as armed, masked men, most of them in camouflage with FSB insignia, raided Khayat mosque and his nearby home. Officers seized religious literature, hand-written notes and documents, computers and mobile phones. One masked man copied files from a laptop computer.

Following his 15 April arrest, the FSB held Imam Abilev for several days in Sevastopol before transferring him to the Investigation Prison in Simferopol. He was held there until being transferred to house arrest on 7 June.

Unnamed FSB officers told the local media on 15 April and again on 23 October that Imam Abilev had "in the course of closed lessons, had conducted ideological cultivation of believers, attracting new members to extremist activity". The officers also claimed that in his sermons Imam Abilev had used banned literature and "called for violent actions against people who do not share his religious convictions".

Officers claimed that Imam Abilev had cooperated with the investigation, revealing the contacts local Salafi Muslims have with a "fundamentalist theologian" Abu Yahya Krymsky (real name Arsen Dzhelyalov). When he was in Crimea, Dzhelyalov hosted a programme on local television. After the Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014, he moved to the Ukrainian capital Kiev.

The FSB made public no evidence to back up their claims about Imam Abilev.

"Local residents and activists say Rustem Abilev cannot have called for extremism," Radio Free Europe journalist Taras Ibragimov told Forum 18 in April. "They insist he is not an extremist and don't believe the FSB allegations."

The FSB investigator Yuri Andreyev brought charges against Imam Abilev under Russian Criminal Code Article 280, Part 1. This punishes "public calls for extremist activity" with a maximum punishment of four years' imprisonment and a ban on specific activity for the same period. Prosecutors handed the case to Sevastopol's Balaklava District Court on 27 September, according to court records.

On 10 October, at the end of a two-day trial, Judge Natalya Zarudnyak of Balaklava District Court found Imam Abilev guilty under Russian Criminal Code Article 280, Part 1, according to court records. She fined him 100,000 Russian Roubles, the minimum punishment under the Article. According to Russian government figures, this represents about three months' average local wages.

Court press secretary Kristina Kulikovskaya said that Abilev was handed the written verdict the same day immediately after it had been delivered orally in court. "Under the court verdict, the house arrest was changed to a pledge not to leave the area and to behave appropriately until the verdict entered into legal force," she told Forum 18 on 30 October. She said no appeals against the verdict had reached the court and it entered legal force on 22 October.

Unnamed FSB officers told the local media that during the trial, Imam Abilev "fully repented" of his actions, which was why he was given only a fine.

The telephone of the FSB Investigation Department in Sevastopol went unanswered each time Forum 18 called on 29 and 30 October.

Despite Imam Abilev's arrest in April, detention until June and then house arrest until his October trial, a member of the Khayat Mosque told Forum 18 on 28 October that the authorities did not prevent the community from continuing to meet for worship.

On 2 June 2016, the Russian authorities registered the mosque community as part of the Crimean Muftiate, according to the Russian Federal Tax Service record. Abilev was one of the ten official founders.

Zarechnoe: July Mosque raid, administrative case

On 5 July, officers of the Interior Ministry Anti-Extremism Centre and the OMON riot police raided the Salgir Baba mosque in the village of Zarechnoe near the regional capital Simferopol. "After Friday prayers, all those present were held in the yard outside the mosque and the officials questioned the imam," the Crimean Solidarity group noted the same day. Arsen Kantemirov has been imam since 2008.

Although the raid was billed as an "investigative measure" related to "extremism", Simferopol District Prosecutor's Office later brought charges against Imam Kantemirov under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"). Individuals are liable for a fine of 5,000 to 50,000 Roubles. For organisations (legal entities), the fine stands at 100,000 to 1 million Roubles.

The Prosecutor's Office accused Imam Kantemirov of conducting "missionary activity" because the mosque is not registered either as a religious organisation or group. (The mosque – which functions independently - had registration under Ukrainian law, but chose not to seek it under Russian law.)

The Prosecutor's Office presented the case against Imam Kantemirov to Simferopol's Magistrate's Court No. 75 on 28 August. However, that same day Magistrate Yekaterina Chumachenko sent back the case to be re-worked. Once it was re-presented, a hearing was set for 4 October but Imam Kantemirov did not turn up. At another hearing on 7 October, Magistrate Chumachenko threw out the case as it had not been completed within the prescribed three months since the "offence", according to case records.

Kantemirov's lawyer Rustem Kyamilev told Radio Free Europe's Krym.Realii on 7 October that in August and September, Prosecutors had called the imam and summoned him. Only later did the court inform him that he was facing an administrative case.

"There have been several such cases in Crimea, but people have chosen not to publicise them," the lawyer Kyamilev told Krym.Realii. "We know in some of these cases people have been given administrative punishments. Almost every fifth person in Crimea could be accused on such an accusation. Unfortunately, the trend is negative."

Zarechnoe: October Mosque raid

Officers of the Interior Ministry Anti-Extremism Centre raided the Salgir Baba mosque in Zarechnoe again on Friday 25 October. This time they were accompanied by Aleksandr Bogdan of Simferopol District Prosecutor's Office, who entered the mosque during Friday prayers, the lawyer Kyamilev told Krym.Realii the same day. Officials claim they were concerned that illegal "missionary activity" was underway.

Prosecutor Bogdan tried to talk to Imam Asan Bekirov, who was leading prayers that day, but he refused to answer any questions. "After the prayers, I came out and refused to give any testimony .. and so there were no more questions to me," Imam Bekirov was quoted by Crimean Solidarity as declaring.

Officials warned Imam Bekirov that he might be summoned to the Anti-Extremism Centre for questioning. The lawyer Kyamilev said officials urged those who had attended prayers to leave the mosque and yard, but they insisted on staying until all the officials had left.

Bogdan of the Prosecutor's Office refused absolutely to discuss the raid. "I am not obliged to give you any information," he told Forum 18 on 30 October. He then put the phone down.

DONBAS: Luhansk: Worship bans, clergy bans, punishments

Worship is banned in all Protestant churches and Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Halls, as the unrecognised Luhansk People's Republic bans exercising freedom of religion or belief without permission. Courts punish those leading unapproved worship. Prosecutors are investigating an Orthodox priest on "extremism" criminal charges. With no permanent resident priest, Catholics hold Mass by Skype. With bans on clergy visiting, many communities suffer isolation.

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (23.10.2019) - <https://bit.ly/323ISOO> - The unrecognised Luhansk People's Republic in eastern Ukraine has banned many religious communities – including all Protestants, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses – from exercising freedom of religion or belief, including bans on meeting for worship. "Our churches lie empty," one Protestant lamented to Forum 18.

The rebel authorities have also banned many religious leaders from outside their territory from visiting their fellow believers. Officials have barred access by the Greek Catholic bishop and a Greek Catholic priest, the bishop of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and many Protestant leaders. This has left their local communities feeling isolated (see below).

The one Catholic priest still allowed access can stay for a maximum of three months, with the next three months out of the territory. This means that in the months when he is denied access, Mass has to be relayed to the congregation over the internet, depriving churchgoers of the opportunity to receive Communion. Receiving Communion is for Catholics an integral part of participating in Mass (see below).

"This is a clear violation of freedom of belief," the Catholic bishop Jan Sobilo told Forum 18. He likened it to conditions for church members in the Soviet Union (see below).

Prosecutors are pursuing an "extremism" investigation against a priest in Luhansk of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, who is in his seventies. For five months he was banned from leaving the territory (see below).

Courts continue to punish individuals who lead worship meetings in defiance of official bans. Of the six known cases in 2019 – all of them from various Baptist denominations - two have been fined about one month's average wages each, one was given a 20-hour community work order and the other three were left with no punishment. The most recent known fine was of Pastor Pyotr Tatarenko on 7 October (see below).

Pro-Russian rebels seized parts of Ukraine's Luhansk Region in March 2014 and the following month proclaimed what they called the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR). Heavy fighting ensued. The rebel administration, which currently controls about a third of Ukraine's Luhansk Region, has declared a state of martial law.

Pro-Russian rebels similarly seized parts of Ukraine's Donetsk Region in April 2014 and proclaimed what they called the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). Heavy fighting ensued. The rebel administration currently controls nearly half of Ukraine's Donetsk Region. The rebel-held area adjoins the rebel-held area of Luhansk Region.

The rebel Luhansk authorities insist that religious communities that have not undergone local registration are illegal. They point to a May 2015 Decree by Igor Plotnitsky, the then

Head of the unrecognised entity, banning mass events while the area was under martial law, and the February 2018 local Religion Law approved by the LPR People's Council.

"We don't have closed communities"?

The rebel LPR authorities banned all exercise of freedom of religion or belief by communities that did not gain registration with their Justice Ministry by the extended deadline of 15 October 2018. Those rejected include all Protestant communities.

"Those refused registration were not given any documents – it was all done verbally," one Protestant told Forum 18.

Baptist Union congregations, which applied for registration before the deadline, were all rejected, Pastor Igor Bandura of the Ukrainian Baptist Union told Forum 18. He said they have continued to ask the Justice Ministry to process their applications.

An official of the Registration Department of the Justice Ministry – which is supposed to register religious communities – refused absolutely to say which communities had been allowed to register and which had been refused, or give any overall statistics. "We don't give out information by telephone," she told Forum 18 on 22 October without any explanation.

Inna Sheryayeva, who took over from Andrei Litsoev as head of the Religious Organisations and Spirituality Department of the Culture, Sport and Youth Ministry in Luhansk, similarly refused to give any information by telephone. "I have only been in this job for two days," she told Forum 18 on 18 October.

Asked why police raid religious communities, courts punish individuals for exercising freedom of religion or belief, why Protestant churches are all closed, and why clergy cannot live permanently or visit the region, Sheryayeva responded: "We don't have closed communities. Everything here is good. We have received no complaints."

Communities which did not apply, such as Jehovah's Witnesses (who knew they would not be accepted) and Council of Churches Baptists (who choose not to seek registration on principle), are likewise regarded as "illegal".

"Our churches lie empty"

With the authorities' insistence that religious communities are not allowed to function unless they have registration, many have had to halt public meetings for worship. Officials do not allow communities to use places of worship of any faith apart from Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish and Muslim places of worship. The rest lie unused.

The Moscow Patriarchate Russian Orthodox Church has many parishes and churches. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine (which used to be part of the Kiev Patriarchate) can still use its cathedral in the city of Luhansk, though they have faced harassment (see below). Catholics can still use two churches, though their clergy have only limited access (see below).

One mosque of the Salam organisation is registered and open in Luhansk, as well as one Orthodox Jewish community. Hare Krishna devotees outside the region told Forum 18 in October 2018 that their community had been registered.

Congregations of the Pentecostal Union cannot meet for worship as a community. "They have no registration and their churches are closed," a Pentecostal Union representative

told Forum 18 from the Ukrainian capital Kiev on 18 October. "They still own the premises, but none have the freedom to hold church meetings in their own buildings."

Congregations of the Baptist Union similarly have not been able to meet for worship as a community since March. "Our communities cannot meet in their places of worship," Pastor Igor Bandura of the Ukrainian Baptist Union told Forum 18 on 18 October. "Their churches haven't been confiscated, but they can't use them." The congregations are still seeking approval for their registration applications (see above).

"Our churches lie empty," a Protestant with close ties to communities of another denomination in the region which previously had registration told Forum 18 on 15 October. "Church members meet in homes, but with no more than four people."

Skype Masses, no Communion

The two Catholic parishes – Christ the King Greek Catholic parish in Luhansk and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic parish in Luhansk, with a chapel in Stakhanov [official Ukrainian name Kadiyevka] – are still allowed to function. The two parishes applied for re-registration under the new Law by the deadline. "They've given us temporary registration while they continue to consider the application," Jan Sobilo, auxiliary bishop of Kharkiv-Zaporozhia, told Forum 18 on 14 October.

However, the authorities have obstructed the two priests (one Roman Catholic and one Greek Catholic) from living in the area to minister to their parishes. "Fr Mykhailo, the Greek Catholic priest, used to visit regularly to serve local believers but has not been able to go since the spring of this year," Bishop Sobilo lamented to Forum 18.

Fr Grzegorz Rapa – a Polish priest who has served Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary parish since 1993 – is no longer allowed to live there permanently. "He can stay there for three months, then has to be out for three months," Bishop Sobilo told Forum 18.

As Fr Rapa is not currently able to live in or visit Luhansk, Mass has to be broadcast over the internet via Skype to the congregation in the church. "They have to set up a screen on the altar and a projector," Bishop Sobilo told Forum 18. "It is like in Soviet times." He recalled that during Soviet years, a radio was often put on the altar of a church with no priest to broadcast Mass to the congregation.

However, this means that in the three months when Fr Rapa is unable to visit Luhansk, Catholics are deprived of the opportunity to receive Communion. Receiving Communion is for Catholics an integral part of participating in Mass.

Bishop Sobilo, who last visited Luhansk in spring 2019 together with the Nuncio Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, told Forum 18 he hopes to be able to visit in the run-up to Christmas 2019.

However, Bishop Sobilo complained that the Greek Catholic Bishop, Stepan Meniuk, is not allowed to visit Greek Catholics in the rebel-held region. This means that when Fr Rapa is there, he is the only Catholic priest, ministering to both Roman and Greek Catholics.

"Extremism" charges?

Following the police anti-"extremism" raid on and search of Holy Trinity Cathedral and diocesan offices of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in the city of Luhansk on 4 April, officers began investigating charges that the community was holding narcotics, then weapons, then "extremist" literature.

Officials forced the two priests - Fr Anatoli Nazarenko and Fr Gennady Kurganov – to sign statements that they would not leave rebel-held territory. This restriction was not continued for Fr Kurganov. Police later returned the priests' passports and other personal documents seized during the raid.

Police prepared an "extremism" criminal investigation against Fr Nazarenko which they then handed on to prosecutors. Banned from leaving rebel-held territory, this ban was lifted in September after five months, Orthodox Christians told Forum 18 from Luhansk.

"A criminal case has not been opened, but the investigation has not been closed," one Orthodox Christian noted about the investigation into Fr Nazarenko. "A commission is apparently still studying the case. Of course, the literature they claim to have seized had nothing to do with us."

"The earlier restrictions and the ongoing case are particularly difficult for Fr Anatoli at his age," Bishop Afanasi (Yavorsky) of Luhansk and Starobilsk told Forum 18 on 14 October. Fr Nazarenko is in his seventies.

Bishop Afanasi said a deacon also faced questioning. "Sunday school teachers were also summoned for questioning and put under pressure," he complained. "They were asked why they go to church."

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine applied for registration for Holy Trinity Cathedral but has not received it so far.

Isolation

Many communities complain about the isolation they are now under. Contacts with fellow believers elsewhere in Ukraine are difficult and most communities cannot invite those they would like to invite for religious purposes, such as to lead worship meetings or conduct education. Individuals can bring in only small quantities of religious literature.

This enforced isolation affects many other communities in addition to the Catholics, whose Bishop, Stepan Meniuk, Greek Catholic priest Fr Mykhailo and Roman Catholic priest Fr Rapa are denied entry or denied permission to live there permanently to minister to their communities (see above).

The local hierarch of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Bishop Afanasi (Yavorsky) of Luhansk and Starobilsk (who is based in the Ukrainian government controlled part of Luhansk Region), is not allowed to enter rebel-held territory in Luhansk. "I tried in June 2019, but they didn't let me in," he told Forum 18. "Other priests of ours can't go in either." At the same time, the two priests of that Church based in Luhansk were not allowed to leave rebel-held territory, though the ban for both has now been lifted (see above).

The lack of priests meant that the Orthodox Church of Ukraine had to close its second church in rebel-held Luhansk. Lack of contact with the rest of the Church in government controlled Ukraine means that the Church in Luhansk has to survive on the meagre donations from impoverished parishioners.

As all Protestant communities are regarded as illegal, they are unable to invite leaders or teachers from outside. "Our pastors are hungry for fellowship," a Protestant from elsewhere in Ukraine who maintains contacts with local Protestant leaders told Forum 18. "They feel very isolated."

Punishments for worship meetings

Those who conduct worship meetings without official permission risk punishment. Courts generally punish religious leaders under Administrative Code Article 20.2. The LPR Administrative Code, which draws heavily on Russia's Administrative Code, was adopted in July 2016.

Administrative Code Article 20.2 punishes "Violation of the established procedure for organising or conducting gatherings, meetings, demonstrations, processions or pickets".

Part 1 punishes "Violation by organisers of public events of the established procedure for organising or conducting gatherings, meetings, demonstrations, processions or pickets" with for individuals fines of 3,000 to 5,000 Russian Roubles or community work of up to 30 hours.

Part 2 punishes holding public meetings without informing the authorities, with for individuals fines of 5,000 to 10,000 Russian Roubles, community work of up to 50 hours, or up to 10 days' imprisonment.

A fine of 5,000 Russian Roubles (the LPR uses the Russian Rouble) is equivalent to 1,930 Ukrainian Hryvnia, 715 Norwegian Kroner, 70 Euros or 80 US Dollars. It represents more than three weeks' local average wage for those in formal work.

Fines, community work order for leading worship meetings

Officials have brought prosecutions against at least six local religious leaders under Administrative Code Article 20.2, Part 2 in 2019 for leading meetings for worship without permission from officials. Of the known cases, two religious leaders were fined and one was given a community work order, while the other three avoided punishment. All the cases known to Forum 18 involve Protestants.

About ten masked and armed fighters raided a worship meeting in February of Path of Salvation independent Baptist church in the city of Luhansk. They claim to have found religious literature which church members insist they planted. At a final hearing on 21 March, a Luhansk court acquitted 82-year-old Pastor Anatoly Tolstenko on charges of "illegal worship" and storing religious literature which the authorities regarded as "extremist". The judge ruled that he had committed no wrongdoing.

Following a police raid on 24 March on the Sunday meeting for worship of a Protestant community in the town of Sverdlovsk [official Ukrainian name Dovzhansk], officials brought charges against Pastor Nikolai Muratov, who is in his seventies. On 27 March, Sverdlovsk City and District Court decided not to punish Pastor Muratov.

Following a police raid on 21 April on the Sunday meeting for worship of the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in the town of Krasnodon [official Ukrainian name Sorokyne], officials brought charges against Pastor Vladimir Rytikov. On 20 June, Krasnodon Town and District Court found him guilty under Administrative Code Article 20.2, Part 2 and sentenced him to 20 hours of community work.

Pastor Rytikov appealed against his conviction and punishment, but on 21 October Luhansk Supreme Court rejected his appeal, Supreme Court officials told Forum 18 the same day. Church members accompanied Pastor Rytikov to the court to give their support, praying with him before and after the hearing, and during the break in proceedings.

"I explained to the court that I consider myself not guilty," Pastor Rytikov noted after the hearing, "and that we have been meeting at the same place since 1961, that entry to our services is free to anyone who wishes, and that the authorities know this."

After Pastor Rytikov told the Supreme Court that he was being punished for his faith, Judge Tatyana Minskaya responded: "We are trying you not for your faith but for breaking the law."

Officials brought charges in summer 2019 against Pyotr Nagorny, leader of a Baptist Union congregation in the village of Slavyanoserbsk. They sought to punish him for visiting a sick member of his congregation with several other church members. Neighbours reported them to the police. Slavyanoserbsk District Court found him guilty under Administrative Code Article 20.2, Part 2 and fined him 5,000 Russian Roubles. This represents more than three weeks' average local wage for those in formal work.

Pastor Nagorny appealed against his conviction and fine. On 24 July, Luhansk Supreme Court overturned his punishment and sent the case back to the lower court, Supreme Court officials told Forum 18 on 16 October.

Slavyanoserbsk District Court cancelled the case against Pastor Nagorny on 11 September, court officials told Forum 18 on 18 October.

Officials brought charges in summer 2019 against Vladimir Devyanin, leader of a Baptist Union congregation in the town of Kirovsk [official Ukrainian name Holubivka]. Kirovsk Town Court found him guilty under Administrative Code Article 20.2, Part 2 and fined him 7,000 Russian Roubles. This represents more than a month's average local wage for those in formal work.

Pastor Devyanin appealed against his conviction and fine, but on 26 August Luhansk Supreme Court rejected his appeal, Supreme Court officials told Forum 18 on 21 October.

Following a police raid on 4 August on the Sunday meeting for worship of Krasnodon Council of Churches Baptist congregation, officials brought charges against Pastor Pyotr Tatarenko. On 7 October, Krasnodon Town and District Court found Tatarenko guilty under Administrative Code Article 20.2, Part 2 and fined him 7,000 Russian Roubles. This represents more than a month's average local wage for those in formal work.

Pastor Tatarenko has appealed against his conviction and fine to Luhansk Supreme Court. No date has yet been set for a hearing.

DONBAS: Luhansk: Community work, fines, property seizure

A Baptist leader in Krasnodon hopes to overturn a punishment of 20 hours' community work when the case resumes at the Supreme Court in Luhansk on 21 October. Krasnodon court punished Pastor Vladimir Rytikov for leading an unapproved Sunday worship meeting which police raided in April. Another pastor was fined in October for leading worship in August, which police also raided.

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (16.10.2019) - <https://bit.ly/339DVEM> - Baptist pastor Vladimir Rytikov is hoping to overturn a sentence of 20 hours' community work handed down to punish him for leading a Sunday meeting for worship without official permission which police raided in April. The case is due to resume at noon on 21 October under Judge Tatyana Minskaya at the Supreme Court of the unrecognised Luhansk People's Republic in eastern Ukraine.

Pastor Rytikov, who is 60, leads the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in the town of Krasnodon [official Ukrainian name Sorokyne], just a few kilometres from the eastern border with Russia. Like all Council of Churches congregations it does not seek official registration (see below).

One of the officers involved in the April raid on the Baptist community, Major Ruslan Volodin, defended it and the subsequent prosecutions. "They meet illegally," he insisted to Forum 18. "Under our laws they must be registered" (see below).

Another leader of the Krasnodon Baptist congregation, Pastor Pyotr Tatarenko, is to appeal to the Supreme Court after he was fined more than a month's average local wage on 7 October after an August police raid on the church's Sunday worship (see below).

In mid-October, court bailiffs started selling off property seized from Pastor Rytikov to meet a 2018 fine for leading unapproved worship meetings which he had refused to pay. Krasnodon's chief bailiff refused to discuss why she and her colleagues were seizing and selling Pastor Rytikov's property (see below).

Pastors Rytikov and Tatarenko sent a message to fellow church members outside the region, thanking them for "your participation in our sorrows and persecutions, and for your prayers" (see below).

Pro-Russian rebels seized parts of Ukraine's Luhansk Region in March 2014 and the following month proclaimed what they called the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR). Heavy fighting ensued. The rebel administration, which currently controls about a third of Ukraine's Luhansk Region, has declared a state of martial law.

Pro-Russian rebels similarly seized parts of Ukraine's Donetsk Region in April 2014 and proclaimed what they called the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). Heavy fighting ensued. The rebel administration currently controls nearly half of Ukraine's Donetsk Region. The rebel-held area adjoins the rebel-held area of Luhansk Region.

The rebel Luhansk authorities insist that religious communities that have not undergone local registration are illegal. They point to a May 2015 Decree by Igor Plotnitsky, the then Head of the unrecognised entity, banning mass events while the area was under martial law, and the February 2018 local Religion Law approved by the LPR People's Council.

The rebel LPR authorities banned all exercise of freedom of religion or belief by communities that did not gain registration with their Justice Ministry by the extended deadline of 15 October 2018. Those rejected include all Protestant communities.

The Baptist Union reluctantly decided that its congregations could no longer meet publicly for services after the last Sunday worship on 10 March.

Communities which did not apply for registration, such as Jehovah's Witnesses (who knew they would not be accepted) and Council of Churches Baptists (who choose not to seek registration on principle), are likewise regarded as "illegal".

Punishments for worship meetings

Courts generally punish religious leaders under Administrative Code Article 20.2. The LPR Administrative Code, which draws heavily on Russia's Administrative Code, was adopted in July 2016.

Administrative Code Article 20.2 punishes "Violation of the established procedure for organising or conducting gatherings, meetings, demonstrations, processions or pickets".

Part 1 punishes "Violation by organisers of public events of the established procedure for organising or conducting gatherings, meetings, demonstrations, processions or pickets" with for individuals fines of 3,000 to 5,000 Russian Roubles or community work of up to 30 hours.

Part 2 punishes holding public meetings without informing the authorities, with for individuals fines of 5,000 to 10,000 Russian Roubles, community work of up to 50 hours, or up to 10 days' imprisonment.

A fine of 5,000 Russian Roubles (the LPR uses the Russian Rouble) is equivalent to 1,930 Ukrainian Hryvnia, 715 Norwegian Kroner, 70 Euros or 80 US Dollars. It represents more than three weeks' local average wages for those in formal work.

As well as the Krasnodon Council of Churches Baptist congregation, several Protestant congregations are known to have been raided in 2019. In two separate cases in March, courts chose not to punish two Protestant pastors (both of them elderly) accused of leading illegal meetings for worship.

In March and again in April, officers of the police Department for Combating Extremism and Organised Crime raided and searched Holy Trinity Cathedral in Luhansk belonging to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Officers questioned two priests and banned them from leaving the area. The investigation of one of them continues.

Raid on Krasnodon Baptist worship meeting

On 21 April at least four police officers came to the home in Krasnodon [official Ukrainian name Sorokyne] where a Council of Churches Baptist congregation meets regularly for worship each Friday, Sunday and on special days.

The officers – who included Major Ruslan Volodin (who wrote up the subsequent report) and Major Oleg Kovalyov - ordered church members to halt their Sunday morning service. They demanded that church members not meet again without official registration.

"They promised that if we still gather they will come to every service and drive us out, and not allow us the possibility of meeting," church members recounted. "We explained that we have been meeting without registration since 1961, that registration of the church of Christ on conditions which contradict the teaching of Christ is impossible, as they would turn church leaders into traitors."

Officials took the names and other details of all those present. They then took three church leaders, including the pastor Vladimir Rytikov, to the police station. The three refused to give the police any statements or sign any documents. "We told them that we don't consider ourselves guilty as, in gathering for common prayer, we are fulfilling God's Will, and that while laws and authorities come and go, God's Word was and remains unchanged. The official representatives didn't like this answer."

Officers fingerprinted and photographed each of the three church leaders before releasing them.

Major Volodin defended the April raid on the Baptist community and the subsequent prosecutions. "They meet illegally," he insisted to Forum 18 from Krasnodon on 16 October. "Under our laws they must be registered." Asked why they have to seek permission to be allowed to worship, he said: "It wasn't me who adopted these laws."

Asked who the Baptists might be harming by meeting for worship in a home without seeking permission, Major Volodin responded: "They've never done me any harm, but if large numbers of people gather they have to seek permission."

First 2019 Krasnodon Baptist prosecution

On 20 May, two police officers came to Pastor Rytikov's house to hand him a record of an offence under Administrative Code Article 20.2, Part 2. They told him the case was being sent to Krasnodon Town and District Court and that he would be punished "for meetings of believers without the authorities' permission".

"All other believers obey the law but you don't want to," one of the officers told Rytikov. "You are not like all the others." He warned the pastor that for defying the law he would be given a bigger fine than in 2018. "All your property could be confiscated."

When Pastor Rytikov said that God would decide what happens, one of the officers responded: "We'll keep on drawing up records of offences against you."

On 4 June, Pastor Rytikov received a summons to appear at 9am on 12 June at Krasnodon Town and District Court.

At 8am on 12 June, an hour before Pastor Rytikov was due in court, police officers came to his house and took him to the police station and then to court. About 15 church members arrived to support him in the hearing and they were allowed in.

Pastor Rytikov began by asking Judge E. Pridatko if he could pray, which she reluctantly agreed to. She then asked what the church does at its meetings. "We pray, read the Bible, and praise God in song," Pastor Rytikov responded. He then invited the Judge to attend a Sunday service.

Judge Pridatko then asked why the church does not register. Pastor Rytikov explained the church's position that registration contradicts the Bible. As the seven appointed witnesses failed to appear, the Judge adjourned the case until 20 June.

At the 20 June hearing, Judge Pridatko found Pastor Rytikov guilty, according to the decision seen by Forum 18. Given his "lack of repentance or recognition of having committed an offence", she sentenced him to 20 hours of community work.

Telephones at Krasnodon Town and District Court went unanswered each time Forum 18 called on 16 October.

After Pastor Rytikov received the written decision on 9 August, he lodged an appeal to the LPR Supreme Court in Luhansk.

The first Supreme Court hearing was held under Judge Tatyana Minskaya on 8 October, according to court records. About 40 church members attended the court hearing, greeting Pastor Rytikov on the court steps afterwards with flowers.

The hearing is due to continue at noon on 21 October, Judge Minskaya's assistant told Forum 18 from the court on 16 October. The assistant said she was not authorised to put any calls directly through to a judge.

Second 2019 Krasnodon Baptist prosecution

Police raided the Krasnodon Council of Churches congregation again during Sunday worship on 4 August. Rytikov was away and the service was led by the second pastor, Pyotr Tatarenko. "Police surrounded the house and took Pyotr away," fellow Baptists told Forum 18. "They released him later."

Following the raid, officers similarly accused Tatarenko of leading worship without registration or informing the authorities under Administrative Code Article 20.2, Part 2. The case was presented to Krasnodon Town and District Court on 21 August and was initially due to be heard on 26 August, according to the court summons seen by Forum 18.

On 23 September, Judge Yuliya Kudrevatykh of Krasnodon Town and District Court finally began hearing the case against Tatarenko. He told the Court that church members regard registration as betrayal of each other. He said a congress of the International Union of Evangelical Christians/Baptists – of which the congregation is a member – adopts a position on registration. The hearing was then adjourned.

On 7 October, Judge Kudrevatykh found Tatarenko guilty and fined him 7,000 Russian Roubles (the LPR uses the Russian Rouble). This represents more than a month's average local wage for those in formal work. He intends to appeal against his conviction to LPR's Supreme Court.

About 35 church members attended the hearing, greeting Tatarenko afterwards on the steps of the court with flowers.

Pastors Rytikov and Tatarenko sent a message to fellow church members outside the region, thanking them for "your participation in our sorrows and persecutions, and for your prayers".

Seized property being sold

In mid-October, Bailiffs started selling off property seized from Pastor Rytikov and his family because of an unpaid 2018 fine, fellow Baptists told Forum 18.

Officials raided the church's regular Sunday meeting for worship in June 2018. Pastor Rytikov refused to pay a fine of 8,000 Russian Roubles (about five weeks' average wages for those in formal work) handed down on 11 July 2018 to punish him for leading an unapproved worship meeting. Krasnodon Town and District Court rejected Pastor Rytikov's appeal against the fine the following month.

In September 2018, court bailiffs opened proceedings to recover the money for the unpaid fine. On 18 October, they came to Pastor Rytikov's home in Krasnodon and summoned him to court that day. There, he told Judge Yuliya Kudrevatykh that he had no intention of paying the fine because he does not regard himself as guilty of any wrongdoing.

Judge Kudrevatykh found him guilty under Administrative Code Article 20.26, Part 1 of failing to pay the fine. She handed him an additional punishment of 20 hours' community service. Pastor Rytikov appealed against this extra punishment to the LPR Supreme Court in Luhansk. On 14 November 2018, the court overturned the community service punishment. However, the July 2018 fine remained in force.

On 9 November 2018, four court bailiffs came to Pastor Rytikov's home, going through all the rooms, recording what property he had and taking photographs.

A 28 February 2019 order from court bailiff Yuliya Getman said Pastor Rytikov owed 8,000 Russian Roubles from the unpaid fine, a bailiffs' fee of 800 Russian Roubles and expenses

in recovering the money of 185 Russian Roubles. She put a restraining order on his car and ordered him not to dispose of any of his other property.

In a 4 March order, the head of the Krasnodon bailiffs, Natalya Komissarova, ordered Pastor Rytikov to present his car to bailiffs on the morning of 21 March. She warned him that failing to abide by this would constitute an administrative offence with fines of 1,000 to 3,000 Russian Roubles. However, four years earlier Pastor Rytikov gave the car to his son, who does not live in the area.

On 22 March, four court bailiffs raided Pastor Rytikov's home, accompanied by two police officers and two official witnesses. Not finding the car, they seized a bread maker and music centre.

On 4 June, the same day that Pastor Rytikov received notification of his 12 June court hearing, he received a notification that property seized from him in March would be sold. Items due for sale included the bread maker and music centre, according to documents seen by Forum 18.

The head of the Krasnodon bailiffs, Komissarova, refused to discuss the enforced sale of Pastor Rytikov's property. "I have no comment," she told Forum 18 from Krasnodon on 16 October. "I am forbidden from discussing my work with the media."

Greek Church recognizes autocephaly of Ukrainian Orthodox Church

UNIAN (12.10.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2OHxxQx> - The establishment of full Eucharistic unity and official relations between the Local Churches of Greece and Ukraine is a new page that will forever be bound in our history and in our hearts, Epifaniy said.

Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine, Primate of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) Epifaniy (Epiphanius) says the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece has decided to recognize the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

In particular, the Council of Bishops of the Church of Greece at an extraordinary meeting on October 12 supported the relevant decision by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

"I am grateful to my Brother in Christ, His Beatitude Ieronymos, Archbishop of Athens and all Greece, President of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, and Brother Hierarchs of the Council of Hierarchs, for today determining to support and follow the canonical and historical decisions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, opening the possibility of full interaction between our two Local Autocephalous Churches in all spheres," Epifaniy wrote on Facebook on October 12.

He added that the histories of our two ancient nations, Greece and Ukraine, include many shared pages of friendship and cooperation.

"The establishment of full Eucharistic unity and official relations between the Local Churches of Greece and Ukraine is a new page that will forever be bound in our history and in our hearts," he said.

"I hope that in the near future I will have the pleasure of visiting Athens, close to my heart, and personally conveying our feelings of love and respect to His Beatitude Archbishop Ieronymos, Brother Hierarchs, and the entire Church of Greece," Epifaniy added.

As UNIAN reported earlier, the Unification Council of members of the Ukrainian Orthodox churches in Kyiv on December 15 elected Metropolitan of Pereyaslavsky and Bila Tserkva from the then Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate Epifaniy (also known as Epiphanius I) as head of the new local Orthodox church in Ukraine.

On January 6, Epifaniy, as Primate of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine, received from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in Istanbul the tomos of autocephaly (independence) of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine Epifaniy was inaugurated as Primate of the newly created Orthodox Church of Ukraine at Kyiv's Saint Sophia Cathedral on February 3.

Read more on UNIAN: <https://www.unian.info/society/10717875-greek-church-recognizes-autocephaly-of-ukrainian-orthodox-church.html>

Violation of the right to freedom of conscience and religion in the occupied Crimea

Statement by Zarema Bariieva, Committee for the protection of rights of the Crimean Tatar people for the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019 of the OSCE/ ODIHR

Committee (19.09.2019) - Distinguished moderator, representatives of OSCE member states and participants!

Having occupied Crimea in 2014, in violation of international law, Russia began systemic violations of human rights. Russian repressive practices are gaining more and more momentum. Searches, arrests, detentions are not single episodes any more but systemic and institutionalized. Every day, human rights defenders record dozens of cases of human rights violations throughout Crimea, including violations of freedom of religion. The occupation power is trying to find more and more artificial reasons to arrest completely innocent people, accusing them of crimes that they have never committed. Here are just a few examples registered by the Crimean Tatar Resource Center over the first half of 2019:

- On January 18, on the eve of Friday prayer police officers and riot police arrived at the mosque in Dubki village of Simferopol region. They tried to substitute the imam;
- On March 17, in Sary-su district, Belogorsk, there was an attempt to prevent a prayer service dedicated to illegally convicted political prisoners and the missing during the occupation period of Crimea;
- On March 27, the Russian authorities in occupied Crimea prematurely terminated the lease agreement for the premises, which houses the only Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the peninsula. The "Arbitration Court "of Crimea ordered the church to return the premises to the "Ministry of Property and Land Relations "
- On April 15, in the village Sturmovoje, Balaklava district of Sevastopol, officers of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation searched the house of imam of the local mosque Rustem Abilev, after which he was detained and arrested.

Under the guise of fighting against terrorist organizations and their leaders, the occupation authorities are fighting against dissent and socially active citizens. The so-called Crimean authorities continue conducting regular searches in the households of the Crimean Tatar

and Ukrainian activists. Most of the searches carried out in the first half of 2019 were related to alleged participation in organizations prohibited in the Russian Federation such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Jehovah's Witnesses. The largest number of searches was recorded in March and in June 2019, when security officials massively searched 26 and 8 houses of the Crimean Tatars on suspicion of participating in the Hizb ut-Tahrir organization banned in Russia and 9 houses of representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization.

Since the beginning of the occupation of Crimea, Russia has prosecuted 63 Crimeans for allegedly participating in or organizing the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir, 50 out of 63 have already been illegally transferred to the territory of the Russian Federation. 13 were sentenced to a term of 5 to 17 years in high security prisons. We urge the OSCE member states to do their best and help to return these people from Russian prisons back to their families. We recommend Russian Federation to release all illegally persecuted people in the so-called Hizb ut-Tahrir case.

Thank you very much for your attention!

Zarema Bariieva: zarbariieva@gmail.com

Russia is barbarically vandalizing UNESCO world heritage site at Chersonese in occupied Crimea

Russia has dangerous construction plans for a site in occupied Crimea on the UNESCO World Heritage List, with one of the reasons linked with Moscow's attempts to rewrite its own history.

UKRINFORM (10.09.2019) - <https://bit.ly/32gXavF> - As UNESCO explains, the site in Crimea holds the remains of the ancient city of Tauric Chersonese which was founded by Dorian Greeks in the 5th century BC. As well as urban remains, there is also agricultural land, divided into several hundreds of chora, or rectangular plots of equal size which were used for vineyards. Production from the latter was exported by the city which thrived until the 15th century.

Chersonese was added to the World Heritage List in 2013, with mention then of the threats posed to the site by its close proximity to the expanding boundaries of Sevastopol and major issues with conservation.

Recent developments at Chersonese are already putting the site in serious danger, and the plans that the Russian occupiers are proposing only intensify the danger.

During the latest illegal visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin on 11 August, Russian state television showed him attending an elaborate event with lights and special effects staged at the site of the ruins. TV1 reported that Putin had been told of "plans for the development of the reserve", with these including a museum of Christianity, and archaeological center and a museum of antiquity and Byzantine.

The ideas were put forward by Metropolitan Tikhon (Shevkunov) of Pskov and Porkhov, who is often described as the former KGB agent's confessor, and who clearly shares Putin's

'Russian world' ideas. The performance was probably based on a version of the history of Crimea and Chersonese written by Tikhon, whose writing plans also include a book about Joseph Stalin.

Whether or not there was an original plan for a museum of Christianity in 1914, it is very clear why such a museum fits the narrative which Moscow has pushed about Crimea and its attempts to treat the peninsula's history as its own. Any link with Russia begins with the peninsula's seizure as part of the Russian Empire in 1783. It is a matter of dispute whether Vladimir [or Volodymyr] the Great was himself baptized in Chersonese or in Kyiv, however, the Russian Orthodox Church had certainly earlier never questioned that the mass baptism that marked the Christianization of Kyivan Rus in 988 took place in Kyiv. This is a problem for adherents of 'Russian world' mythology, and it seems likely that the museum would be aimed at pushing a different, more 'Russian', version of events, one that would gel with Putin's claim that Crimea has 'sacred' significance for Russia.

Anatoly Tumanov, who earlier worked at the Tauric Chersonese museum complex, has told Krym.Realii that under Russian control the museum is not run by scholars, but by "some kind of people with the words 'Russian Foundation – my history' on their backs". He says that they do whatever they please and clearly have no idea where they are, as seen by how they prop metallic fencing against ancient walls.

Tumanov reacted also with horror to another idea floated by the Russian Orthodox Church that it has an active monastery on the territory of Chersonese. This, he says, could seriously damage this monument of world heritage.

Albina Gaevskaya is another Sevastopol scholar, who shares Tumanov's concerns.

In a Facebook post entitled 'Save Chersonese!' on 12 August, she posted a copy of her letter to Vladimir Medinsky, Russia's minister of culture.

In it she points out that UNESCO has not been carrying out monitoring visits to Chersonese since 2014, as it does not recognize Russia's 'jurisdiction' It is probably because of this, she says, that the current management of the museum are carrying out disastrous 'reconstruction' of the ruins of the ancient city without any obstruction and with impunity.

She warns that, as a result, the ancient city could simply disappear. She mentions wooden boards being used to cover the stone roads of the city, with no consideration of the state that these boards will get in. She is even more damning of the methods used to popularize the place, with little booths built where people can supposedly learn about its history and "incredibly ugly banners that look like gallows". They appear to be trying to turn the place into something like a summer opera theatre or state, with tens or hundreds of meters of cables being stretched out over the territory of the monument for lighting, etc. All of this is enabling them to make profit from events there, but the massive constructions are seriously threatening the integrity of these ruins. Gaevskaya warns that UNESCO may well strip the site of its world heritage status if it sees what is being done to the ancient ruins, how structures that have nothing to do with Chersonese are being erected, and how they're rolling machines weighing many tons over areas that have not yet been excavated.

While UNESCO is, hopefully, following developments, it has not yet visited Crimea, with the reason in its case, as with other international bodies and NGOs, is probably deliberate policy by Russia. Crimea remains Ukrainian territory, and, while Kyiv is not prohibiting any visits to the peninsula, it does demand that delegations cross into Crimea from mainland Ukraine. Russia, on the other hand, is demanding that any delegates go from Russia and in accordance with Russian legislation. This probably explains why, despite the reports

from Ukraine's Foreign Ministry that UNESCO would be sending a direct monitoring delegation in April 2019, this has so far not happened.

Any major construction work at the site of Tauric Chersones, is prohibited, and all conservation measures should be clearly detailed, and agreed with UNESCO.

Russia has already caused immeasurable damage to other sites of historic and national significance in occupied Crimea, with the worst and most barbaric damage inflicted on the 16th Century Khan's Palace in Bakhchysarai, a site of immense significance for Crimean Tatars in particular, and for Ukraine. Details here: ['Closed for Destruction': Russia is digging up 16th Century Crimean Tatar Khan's Palace.](#)

Russia's destruction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Crimea hits unexpected hurdle

By Halya Coynash

Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (10.09.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2m1sSfU> - With Russia on the verge of destroying virtually the last remaining Ukrainian Orthodox Church place of worship in occupied Crimea, the UN Human Rights Committee has stepped in. The Committee has applied its Rule 94 as an interim measures, and thus halted the eviction of the congregation from the Cathedral of Vladimir and Olga in the centre of Simferopol. This is, of course, if Russia does not simply flout the order, however Serhiy Zayets, who is representing 50 members of the congregation, notes that Russia is shortly due to report to UN bodies on its human rights record in a broader context. Flagrant refusal to obey such a ruling is fraught with "serious reputational losses", Zayets believes.

Zayets applied to the UN Human Rights Committee on behalf of over fifty parishioners who complain of persecution by the Russian occupation authorities. In the letter dated 6 September, which he has made public, the Committee informs that the case has been accepted, and that Russia "has been requested" to not evict the congregation from the Cathedral until the case has been considered. Russia has also been invited to provide comments on the substance of the complaints made.

This was categorically not what Russia was expecting. Zayets reports that the Russian-controlled court of appeal had, at the end of August, upheld the ruling of the de facto 'Crimean Arbitration Court' from 28 June. This had ordered the dissolution of the lease agreement for the Cathedral of Vladimir and Olga signed in 2002 between the Ukrainian authorities (the Crimean Property Fund) and the Crimean Eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Kyiv Patriarchate, and the eviction of the Church congregation from the Cathedral. Klyment had reported on 8 February this year that he had received a writ ordering that he vacate the Cathedral within 30 days. The Archbishop then warned that this was likely to lead to eight parishes in rural areas also being forced to close. On 27 March, the Church received another letter from this 'ministry', which terminated the lease agreement. The letter claimed that this was because the Church is in debt, however the sum, as Zayets mentioned, was nominal, and in fact the Archbishop denies that anything at all is owed.

All such court procedure was, like the Russian-controlled appeal court ruling, a formal pretext. As Zayets noted, the occupation regime had not even waited for the final stage and had already begun destroying Church property under the guise of 'renovations' and

had set up a fence around the building. The dismantling of the roof resulted in a significant part of the Cathedral being flooded. Then in late July 2019, Archbishop Klyment made photos public of the devastation inside the premises of the Cathedral and the Eparchy. He reported that the effective plundering of the Cathedral had taken place while he was away. A large wooden Cross, which they had obviously decided was not worth stealing, could be seen dumped, together with workmen's equipment. The Archbishop stressed that this attack on the Church was a blow to Ukrainians for whom the Church, since 2014, has provided the only hearth for their Ukrainian identity since annexation.

The battle to seize control of the Cathedral of Vladimir and Olga began soon after Russia's invasion and has continued, with Klyment even attacked during a raid on the Cathedral in which crosses and icons were seized. This is partly a move aimed at seizing a major site in Simferopol, which Klyment has said he was almost immediately after annexation offered 200 thousand USD to vacate. Since he, obviously, refused, the occupation regime used trumped-up pretexts for its plunder.

This move is also part of the aggressive offensive and repressive measures against the Ukrainian Church in Crimea since annexation and against Klyment himself. He was detained on 3 March, when he was already seated on a coach to Rostov in Russia for the latest hearing in the 'trial' of Ukrainian political prisoner Pavlo Hryb. Two pretexts were found, both insultingly implausible, for holding Klyment in detention until late evening. It is possible that the occupation authorities were planning administrative arrest, but were deterred by the publicity the move received.

All faiths, except the Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate, have come under fire in occupied Crimea, but the Orthodox Church under the Kyiv Patriarchate was the first to be attacked, probably because of its openly pro-Ukrainian position and its public statement on 11 March 2014 condemning Russian occupation of Crimea.

In just the first year, 38 out of 46 parishes ceased to exist, and in at very least three cases, churches were seized by the occupation regime: in Sevastopol; Simferopol and in the village of Perevalne. Of 25 priests in 2014, by October 2018 there were only four. There had been nine until the summer of 2018, however five had left for mainland Ukraine after a number of searches of the homes of members of the Ukrainian Cultural Centre and after it became clear that the lack of a Russian passport was likely to be used against them.

Lack of such registration has given Russia weapons to use in depriving the Church and believers of their places of worship and of other rights. Other methods have also been used, including the threat of physical reprisals by the armed paramilitaries, especially in 2014, vulnerability over the lack of Russian citizenship and also economic intimidation. There have been threats, for example, against those businesspeople who provided premises for the Church to use, with this a reason why many religious communities have lost their places of worship.

Jehovah's Witnesses of Kryvyi Rih's Ternivsky District v. Ukraine

By Halya Coynash

Registrar of the Court (03.09.2019) - The applicant community is the Religious

Community of Jehovah's Witnesses of Kryvyi Rih, Ternivsky District, Dnipropetrovsk Region.

Once a judgment becomes final, it is transmitted to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for supervision of its execution. Further information about the execution process can be found here: <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/execution>. The case concerned the community's complaint that it had not been able to construct a building for worship on land it had purchased owing to the domestic authorities' inactivity.

In 2004 the applicant community purchased a residential building in Kryvyi Rih in order subsequently to erect a place of worship, a "Kingdom Hall", on the site. In February 2005 the city's Architecture and Planning Council approved the placement of the Kingdom Hall on the land and seven months later the city's planning authority submitted a draft decision to approve a land allocation project and to grant the applicant community a lease, but this plan was not adopted at subsequent City Council meetings.

In February 2007 the applicant community initiated a first set of proceedings against the City Council, seeking to have its lack of activity declared unlawful. In June 2007 the Regional Court allowed the claim, but in August 2007 a draft decision on the applicant community's project failed to get enough votes to be adopted by the City Council.

In January 2008 the community lodged a second claim against the City Council for a declaration that it had the right to lease the plot of land and for the City Council to be ordered to enter into a lease agreement. In December 2008 the Regional Court rejected the claim, holding in particular that land allocation decisions fell within the exclusive competence of councils and that the courts could not replace the City Council and take the decision in its place. All further appeals by the religious community were rejected.

Relying in particular on Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience, and religion) and Article 1 (protection of property) of Protocol No. 1, the applicant community alleged that the City Council's failure to allow it to establish a place of worship had breached its rights.

Violation of Article 9 Violation of Article 1 of Protocol No. 1

The European Court

1. *Declares*, unanimously, the application admissible;
2. *Holds*, by six votes to one, that there has been a violation of Article 9 of the Convention;
3. *Holds*, unanimously, that there has been a violation of Article 1 of Protocol No. 1;
4. *Holds*, unanimously, that the complaints under Articles 6 and 13 of the Convention raise no separate issue;
5. *Holds*, unanimously,
 - (a) that the respondent State is to pay the applicant community, within three months from the date on which the judgment becomes final in accordance with Article 44 § 2 of the Convention, the following amounts, to be converted into the currency of the respondent State at the rate applicable at the date of settlement:
 - (i) EUR 1,000 (one thousand euros), plus any tax that may be chargeable, in respect of non-pecuniary damage;
 - (ii) EUR 6,000 (six thousand euros), plus any tax that may be chargeable to the applicant community, in respect of costs and expenses;
 - (b) that from the expiry of the above-mentioned three months until settlement simple interest shall be payable on the above amounts at a rate equal to the marginal lending rate of the European Central Bank during the default period plus three percentage points;
6. *Dismisses*, unanimously, the remainder of the applicant community's claim for just satisfaction.

Done in English, and notified in writing on 3 September 2019, pursuant to Rule 77 §§ 2 and 3 of the Rules of Court.

CRIMEA: Prisoner sent to Russia, more awaiting trial

Arrested in 2017, sentenced in January 2019, Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov has lost all his appeals. In May he was transferred from occupied Crimea to a labour camp in Russia, where he was placed in punishment cell. A court extended Imam Rustem Abilev's pre-trial detention. Russian FSB officers raided Jehovah's Witnesses in Yevpatoriya and Sevastopol, bringing another criminal case.

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (26.07.2019) - <https://bit.ly/31SVhof> - In May, the Russian authorities transferred 49-year-old Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov from occupied Crimea to a labour camp in Russia. After his eventual arrival at the camp in Kabardino-Balkariya, the camp administration placed him in a punishment cell. Suleimanov, who on 11 July lost his second appeal against his four-year jail term, is planning an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

The 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War covers the rights of civilians in territories occupied by another state (described as "protected persons"). Article 76 includes the provision: "Protected persons accused of offences shall be detained in the occupied country, and if convicted they shall serve their sentences therein."

Suleimanov – who has been in jail since his October 2017 arrest - met with friends to study his faith in local mosques. Prosecutors accused him of being a member of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, which Russia's Supreme Court has banned as an "extremist" organisation (see below).

Meanwhile, a court in Sevastopol has extended the pre-trial detention of 45-year-old Imam Rustem Abilev. Arrested by the Russian FSB security service on 15 April, he is being investigated on charges of "public calls for extremist activity". "Local residents and activists say Rustem Abilev cannot have called for extremism," a Radio Free Europe journalist told Forum 18 in April (see below).

Russia's FSB security service is also seeking to prosecute Crimean Jehovah's Witnesses, a community Russia's Supreme Court has also banned as an "extremist" organisation.

FSB officers raided Jehovah's Witnesses meeting in a home in Yevpatoriya on 13 July. Officers singled out for interrogation Oleg Osetsky, questioning him all night at the police station although he felt unwell (see below).

On 4 June, Russian FSB investigators launched a criminal case against Sevastopol resident Viktor Stashevsky, accusing him of Jehovah's Witness activity. That evening, the FSB raided at least nine homes, with a further follow-up raid on 7 July (see below).

The FSB Investigator handling Stashevsky's case - Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin – is also conducting the criminal investigation into fellow Crimean Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov, launched in November 2018. Lieutenant Chumakin has repeatedly refused to talk to Forum 18 (see below).

Earlier in 2019, Suleimanov and Filatov were added to the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose accounts banks are obliged to freeze, apart from small transactions. Investigators had Abilev and Stashevsky added on 11 July (see below).

Annexation, restrictions imposed

Ukraine and the international community do not recognise Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea. The peninsula is now divided between two Russian federal regions, the Republic of Crimea (with its capital in Simferopol) and the port city of Sevastopol.

After the annexation Russia imposed its restrictions on freedom of religion and belief. Many religious communities have been raided, and many individuals have been fined for possessing books – such as the Muslim prayer collection "Fortress of a Muslim" - which have been banned as "extremist" in Russia.

Russia's Supreme Court banned the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement in 2009. The ban was extended to Crimea following Russia's 2014 annexation of the peninsula.

Russia's Supreme Court banned Jehovah's Witnesses in April 2017. It declared the Jehovah's Witness Russian headquarters in St Petersburg and all 395 local organisations "extremist", banned all their activity immediately, and ordered their property seized by the state. The ban was immediately imposed in Russian-occupied Crimea, where 22 communities were liquidated.

Religious communities and individuals in Crimea continue to be fined for not displaying the full name of their registered religious organisation at their place of worship, for meeting for worship without Russian state permission or advertising their faith. Forty such administrative prosecutions are known to have been brought in 2018 of which 28 ended with punishment.

Suleimanov: Moscow appeals fail, preparing Strasbourg case

Prisoner of conscience Renat Rustemovich Suleimanov (born 30 August 1969) was arrested in October 2017, accused of membership of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, which Russia's Supreme Court banned in 2009. The ban was extended to Crimea following Russia's 2014 annexation of the peninsula.

Suleimanov, a Crimean Tatar, was born in exile in Kazakhstan's then capital Almaty. When the Crimean Tatars were allowed to return to Crimea, he settled in the village of Molodezhnoe just north of Crimea's capital Simferopol. He is married with three young daughters.

Suleimanov and three friends met openly in mosques to discuss their faith. "At lessons we studied ayats [verses] from the Koran, the value of praying the namaz, and the zikr [reciting devotional phrases as a reminder of Allah]," one of the men told the court at their trial. "These lessons were not conspiratorial and took place in mosques."

Fifteen months after his arrest, Crimea's Supreme Court in Simferopol finally convicted Suleimanov and the three other men on 22 January 2019.

All four were sentenced under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2. This punishes organisation of or involvement in "the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity".

The Judge jailed Suleimanov for four years in an ordinary regime labour camp, followed by one year under restrictions. He handed the other three men suspended sentences, with one year under restrictions.

Suleimanov appealed for the first time against his conviction and four-year jail term to Russia's Supreme Court in Moscow. But in a closed hearing on 16 April, the Court rejected his appeal.

On 21 June, Suleimanov lodged a second appeal to Russia's Supreme Court. However, on 11 July without a hearing the Court declined to consider his appeal, according to court records.

Suleimanov's lawyer Roman Martynovskyy and his colleagues at the Regional Centre for Human Rights, originally based in Sevastopol but now in the Ukrainian capital Kiev, are preparing his case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, he told Forum 18 from Kiev on 26 July.

Suleimanov: Transferred to Russian jail

On 18 May, prison officials began the transfer of Suleimanov from the Investigation Prison in the Crimean capital Simferopol to serve his sentence at a labour camp (correctional colony) in the village of Kamenka near Kabardino-Balkariya's regional capital Nalchik in the Russian North Caucasus. Sometimes such transfers can take a month or longer.

Kamenka is about 950 kms (590 miles) by road from Simferopol.

Once arrived at the Kamenka camp Suleimanov was, like all newly-arrived prisoners, placed in quarantine, which usually lasts about two weeks. However in early July, immediately after the quarantine period, camp officials placed him in a punishment cell, his lawyer Martynovskyy told Forum 18.

An official at the Kamenka camp, who did not give his name, refused to discuss Suleimanov's conditions. "I won't give you any information on why he was put in the punishment cell," the official told Forum 18 on 26 July. "I don't have the right to do so." He said Forum 18 should send a letter to the camp head, Salikh Gurizhev.

"At present I am asking the camp administration why Suleimanov has been placed in a punishment cell, as they can do this only after a disciplinary warning," the lawyer Aleksandr Lesovoi – who represented Suleimanov in his earlier hearings - told Forum 18 from Simferopol on 24 July. "After getting a response from the camp administration, if there is a basis to do so I will challenge the decision to place Suleimanov in a punishment cell."

Forum 18 was unable to ask the camp official whether Suleimanov is allowed to have religious literature with him and to pray unimpeded. His lawyer Martynovskyy said he does not know if Suleimanov can exercise freedom of religion or belief in the camp or not.

Suleimanov's labour camp address:

361424 Kabardino-Balkariya
Chegemsky raion
Pos. Kamenka
Ul. D.A. Mizieva 1
Ispravitel'naya Koloniya No. 1
Suleimanovu Renatu Rustemovichu

Abilev: Pre-trial detention extended

The Russian FSB security service continues to investigate the criminal case against Rustem Enverovich Abilev (born 18 May 1984), Imam of the Khayat (Life) mosque in the village of Shturmovoe on the eastern edge of the city of Sevastopol.

On 5 June, Judge Anatoly Vasilenko of Sevastopol's Lenin District Court approved Imam Abilev's continued detention at the Investigation Prison in the Crimean capital Simferopol, court officials told Forum 18 on 25 July.

The FSB investigator Yuri Andreyev is investigating Imam Abilev under Russian Criminal Code Article 280, Part 1. This punishes "public calls for extremist activity" with a maximum punishment of four years' imprisonment and a ban on specific activity for the same period.

"Local residents and activists say Rustem Abilev cannot have called for extremism," Radio Free Europe journalist Taras Ibragimov told Forum 18 in April. "They insist he is not an extremist and don't believe the FSB allegations."

The telephone of the FSB Investigation Department in Sevastopol went unanswered each time Forum 18 called on 25 July.

FSB officers arrested Imam Abilev on 15 April as armed, masked men, most of them in camouflage with FSB insignia, raided Khayat mosque and his nearby home. Officers seized religious literature, hand-written notes and documents, computers and mobile phones. One masked man copied files from a laptop computer.

The following day, 16 April, Lenin District Court ordered Imam Abilev held in pre-trial detention for eight weeks, until 11 June. His lawyer Lenyara Gabdrakhmanova appealed against the pre-trial detention order to Sevastopol City Court. However, Judge Danil Zemlyukov rejected the appeal on 26 April, according to court records.

At the Investigator's instigation, on 11 July Abilev was added to the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose accounts banks are obliged to freeze, apart from small transactions.

Imam Abilev earned his living as head of the dentistry department at Sevastopol's City Hospital No. 6. However, following his arrest the hospital removed his name from its website.

Following his 15 April arrest, the FSB held Imam Abilev for several days in Sevastopol before transferring him to the Investigation Prison in Simferopol. He has been held there ever since.

Abilev's Investigation Prison address:

295006 Krym

g. Simferopol
Bulvar Lenina 4
Sledstvenny Izolyator No. 1
Abilevu Rustemu Enverovichu

Yevpatoriya: Raid on Jehovah's Witnesses

On the evening of 13 July, a group of friends and acquaintances gathered in a local woman's home in the western Crimean city of Yevpatoriya. Russian FSB security service officers surrounded the entrance to the stairwell of the block of flats. FSB officers then stormed the woman's flat, Jehovah's Witnesses noted.

FSB officers interrogated those present, filming the interrogations. They also recorded the personal details of those present, seizing personal documents, discs and any printed material they had.

FSB officers singled out 57-year-old Oleg Osetsky. "As a result of the interrogation, he began to feel unwell," Jehovah's Witnesses said, "but despite this they took him to the police station and questioned him all night until six o'clock in the morning." They then released him.

FSB officers admitted to Osetsky during the interrogation that they had been keeping him under surveillance for some time. It remains unclear if FSB investigators have launched a criminal case against Osetsky.

Forum 18 was unable to reach the FSB branch in Yevpatoriya on 25 July.

Sevastopol: Criminal Case, 9 raids

In late May or early June, a Jehovah's Witness family in Sevastopol began suspecting that officials were using their internet connection to spy on them covertly. They changed their internet connection.

On 4 June, Russian FSB investigators launched a criminal case against Sevastopol resident Viktor Vladimirovich Stashevsky (born 11 July 1966), a member of the former Sevastopol Jehovah's Witness community. The community gained Russian registration in May 2015, but was among the 22 Jehovah's Witness communities across the peninsula liquidated on 17 May 2017.

The liquidations of the 22 Crimean Jehovah's Witness communities came less than four weeks after Russia's Supreme Court in Moscow in April 2017 declared the Jehovah's Witness Russian headquarters in St Petersburg and all 395 local organisations "extremist", banned all their activity immediately, and ordered their property seized by the state.

Russian FSB officials are investigating Stashevsky under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. This punishes "Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity". The maximum punishment is ten years' imprisonment.

That evening, FSB security service officers raided at least nine local homes. The house searches were approved in advance by Judge Anatoly Vasilenko of Sevastopol's Lenin District Court. "In at least one case, officers forced their way into a flat in the absence of the owners, rendering the door unusable," Jehovah's Witnesses complained. "Searches

continued until deep in the night." Officers seized computers, computer hard discs, phones and tablet computers.

During the raid on the family which had changed their internet connection, a masked man billed as a "technical specialist" accompanied the raiding team, Jehovah's Witnesses said.

In one of the raids, FSB and Spetsnaz operatives detained Stashevsky and held him overnight in an investigation cell, Jehovah's Witnesses added. After making him sign a pledge not to leave the city they released him in the morning of 5 June.

That same morning after the raids, FSB Investigator Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin summoned for interrogation those whose homes the FSB had raided.

Lieutenant Chumakin, of the Investigation Department of the Russian FSB for Crimea and Sevastopol, is based in the Crimean capital Simferopol. He is also leading the criminal investigation into another Crimean Jehovah's Witness, Sergei Filatov from the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi (see below).

At Lieutenant Chumakin's instigation, on 11 July Stashevsky was added to the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose accounts banks are obliged to freeze, apart from small transactions.

The man who answered Lieutenant Chumakin's phone on 25 July immediately hung up when Forum 18 introduced itself.

FSB officers made a further raid in Sevastopol a month after the initial raids. In the early morning of 7 July, officers raided the home of Vladimir Petrovsky, Jehovah's Witnesses said.

Criminal investigations of three Jehovah's Witnesses continue

The criminal case opened against Viktor Stashevsky is the third known Jehovah's Witness criminal case in the peninsula. The FSB is still investigating two other cases, against three individuals. None of the three is under arrest.

On 10 November 2018, the FSB launched a case against Sergei Filatov from the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi. Five days later, the FSB and OMON riot police launched coordinated raids on eight Jehovah's Witness family homes. He has had to sign a pledge not to leave the town.

On 17 January 2019, Filatov was added to the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose accounts banks are obliged to freeze, apart from small transactions.

On 15 March 2019, the FSB launched a case against Artyom Gerasimov and Taras Kuzio from the southern Crimean town of Yalta. Five days later, officers raided eight Jehovah's Witness family homes in and around Yalta.

Like Stashevsky, all three men are being investigated under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. This punishes "Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity". The maximum punishment is ten years' imprisonment.

Ukraine church's only temple in occupied Crimea plundered

Church property was destroyed under the pretext of "repair works" allegedly conducted by the occupying authorities.

UNIAN (25.07.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2JSnx4f> - Simferopol's Volodymyr and Olha Cathedral, the only temple of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine that is left in the occupied Crimea, has been looted and plundered, the Crimean Human Rights Group reported citing Archbishop of the OCU's Crimean Diocese, Klyment.

The cleric noted that all church property belonging to the Crimea Diocese's Administration has been stolen, Krym.Realii reports.

The archbishop said that the "minister of property and land relations" of the occupied Crimea, Anna Anyuhina stood behind the plundering of the church disguised as "internal repairs", all while Klyment set off to Washington to attend a conference on religious freedom.

Human rights activists recalled that on June 8, the "arbitration court" of Crimea ruled to terminate the lease of premises, which before the occupation was concluded with the Crimean Diocese of the then-Kyiv Patriarchate (the entity that in December 2018 was dissolved in favor of founding the Orthodox Church of Ukraine).

The "court" obliged the church to return the premises to the Crimean occupation authorities and pay RUB 12,000 in duties to the Federal budget of the Russian Federation. The formal reason for contract termination was the debt worth UAH 2.3 (approximately 9 U.S. cents).

It is noted that the Crimean Human Rights Group for several years has been fixing the facts of Russian occupation authorities in Crimea systematically violating religious freedoms.

The Group's leader, Olha Skrypnyk, stressed that during the occupation period, almost all religious communities and organizations were subjected to harassment, restrictions, and persecution, except for the church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

President-elect Zelensky meets with rabbis and other religious leaders

Zelensky asks Rabbis to support his initiative on dialogue with residents of Russia-occupied Donbas, Crimea

Interfax-Ukraine (06.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2V68ExF> - President-elect Volodymyr Zelensky during a meeting with Rabbis from across Ukraine has asked them to support his initiative to develop a dialogue with residents of Russia-occupied territories in Donbas and Crimea.

"I have met with representatives of various religions and cultures. And today I appeal to you to support our idea of fostering dialogue with residents of Russia-occupied territories in eastern Ukraine and Crimea. We don't want to lose touch with these people, because all of them are Ukrainians, our fellow citizens," Zelensky said.

Zelensky's press service said the president-elect on Monday met with representatives of the Council of Rabbis of Ukraine, including Chief Rabbi of Dnipro and Dnipropetrovsk region Shmuel Kaminetsky (central Ukraine); Chief Rabbi of Kharkiv and Kharkiv region, Moshe Moskovitz (eastern Ukraine), Chief Rabbi of Odesa and southern Ukraine Abraham Wolf, Chief Rabbi of Zhytomyr and western Ukraine Shlomo Wilhelm; Donbas Chief Rabbi Pinchas Vyshetsky, and Chief Rabbi of Ukraine and Kyiv Moshe Reuven Azman.

Chief Rabbi of Donbas Vyshetsky, who lived in Donetsk for a long time, said the proposed initiative is correct and will be effective.

"Even a little light drives away a lot of darkness. There are three main factors for the success of your government: justice, honesty, and peace. Never do what you do not want to be done to you. That is the main rule," he noted.

Participants of the meeting discussed the fight against anti-Semitism. They said today this problem is not acute as in other countries of the world. Every year more than 800,000 pilgrims come to Ukraine where 150 Jewish religious leaders were buried.

"There are now at least half a million Jews in Ukraine, people for whom Ukraine is their native land, which they love. And we dream that life in Ukraine should be decent and happy for all people. There is no contradiction in being Jewish and being a patriot of Ukraine," Rabbi Kaminetsky said.

Guests at the meeting presented Zelensky with an exclusive edition of the Torah.

As reported, on April 30, Zelensky met with head of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Metropolitan Epiphanius, Honorary Patriarch of Kyiv and All Russia-Ukraine Filaret and Head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) Metropolitan Onufriy.

On May 2, Zelensky met with the spiritual leaders of Ukraine's Muslim community.

Ukraine urges OSCE to investigate "seizure" of OCU temple in Donetsk region

By Yekaterina Filatova

HRWF Note: UOC/KP or Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Ukraine/ Kiev Patriarchate, as used by the author, is in fact the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) in communion with Constantinople recently created with the full engagement of President Poroshenko while the UOC (Ukrainian Orthodox Church) is the one in communion with Moscow.



Фото алтарной части храма ПЦУ в селе Кузнецово-Михайловка.

Union of Orthodox Journalists (03.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2JdrZKK> - Earlier, representatives of the OCU/ UOC KP reported that "the 'DNR' and the Moscow Patriarchate seized the temple of the OCU in Kuznetsovo-Mikhailovka, Donetsk region".

On May 2, 2019, during a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to international organizations in Vienna Igor Prokopchuk called on the OSCE SMM to verify the report on the decision of the Russian occupation administration to confiscate the church and church property of the OCU in the village of Kuznetsovo-Mikhailovka of the Telmanovsky district, Donetsk region, reports "[Ukrinform](#)".

"We expect the Mission to check the latest reports of April 25 regarding the decision of the Russian armed forces to confiscate the church of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in the village of Kuznetsovo-Mikhailovka in the occupied part of the Donetsk region and transfer the ownership of it to the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine," the Ukrainian diplomat said.

At the same time, Prokopchuk stressed that Ukraine strongly condemns "such repressive actions of the Russian side that violate freedom of religion and religion", urging the SMM to "continue to implement this part of its monitoring mandate".

Earlier Yevstratiy Zoria wrote on his Facebook page that "Russian invaders and their henchmen are taking away a Ukrainian church in the Donetsk region", referring to the [message of the Donetsk "eparchy" of the UOC KP](#), which openly accused the Moscow Patriarchate of seizing the temple.



Донецька єпархія УПЦ КП

25 апреля в 07:34 · 🌐

«ДНР» ТА МОСКОВСЬКИЙ ПАТРІАРХАТ ЗАХОПИЛИ ХРАМ ПЦУ У КУЗНЕЦОВО-МИХАЙЛІВЦІ ДОНЕЦЬКОЇ ОБЛАСТІ

Щойно прийшла сумна звістка з тимчасово окупованої території, що представники «правоохоронних органів» так званої «ДНР» натиснули на голову та депутатів сільської ради с. Кузнецово-Михайлівка Тельманівського р-ну, Донецької області відібрати наш стародавній храм. У 90 роках цей храм передали Донецькій єпархії УПЦ-КП, котрий був майже зруйнований за часи радянської влади. За рахунок нашої церкви, українських меценатів, патріарха Філарета за короткий термін часу ця святиня була відбудована і реставрована. На протязі багатьох років там проводилися урочисті богослужіння та благодійні акції для всіх нужденних. Монументальний живопис, чудові ікони на стінах храму виконували відомі художники і архітектори України. Сьогодні вранці нам повідомили, що цей український храм найближчим часом буде переданий представникам Московського патріархату. Невідомо яким чином окупаційна влада не допустить священика у найближчі дні звершити Великодні богослужіння. Є небезпека фізичної розправи над духовенством УПЦ (ПЦУ) у Тельманівському р-ні. Закликаємо всіх небайдужих українців вознести свої сердечні молитви за наш храм і багатостраждальне духовенство, яке залишилося на тій території.

"I spoke with the Donetsk Eparchy," Archpriest Nikolai Danilevich, vice-chairman of the UOC Department for External Church Relations, commented on the message by the UOC KP / OCU. "The situation is the following: our Donetsk Eparchy of the UOC has nothing to do with this. This is the initiative of the local self-proclaimed government of the 'DNR'. So, I would like to advise the source of this information not to blame the UOC immediately and indiscriminately. Our eparchy did not initiate this, they found out about it from the media, no one offered anything to our eparchy. We have enough temples, and we do not act in the East in the same way that representatives of the OCU act against us in other regions of Ukraine. Until now, we have not taken a single church from any denomination in this region, although there have been proposals."



As the UOJ reported, [the UOC appealed to the UN, OSCE and the EU in connection with mass violations of the rights of believers](#).

We recall that in October 2018, a group of UN Special Rapporteurs already sent a communication request to the Ukrainian government regarding systematic violations of the rights of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church: the document raised questions concerning specific facts of human rights violations in Ukraine in connection with the seizure of UOC churches, attempts to disrupt the All-Ukrainian procession in 2016, attacks by members of the radical group S14 on the Tithe Monastery and the office of the Union of Orthodox Journalists, and others. So far, [there has been no response from the Ukrainian authorities](#). At the same time, [the "Honorary Patriarch" of the OCU Filaret Denisenko states that there have not been any seizures of UOC temples in Ukraine](#).

Russia's Donbas proxy 'republic' seizes Ukrainian Orthodox Church for the Moscow Patriarchate

By Halya Coynash

KHPG.org (30.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2H4KyPU> - A Ukrainian Orthodox church in the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk people's republic' [DPR] is to be forcibly taken from its congregation and handed over to the Moscow Patriarchate, with other Ukrainian Orthodox congregations also in danger of losing their places of worship. Metropolitan Epiphanius, Primate of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine recently issued an appeal to the international community, warning that the very existence of the Church was in danger in occupied Donbas.

The Donetsk – Mariupol Eparchy reported on 25 April that the so-called 'DPR enforcement agency' had put pressure on the Mayor of the village of Kuznetsovo-Mykhailivka to appropriate the church. This is particularly shocking since the church building was already once plundered in Soviet times and even used as a warehouse. It was the local community in the 1990s who had sought and gained permission from the Orthodox Church under the

Kyiv Patriarchate to reinstate the church, with money for parts of this gathered from donations. The icons and other paintings were drawn by well-known artists from all over the country.

Serhiy Horobtsov, Head of the Eparchy, explained to Donbas Realii that he has communicated via Facebook with a priest from the Moscow Patriarchate who claimed that Kuznetsovo-Mykhailivka is "a Russian village". Horobtsov dismisses this claim. He has lived in the region all his life, he says, and everybody spoke in Ukrainian, or in 'surzhik (a russified version of Ukrainian).

The priests serving in the Church in Kuznetsovo-Mykhailivka had continued providing both services and assistance to people in the area, and did not engage themselves in politics.

Horobtsov says that he has been told by believers that virtually every week they have been summoned and "worked on". They are told that they should not go to Ukrainian churches as this will put them in danger, that they won't get through the checkpoints between the so-called 'republic' and government-controlled Ukraine and that their pensions will be taken away from them. Since people living in occupied Donbas need to register in government-controlled areas to receive their pension, this is a serious threat.

In the statement from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine issued on 25 February 2019, Metropolitan Epiphanius pointed out that the situation with respect to religious freedom had steadily worsened in the so-called 'Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics' over the past five years.

"This was seen in systematic persecution; harassment; arrests; seizure of churches, etc. However, if up till the present time we were dealing with significant restrictions and violations of rights, now, from 1 March 2019, there is danger of the total ban on the activities of congregations and religious clergy of our Church; the total confiscation of the congregations' property and deportation of priests from territory under the control of the so-called 'DPR'."

This is due to the new demand that congregations "register under the laws of the republic", a demand, Epiphanius says, cannot be fulfilled as these 'laws' were issued by a structure which is not recognized as a state by anybody.

"From 2 March, 36 churches and premises, as well as the Eparchial House of Mercy, which belong to congregations of our Church in some occupied areas of the Donetsk oblast may be "confiscated for the good of the republic", its priests – deported".

He calls on the UN, OSCE, the EU, all countries acting as guarantors of the Minsk Accord, and all democratic countries to help prevent such destruction of their Church.

The Russian-controlled 'republics' are basically following Russia's lead with these methods directed against all religions aside from the Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate. Both Luhansk and Donetsk 'republics' have banned or virtually banned the Jehovah's Witnesses, and are increasingly persecuting Protestant Churches. In the so-called 'Luhansk republic', for example, essentially identical demands that all religious communities 're-register' were used as a pretext to refuse registration to all communities of Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh Day Adventist and other Protestant churches.

Churches under the Moscow Patriarchate have enjoyed special treatment from the beginning, with religious persecution of all other faiths becoming a grave problem from the beginning of the Russian-backed, manned and armed military conflict in April 2014.

A 2015 study by human rights groups entitled 'When God becomes the weapon' identified systematic and widespread religious persecution, and reported that religion was one of the key motivating factors and justification cited for criminal activities by unlawful paramilitary groups within the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics'

A major role had been played by unlawful armed groups who "under the banners of the Russian Orthodox Army and the Cossack Army, openly manifest their adherence to orthodoxy and have begun a 'crusade' across the Donbas region".

While conflicts have arisen between differing armed formations, especially in 'LPR', this adherence to a specific form of Orthodoxy and political ideas around this is largely shared by all pro-Russian militants.

CRIMEA: Residents "don't believe" FSB allegations against imam

By Felix Corley, Forum 18

Crimean Tatar imam Rustem Abilev is in two-month pre-trial detention as the Russian FSB investigates him on criminal charges of calling publicly for "extremism". Residents "don't believe the FSB allegations", says journalist Taras Ibragimov. Renat Suleimanov, a Muslim jailed for four years in January for alleged membership of Tabligh Jamaat, lost his appeal at Russia's Supreme Court.

Forum18 (24.04.2019) - http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2470 - On 16 April, a court in Sevastopol in the Russian-occupied Crimean peninsula ordered Crimean Tatar imam and dentist Rustem Abilev held in pre-trial detention for eight weeks. The Russian FSB security service accuse him of calling for violence against non-Muslims and is preparing a criminal case against him for allegedly calling publicly for "extremism". Local residents "don't believe" the FSB accusations.

The FSB seized Abilev the previous day in a raid on his home and the village mosque which he helped build. If eventually tried and convicted, he faces up to a four-year jail term and a four-year ban on specific activity (see below).

Investigator Yuri Andreyev of the Russian FSB in Sevastopol is investigating the 34-year-old Abilev under Russian Criminal Code Article 280, Part 1 ("Public calls for extremist activity") (see below).

"Local residents and activists say Rustem Abilev cannot have called for extremism," Radio Free Europe journalist Taras Ibragimov told Forum 18 on 24 April. "They insist he is not an extremist and don't believe the FSB allegations" (see below).

On 24 April, an official of Sevastopol FSB's Investigation Department, after repeatedly asking about Forum 18, refused to say if he was Investigator Andreyev, told Forum 18 it was a wrong number and put the phone down (see below).

Meanwhile, Renat Suleimanov, one of the four Muslims convicted at Crimea's Supreme Court in January for alleged membership of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, has failed to overturn his four-year jail term on appeal. Russia's Supreme Court in Moscow left the verdict unchanged on 16 April. The Prosecutor appealed against the suspended prison sentences handed to the other three Muslims convicted with him, but withdrew the appeals before the hearing (see below).

Suleimanov is intending to make a last appeal to the Chair of Russia's Supreme Court and, if that fails, to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, his lawyer told Forum 18 (see below).

On 23 April, the four men were added to the Russian Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists". This means banks are obliged to freeze their assets, with only small transactions permitted (see below).

Annexation, restrictions imposed

Ukraine and the international community do not recognise Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea. The peninsula is now divided between two Russian federal regions, the Republic of Crimea (with its capital in Simferopol) and the port city of Sevastopol.

After the annexation Russia imposed its restrictions on freedom of religion and belief. [Many religious communities have been raided, and many individuals have been fined for possessing books – such as the Muslim prayer collection "Fortress of a Muslim" - which have been banned as "extremist" in Russia.](#)

Religious communities and individuals continue to be fined for not displaying the full name of their registered religious organisation at their place of worship, for meeting for worship without Russian state permission or advertising their faith. [Forty such administrative prosecutions are known to have been brought in 2018 of which 28 ended with punishment.](#)

Three Crimean Jehovah's Witnesses under criminal investigation

Three Crimean men – Sergei Filatov, Artem Gerasimov and Taras Kuzio - are already under criminal investigation for alleged involvement in Jehovah's Witness activity. [The criminal cases – in the southern Crimean city of Yalta and the northern town of Dzhankoi – were both launched just before raids on the homes of community members.](#)

As Russia banned Jehovah's Witnesses in 2017, they face prosecution for participating in the "activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity".

Filatov, Gerasimov and Kuzio are living in their homes under restrictions as the Russian FSB continues the investigations.

Mosque, imam's home raided

Armed, masked men, most of them in camouflage with FSB insignia, raided the small, single-storey Khayat (Life) mosque in the village of Shturmovoe on the eastern edge of the city of Sevastopol on 15 April, the FSB, local news agencies and the human rights group Crimean Solidarity noted the same day. Television crews accompanied the raiders.

The raiders then moved to the nearby home in Shturmovoe of the mosque's imam, Rustem Enverovich Abilev (born 18 May 1984). In television pictures of the raid, a man in civilian clothes shows Abilev and his pregnant wife a document. Then masked men in camouflage with no insignia search their home. They seize religious literature, hand-written notes and documents, computers and mobile phones. One masked man is seen copying files from a laptop computer.

As with the raid on the mosque, the masked men brought with them two television crews, as well as other journalists. Some waited outside Abilev's house as the armed men searched the premises.

Masked, camouflaged men then led Abilev down the steps of his house, through the garden and onto the street. They then put him in an unmarked white van and drove him away.

The homes of two mosque members in the village, described in the media as "witnesses", were also searched.

The FSB afterwards told the local media that not only FSB but police and National Guard troops were also used in the raids.

Pre-trial detention

The Russian FSB told the local media that they took Abilev to the FSB headquarters in Sevastopol, where he is being held in detention. The FSB is investigating him under Russian Criminal Code Article 280, Part 1. This punishes "public calls for extremist activity" with a maximum punishment of four years' imprisonment and a ban on specific activity for the same period.

The following day, 16 April, FSB investigator Yuri Andreyev brought a suit to Sevastopol's Lenin District Court to have Abilev held in pre-trial detention. The Court ordered him held for eight weeks, until 11 June, as the investigation proceeds, a court official told Forum 18 on 24 April.

Abilev's lawyer, Lenyara Gabdrakhmanova, appealed against the pre-trial detention order. The appeal arrived at Sevastopol City Court on 24 April, but has not yet been assigned to a judge, the City Court told Forum 18 the same day. The Court official said she did not know the name of the FSB investigator who brought the pre-trial detention suit to court.

The FSB held Abilev for several days in Sevastopol before transferring him to the Investigation Prison in Simferopol. His address:

Suleimanov's address in Investigation Prison:

295006 Krym

g. Simferopol

Bulvar Lenina 4

Sledstvenny Izolyator No. 1

Suleimanovu Renatu Rustemovichu

Imam "called for violent actions"?

Abilev, a dentist by profession, founded Hayat (Life) mosque, which he and other local Muslims built near his home in the village of Shturmoev. Russian security personnel raided the mosque in 2015.

On 2 June 2016, the Russian authorities registered the mosque community as part of the Crimean Muftiate, according to the Russian Federal Tax Service record. Abilev was one of the ten official founders. He serves as the mosque's imam.

On 24 April, an official of Sevastopol FSB's Investigation Department, after repeatedly asking about Forum 18, refused to say if he was Investigator Andreyev, told Forum 18 it was a wrong number and put the phone down.

The FSB told the media after the raid that Abilev (whom they did not name) is the "leader

of a group of radical Islamists" who gave sermons "using banned literature which called for violent actions against individuals not sharing his religious convictions". The FSB added: "In the course of closed lessons, the man conducted the ideological cultivation of mosque members, drawing new members into extremist activity."

"Local residents and activists say Rustem Abilev cannot have called for extremism," Radio Free Europe journalist Taras Ibragimov told Forum 18 on 24 April. "They insist he is not an extremist and don't believe the FSB allegations."

Ibragimov disputes the FSB claim that Abilev conducted "closed lessons". He quoted local people as declaring that "the case materials feature a certain audio-recording which was made not during closed meetings but at Friday prayers," Ibragimov told Radio Free Europe's Krym Realii service. "Friday prayers are obligatory for Muslims and all villagers would gather for them."

Ibragimov found it "strange" that any imam would use Friday prayers if he wanted to conduct any "alternative meetings".

One villager described Abilev as "an educated man" and "a devout believer". She noted that Russian forces had already raided the mosque and checked worshippers' identity documents at Friday prayers. "They have only one aim," she told Crimean Solidarity on 15 April, the day of the raids, "to intimidate our people. They have no other aim. This is how they want to drive us out of here."

One appeal fails, other three withdrawn

Renat Rustemovich Suleimanov (born 30 August 1969), one of the four Muslims convicted at Crimea's Supreme Court in January for alleged membership of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, has failed to overturn his four-year jail term on appeal.

A panel of three judges at Russia's Supreme Court in Moscow left the verdict unchanged on 16 April, an official of the Court told Forum 18 from the Russian capital on 24 April. The Supreme Court has not yet published its decision.

The official added that the Prosecutor, who had appealed against the suspended prison terms handed to the other three Muslims convicted with him - Talyat Abdurakhmanov, Seiran Mustafaev and Arsen Kubedinov - withdrew the appeals before the hearing.

Suleimanov's lawyer, Aleksandr Lesovoi, represented his client at the hearing. Suleimanov himself refused to go to Moscow because of his state of health, Lesovoi told Forum 18. He is currently still being held in Simferopol's Investigation Prison. But now the verdict has entered into force he could be sent to serve his sentence in a prison colony.

Suleimanov's address in Investigation Prison:

295006 Krym

g. Simferopol

Bulvar Lenina 4

Sledstvenny Izolyator No. 1

Suleimanovu Renatu Rustemovichu

Supreme Court again, then Strasbourg?

Lesovoi said he is already preparing a further appeal on Suleimanov's behalf to the Chair

of Russia's Supreme Court, as "Renat has been punished solely for exercising freedom of religion". This would be his last possible appeal within Russia. "If that fails, he intends to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights - we have already discussed this," Lesovoi told Forum 18.

Suleimanov "would have a very strong case" at the European Court of Human Rights under Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Lesovoi added. Article 9 protects the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Russia's Supreme Court [banned the Tabligh Jamaat missionary movement as "extremist" in 2009.](#)

The four men met openly in mosques to discuss their faith. ["At lessons we studied ayats \[verses\] from the Koran, the value of praying the namaz, and the zikr \[reciting devotional phrases as a reminder of Allah\]," Abdurakhmanov told the court at their trial. "These lessons were not conspiratorial and took place in mosques."](#)

On 22 January, at the end of their trial, Crimea's Supreme Court in Simferopol convicted the men under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2 (Suleimanov under Part 1, the other three under Part 2). This punishes organisation of or involvement in "the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity".

Suleimanov – who is married with three young daughters - has been in continuous detention [since his arrest in October 2017](#). He was jailed for four years in an ordinary regime labour camp, followed by one year under restrictions. Abdurakhmanov, Mustafaev and Kubedinov were each given a two and a half years' suspended sentence, with a two year probation period, plus one year under restrictions.

[Suleimanov initially lodged his suit to Russia's Supreme Court in Moscow, reaching the Court on 11 March. The Prosecutor's appeal against the sentences of the other three reached the Supreme Court at the same time.](#)

On 23 April, the four men were added to the Russian Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists". This means banks are obliged to freeze their assets, with only small transactions permitted.

President Zelenski, religion and Orthodox Churches

HRWF (24.04.2019) - Volodymyr Zelenski, who has just been elected president of Ukraine, is a Jew. How will he deal with religious issues in Ukraine, in particular with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in communion with the Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople? Some have analyzed his declarations during the election campaign and are sharing their expectations and their views.

New Ukrainian president has ambiguous relationship with church

[Religiia v Ukraine, 22 April 2019](#)

Stetson (22.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2URS1ul> - Vladimir Zelensky, who was elected president of Ukraine on 21 April 2019, informed voters on the eve of the election that he

thinks well of the tomos about autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and he considers it not only President Petro Poroshenko's achievement, Religia v Ukraine reports.

During the debate with Poroshenko in the Olympic stadium on 19 April, Zelensky literally declared (in translation from Ukrainian): "As regards the tomos, this is a victory for Ukraine. But it seems to me that this is a victory primarily of Filaret, who fought for the Ukrainian church back before you became president. Back in the time when you were a parishioner of the Moscow patriarchate."

Earlier, on 4 April, an advisor to Zelensky for legal matters, Irina Venediktova, stated at a press conference: "Ukraine is a secular state, but for our self-identity the receipt of the tomos was most important. Therefore these are things on which nobody will encroach but will support by all possible means that the state has. The state cannot tread on the territory of sacred religious things, but it is obligated to protect them. Vladimir Zelensky will do everything in order to protect this mighty achievement."

Despite this, on the day of the election, 21 April, without awaiting the counting of votes, UPTsMP Metropolitan of Zaporozhe Luka, who earlier threatened the head of the Novonikolaev district state administration with a curse for his support of autocephaly and campaigned against Poroshenko, published on the official website of the diocese congratulations to Zelensky for "an undoubted victory in the presidential election," and he assured him of "prayerful intercession."

In his congratulations published on 22 April, the head of the UPTsMP, Metropolitan Onufrey, also says to Zelensky: "Your stated priorities for the development of the country coincide with the hopes and aspirations of our people."

Meanwhile, observers earlier explained "why Zelensky is frightening for Orthodoxy." In an interview with RBK-Ukraine on 17 April, Vladimir Zelensky confirmed that he is a loyal supporter of abortions and the legalization of marijuana, prostitution, and gambling. (tr. by PDS, posted 22 April 2019)

Patriarch Kirill: Zelensky given historic chance to unite people of Ukraine

Interfax-Religion (22.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2ZDBRDA> - Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia has congratulated Vladimir Zelensky on his election as president of Ukraine and hopes that under his rule, the canonical Church will stop being persecuted.

"The people of Ukraine that supported your candidacy are pinning big hopes on you for positive changes in their lives. You are being given a historic chance to unite the nation and make a personal contribution to resolving economic and social problems in the country, and to finding ways to overcome the existing conflicts and splits," the patriarch said in his address to Zelensky published by the press service of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Patriarch Kirill said he believes that the only possible way to ensure that the state system works effectively toward making life better for the people will be "cooperation of all well-intentioned powers in society, with their full involvement in a nationwide dialogue."

In his address to Zelensky, Patriarch Kirill expressed sincere hope for an end to "the sad period" of harassment and discrimination against Ukrainian citizens belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

"May the merciful God help you in your good affairs and undertakings, and give you wisdom and make you firm in your future endeavors for the good of the Ukrainian people," Patriarch Kirill said in his letter to the Ukrainian president-elect.

Zelensky won the presidential election in the second round on April 21 with 73% of the vote, while his rival, incumbent head of state Pyotr Poroshenko gained slightly over 24%.

What the Orthodox should expect from Zelensky (By Kirill Aleksandrov) - Excerpts

Union of Orthodox Journalists (23.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2GBWEzF> - If we analyze the words and facts known today, we can make an unequivocal conclusion: Vladimir Zelensky has never declared his sympathy for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Instead, he spoke very positively about the OCU. Let us cite a quote from his debate with Poroshenko at the Olympic NSC on April 19:

"Concerning the Tomos. This is a victory for Ukraine but it seems to me that this is a victory, first of all, for Filaret, who had fought for the Ukrainian Church even before you (Petro Poroshenko – Ed.) became the president. Back in the days when you were a parishioner of the Moscow Patriarchate."

The following messages can be read in this short statement:

- Tomos is a victory for Ukraine. Tomos is assessed positively and therefore, everything associated with Tomos is assessed positively: both the OCU, Filaret Denisenko, Epiphany Dumenko, unlawful transfers of the UOC temples to the OCU, and the infringement of the rights of believers of the canonical Church, etc;
- Tomos is Filaret's victory. Filaret, therefore, is not a schismatic, not the culprit of the hostility and lawlessness in the religious sphere but an honored person for Ukraine;
- The struggle of Filaret for Tomos, which really has a long history, is also evaluated positively.
- To be a parishioner of the Moscow Patriarchate (i.e. the UOC) is a direct reproach toward Poroshenko. Consequently, belonging to the UOC is evaluated negatively; otherwise, it would not be possible to reproach anyone.

Irina Venediktova, Zelensky's advisor, also expressed sympathy for the OCU: *"Tomos is the most important thing for our self-identity. Therefore, these are things which no one will not only encroach but will support with all the capacity that the state has."*

Of course, one should not exaggerate all these statements but the fact remains: the Ze-team expresses sympathy for the Tomos but not for the UOC.

The factor of businessman Igor Kolomoisky also testifies to the general mood against the UOC under the new government. We will not repeat Poroshenko's election mantra that Zelensky is a puppet of Kolomoisky. However, it is undoubted that with the victory of Zelensky, the influence of Kolomoisky on the policy of Ukraine and on the state of affairs in general will increase significantly. And if you remember that the main mouthpiece of Kolomoisky, the TV channel "1 + 1", is the channel that most of all slings mud at the UOC, it becomes quite obvious that the new government will favor the schismatics and treat the UOC badly.

But a much more important question than the way the new government is going to treat various confessions is the question – what the new government is going to do, what its policy in the religious sphere is going to be. Here we can assume the following.

Firstly, the new government will pay much less attention to religion than Poroshenko's team. Zelensky will be faced with much more urgent tasks, on which he will have to concentrate first of all. (...)

All this simply will not allow Zelensky to continue the religious policy of his predecessor with the same intensity. And for Poroshenko himself, this whole venture with the Tomos was basically a pre-election technology. And this technology, admittedly, failed. The grantee of the Tomos, Petro Poroshenko, who was put by Phanar on a par with the holy Prince Vladimir the Great, the Baptist of Russia, lost miserably to the comedian Zelensky, the clown in Old Russian terminology. Vladimir Zelensky seems not that stupid not to take Poroshenko's mistakes into account. Intervention in church affairs does not push up a rating. Now the elections being over, no one really needs all this hubbub around the Tomos and the creation of the new religious structure.

Therefore, with a high degree of probability, the pressure on the UOC will weaken. The central government will no longer send directives to places demanding the transfer of the UOC communities to the OCU. The theme of the transferring the Ukrainian Lavras to the dissenters will also lose its relevance. Zelensky will be just busy with other concerns. Although active supporters of the OCU may try to continue the persecution of the UOC with the tacit consent of the new government but the second factor will play against it.

Secondly, for V. Zelensky himself, the issue of religion is a matter more personal than public or state. In an interview with RBC-Ukraine, he said, *"There are things that we never discuss at the table of our family. My father taught me so. I never discuss them with anyone. The issue of religion is number one. We never discuss things that split families and society. I never do that. But I believe in God."*

If Zelensky truly understands that state intervention in the affairs of religious organizations splits society, then he is unlikely to welcome such interference. As a president, he will be interested in the elimination of any conflicts within the state, not in their escalation. Moreover, "hands-off" approach to the religious sphere responds to his inner convictions.

Another positive response, which was heard in an interview with RBC-Ukraine, was the answer to the question about demonstrative visits of divine services on major religious holidays, which all previous presidents practiced. Zelensky said that he was not going to attend churches "on camera": *"I think this is my personal, internal affair. I do not want to broadcast this to the whole world. Because my conversation with God I prefer to have one-on-one."*

This is welcome. Perhaps, the demonstration tour of the presidential couple to the churches of various denominations will finally end, followed by counting the minutes that the head of state and his wife spent in a particular temple.

Thirdly, Zelensky positions himself as a true European. So, he will, or at least try, to implement European values in Ukraine: human rights, rule of law, independent legal proceedings, democracy, etc.

It can be assumed that under President Zelensky, there will be less lawlessness in the religious sphere. The courts will decide in favor of the UOC communities, the police will investigate incidents of violence against believers, etc. And all this will happen not because Zelensky will support the UOC but because all the actions of the authorities in relation to the UOC under Petro Poroshenko were not just lawless, but outspokenly lawless. And when Poroshenko still had full presidential power, heads of territorial communities, heads of local state administrations, and law enforcement officials still violated the law to please the President and his team.

But it was only for Zelensky to gain twice as many votes as Poroshenko in the first round of the presidential election, as it became clear that there was practically no chance for the

latter to remain in the chair of the head of state. So, it became pointless for officials to violate the law for the benefit of the Tomos-grantee Poroshenko. (...)

All this opens up a window of opportunity for the UOC. Taking advantage of the lack of motivation for officials to violate the law, one can try to get through the courts or by submitting complaints to the state administration bodies to restore the violated rights to freedom of religion. It is possible that after a while this window will close. This can happen if President Zelensky appoints people to government posts who will strive to destroy the UOC and drive everyone into a single pseudo-religious organization – the OCU.

We repeat that today's decisions of the courts in favor of the UOC are not connected with the support of the Church by the new government (there is no such support), but because the actions of the authorities under President Poroshenko were overtly and unambiguously illegal.

Thus, the question “what should the Orthodox expect from President Zelensky?” can be answered like this: the attitude anticipated is negative rather than positive, but the actions are legal rather than illegal. In any case, the Church should not rely on the state and seek its support. The Church must rely on its own inner spiritual foundation. *“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that is laid, which is Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor. 3, 11).

But the Church, of course, has the right to demand that the state observe the norms of its own laws and the Constitution regarding the rights of believers. The time will tell how it will be exercised by the new government, while the Orthodox now have more important things to do: the Church is living through the Passion Week, preparing to prayerfully experience the last days of the earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ and to celebrate the Bright Feast of His Resurrection.

CRIMEA: Tatar Imam arrested on charges of ‘calls to extremism’ in Russian-occupied Crimea

By Halya Coynash

Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (17.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2VLQDG0> - Armed searches of both a mosque and the home of the Imam [were carried out](#) on 15 April in the Balaclava region of occupied Crimea, with the Imam, Rustem Abilev arrested on charges of making ‘calls to extremist activities’. Russia’s abuse of ‘extremism’ legislation is notorious, and suspicions about this ‘operation’ are only exacerbated by the fact that the FSB and other enforcement officers appear to have been accompanied by several Russian and Russian-controlled TV channels.

All such channels later cited the FSB in calling the Imam a person born in Uzbekistan. This was probably to avoid admitting to the arrest of yet another Crimean Tatar, just two weeks after a major offensive against the civic initiative Crimean Solidarity and arrests of 23 Crimean Tatar activists and civic journalists. Most of them could also be described as ‘people born in Uzbekistan’ where Crimean Tatars lived in exile after the 1944 Deportation.

The FSB [claims](#) that the arrested man “is the leader of a group of radical Islamists who gave sermons in one of Sevastopol’s religious institutions with the use of prohibited literature, in which he called to violent actions in relation to people who do not share his religious views”. During closed sessions he is alleged to have ideologically worked on believers, “drawing new members into extremist activities”.

FSB assertions after the arrests of Ukrainian citizens must always be treated with caution, and here the claims are essentially contradicted by the charges which, by Russian standards, are fairly mild. Paragraph 1 of Article 280 of Russia's criminal code which it is illegally applying in Crimea punishes for something termed "public calls to carry out extremist activities". It envisages a penalty from up to a steep fine to a maximum 3-year prison sentence. Given that 55 totally law-abiding Crimean Muslims are currently facing up to life imprisonment on 'terrorism' charges based solely on allegations of involvement in the peaceful Hizb ut-Tahrir movement which is legal in Ukraine, it seems likely that the allegations of 'calls to violence' against Abilev were for the propaganda media and may well be quietly shelved.

Abilev is a dentist with his own surgery. He is married and his wife is seemingly expecting their first child. Crimean Solidarity activists who went to the village of Shtormove (near Sevastopol) [spoke](#) with a local resident who had only praise for Abilev and called the charges against him yet another attempt to intimidate the Crimean Tatar people.

This is at least the fourth time since Russia's invasion and annexation, that an armed search has been carried out of a mosque in occupied Crimea.

During [the last hunt](#) at the Mosque / Muslim Cultural Centre Sozidanye [Creation] in Simferopol for 'prohibited literature', the armed and masked men 'found' it – this time with insulting disregard for Muslim practice, near a toilet.

With respect to such charges, Vitaly Ponomaryov, a senior analyst for the Memorial Human Rights Centre, [notes](#) that Russia has used anti-extremism legislation to launch "a conveyor belt of political repression where you can be sentenced on the basis of spurious cases which have little in common with reality". This conveyor belt "until it's stopped, will demand more and more victims".

This Ukrainian Muslims have learned at first hand. As mentioned, 55 men have been arrested since January 2015 on charges of 'involvement' in Hizb ut-Tahrir, with the charges not based on any crimes that the men are believed to have committed, nor even of substantiated charges against Hizb ut-Tahrir itself. 'Proof' in such cases is often provided by 'secret witnesses' and extremely questionable 'expert assessments'. Four men have thus far been prosecuted for involvement (which they did not deny) in the equally peaceful Tablighi Jamaat movement, which Russia has, just as arbitrarily, called 'extremist'.

DONBAS: Luhansk: Orthodox cathedral, more Protestant churches raided

By Felix Corley, Forum 18

Forum 18 (10.04.2019) - http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2467 - Officials of the unrecognised Luhansk People's Republic raided at least two Protestant Sunday worship meetings on 24 March. Courts chose not to punish two pastors. On 4 April anti-"extremism" police raided the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's Holy Trinity Cathedral in Luhansk, diocesan offices and the homes of two priests. A police officer refused to say if further measures against the priests are planned.

Officers of the police anti-"extremism" department of the unrecognised Luhansk People's Republic in eastern Ukraine searched Holy Trinity Cathedral and diocesan offices of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in the city of Luhansk on 4 April. Officers also searched the

homes of the diocesan secretary and another priest. Interrogations have continued since then.



Consecration of Holy Trinity Cathedral, Luhansk, 2013
Qypchak/Wikimedia Commons [CC BY-SA 3.0]

An official of the police anti-"extremism" department, who gave his name only as Sergei, insisted to Forum 18 that the two priests are "at liberty" and are free to continue to conduct religious activity. He refused to say if any further measures will be taken against them (see below).

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine – the successor of the Kiev Patriarchate – chose not to seek registration for its Luhansk cathedral and another parish in rebel-held territory. Despite the raid and interrogations, it appears still to be allowed to hold services at its cathedral.

Andrei Litsoev, head of the Religious Organisations and Spirituality Department of the Culture, Sport and Youth Ministry in Luhansk, blamed the Orthodox Church of Ukraine itself for its problems. "They're guilty," he insisted to Forum 18. "It is not registered, so it doesn't exist" (see below).

The Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate appears to function unimpeded in rebel-held territory.

The 4 April searches, confiscations and interrogations connected with Luhansk's Orthodox cathedral came just over a week after two more Protestant churches in the rebel-held area were on 24 March raided as they were meeting for Sunday worship (see below).

The latest raids on Protestant churches as they met for worship came two weeks after Baptist Union congregations held their last meetings for public worship. LPR officials threatened Baptist Union church leaders that they will not tolerate continued open public meetings for worship in the 48 Baptist Union congregations in rebel-held territory. Reluctantly, local church leaders therefore decided to from 17 March stop meetings for public worship.

Two Protestant pastors – both pensioners - were brought to court (one following a 24 March raid, one following a February raid) for continuing to exercise freedom of religion or

belief by leading "illegal worship". Neither pastor was given a formal legal punishment (see below).

The rebel LPR authorities have banned all exercise of freedom of religion or belief by communities that did not gain registration with their Justice Ministry by the extended deadline of 15 October 2018. Those rejected include all Protestant communities.

Litsoev of the Culture, Sport and Youth Ministry claimed that all the communities that lodged applications received registration. Asked about all the Protestant communities that have been rejected, he responded: "All that lodged applications in time" (see below).

Communities which did not apply for state permission to exist, such as Jehovah's Witnesses (who knew they would not be accepted), the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and Council of Churches Baptists (who choose not to seek registration on principle), are also regarded as "illegal".

Cathedral, diocesan offices, homes searched

Trouble began for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's community in the city of Luhansk in late March, when a group of people – who later turned out to be from the police Department for Combating Extremism and Organised Crime – came to inspect Holy Trinity Cathedral. They spent several hours there and the following day invited Fr Anatoli Nazarenko, the secretary of the Luhansk and Starobilsk diocese, for questioning.

That questioning lasted for about five hours and appeared to end amicably, Radio Free Europe's Donbas.Realii noted on 9 April. Officers shook the priest by the hand and assured him that the Orthodox Church of Ukraine would not come to any harm.

At 10 am on 4 April, officers of the police Department for Combating Extremism and Organised Crime returned to the cathedral, where a baptism was underway. A woman in a black scarf rang the doorbell and asked for Fr Nazarenko. When he opened the gate the officers rushed in, a church member told Donbas.Realii on 9 April.

Officers took the keys from Fr Nazarenko and then searched not only the cathedral but the diocesan offices. The officers filmed the search. "They conducted the searches without a search warrant," Bishop Afanasi (Yavorsky) of Luhansk and Starobilsk (who is based in the Ukrainian government controlled part of Luhansk Region) told Forum 18 on 9 April.

About 20 officers searched the cathedral and diocesan offices until the evening, the church member told Donbas.Realii. They seized 54 religious books as well as books on Ukrainian themes. They also seized computers and Church correspondence, as well as notarised copies of the documents relating to the purchase of the land where the cathedral was built in 2013.

Fr Nazarenko was forced to write a statement under scrutiny from two officers of the Department for Combating Extremism and Organised Crime. Another priest who also serves at the cathedral, Fr Gennady Kurganov, was also ordered to write a statement. Similarly, the church member was forced to write a statement about "who I am, and what I do in the church".

At Fr Nazarenko's request, officers allowed the church member to leave at about 2.30 pm, as she had to go back to her sick husband. Officers held the 72-year-old Fr Nazarenko and Fr Kurganov until 9 pm.

That same day, officers search both Fr Nazarenko's and Fr Kurganov's homes.

Fr Nazarenko and Fr Kurganov were repeatedly summoned for questioning over the following days. Officers told both verbally not to leave the area while the investigation proceeds.

Fr Nazarenko was expecting to face further questioning on 8 April, but no one came for him. Instead he met officials of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) in Luhansk. OSCE representatives then visited the cathedral, Donbas.Realii added.

"The SMM is aware of such allegations and its monitoring officers on the ground are monitoring the situation," Dragana Nikolic-Solomon, the OSCE SMM's Spokesperson, told Forum 18 from Kiev on 10 April.

The church member present in the cathedral when the officers raided said she did not dare to ask them why they were conducting the operation. "We are doing nothing wrong," she told Donbas.Realii. "We just pray."

Orthodox themselves to blame for raids, confiscations?

An official of the police Department for Combating Extremism and Organised Crime in Luhansk, who gave his name only as Sergei, insisted that the two Orthodox priests are "at liberty" and are free to continue to conduct religious activity. "There are no repressions," he claimed to Forum 18 on 9 April. He refused to say if any further measures will be taken against the two priests.

Asked if officials are restricting the movements of the two priests, Sergei initially claimed they could go where they liked. Asked if that meant they could travel to Moscow, Kiev or Riga if they wished to, he appeared to get angry. "You've been given false information," he claimed. "We won't talk to you again." He then put the phone down.

Andrei Litsoev, head of the Religious Organisations and Spirituality Department of the Culture, Sport and Youth Ministry in Luhansk, blamed the Orthodox Church of Ukraine itself for its problems. "They're guilty," he insisted to Forum 18 from Luhansk on 10 April. "It is not registered, so it doesn't exist. They can't conduct their activity. They show no desire to legalise their situation."

Asked why the police Department that combats extremism and organised crime conducted the raids and interrogations, Litsoev said that was not a question for him.

Litsoev claimed that all religious communities which applied for registration passed through the "expert analysis" procedure successfully and gained registration. Asked why none of the Protestant communities which lodged registration applications received it, he responded: "All that lodged applications in time."

Litsoev then said he was too busy to answer further questions and put the phone down. Forum 18 was therefore unable to ask why the LPR authorities insist that individuals and communities cannot meet with others to exercise freedom of religion or belief without registration.

Acquittal

At a final hearing on 21 March, a court in the city of Luhansk acquitted 82-year-old Protestant pastor Anatoly Tolstenko on charges of "illegal worship" and storing religious literature which the authorities regarded as "extremist". The judge ruled that he had committed no wrongdoing.

About 10 masked and armed LPR fighters raided a worship meeting in February of Path of Salvation Baptist church in Luhansk (which is not a community of the Baptist Union). They accused Pastor Tolstenko of leading "illegal worship".

During a search, the men seized books which the authorities of the unrecognised entity have banned as "extremist", including Jehovah's Witness publications. Friends of the community insist the armed fighters planted the books.

Raids, another court case

Officials of the rebel authorities raided at least two Protestant communities as they met for Sunday worship on 24 March, Sergei Kosyak, a Protestant pastor and former resident of Donetsk, told Forum 18.

One of the known 24 March raids was on a Protestant community in the town of Sverdlovsk [official Ukrainian name Dovzhansk], less than 15 kms (10 miles) from the border with Russia. About 10 officers arrived, but did not halt the service. "The officers behaved more than correctly," Kosyak told Forum 18.

Afterwards the officers insisted that Pastor Nikolai Muratov should accompany them to the State Security Ministry. The church's deacon accompanied the pastor. There the secret police questioned them for an hour and a half. They had to sign pledges not to leave the area. The following day the police questioned Pastor Muratov.

On 27 March, Pastor Muratov – who is in his seventies - was summoned to a hearing at Sverdlovsk City and District Court. However, the Judge decided not to punish Pastor Muratov.

An official of the chancellery of Sverdlovsk City and District Court refused absolutely to give Forum 18 any information about the case on 9 April.

Forum 18 was unable to reach either the branch of the State Security Ministry in Sverdlovsk or the town police.

Complaint of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church declared admissible in Strasbourg

The European Court of Human Rights has opened legal proceedings over a complaint filed by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church community of Ptichya about the confiscation of the church

Orthodox Rights (04.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2KcnUJ1> – the European Court of Human Rights addressed an official notification of the admissibility of the complaint and the opening of the legal proceedings to the religious community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)¹ in the village Ptichya of Rovno region in connection to multiple seizures of the church, which took place with the support and inaction of public authorities at various levels, reports the [NGO "Public Advocacy"](#).

For a long time, despite the existence of a court-confirmed title of ownership, the community was unable to use its own church, which was seized at the request of investigators as part of a criminal inquiry. The local authorities instead of resolving the conflict according to the law, i.e. to punish the raiders of the church, have, de facto, taken away the right to use the church. The fact that a Ukrainian Orthodox Church community

cannot use its own property constitutes an obvious violation of international law, the "Public Advocacy" concludes.

Source(s):

1. NGO Public Advocacy/ECOSOC UN – [15 March 2019, "The European Court of Human Rights has opened legal proceedings over a complaint filed by the UOC community of Ptichya"](#)

Related Publications:

§ March 13, 2019 – [A report on the situation about the human rights in Ukraine was published by the UN shortly before the presidential elections in Ukraine.](#)

§ March 3, 2019 – [The believers were beaten, insulted and thrown out from their church into the street by the supporters of the OCU.](#)

§ Feb. 18, 2019 – [Representative of Ukrainian Orthodox Church appeals to international organization over facts of mass violations of rights of believers in Ukraine](#)

1. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is an autonomous Orthodox Church with the headquarter in Kiev, Ukraine. It is spiritually and canonically linked with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Interview of Metropolitan Onufry, Ukrainian Orthodox Church

HRWF (25.03.2019) – This interview was taken by Willy Fautré in Kyiv in March 2019.

Q: Since the creation of a new Orthodox Church led by Metropolitan Epifaniy, about 150 parishes out of 12,000 have left the UOC and have opted for the jurisdiction of the OCU. Can you comment about that phenomenon?

A: The creation in Ukraine of a new religious organization, the so-called "Orthodox Church in Ukraine", is a violation of the canons of Orthodoxy, which is confirmed by many official statements by representatives of Local Churches. But more importantly, the actions of Patriarch Bartholomew actually provoked a new wave of clashes on religious grounds in Ukraine.

And if from 2015 to 2018, 40 of our churches were violently seized, during January and February of 2019 more than 30 clashes took place aimed at seizing the property of our denomination or at transferring our communities to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

Such a wave of new conflicts was caused by the fact that prior to the intervention of Constantinople in Ukrainian affairs there existed a certain balance of relations between religious denominations and parishioners remained within their religious choice, but after the creation of a new structure by Patriarch Bartholomew, not only aggressive propaganda was launched against our believers, but also various types of power pressure in order to force them to move to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

Our priests and bishops are being systematically interrogated in the special security services of Ukraine; bishops are being questioned when leaving and entering the country; the most active bishops, priests and laity have been included in the data-base of the Peacemaker website as enemies of Ukraine; enormous illegal pressure is being now exerted on our communities in the regions.

Despite all the pressure, the overwhelming majority of our priests and parishioners refused to change their religious beliefs, and the statistics reported by the media is in fact manipulative, since it does not reflect the reality. It is necessary to take into account the fact that the religious centre of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine has not been registered at all, therefore it is impossible for a religious community to legally transfer to this denomination.

Virtually, today there are numerous attempts to force seizures of our churches, as well as spur forcible "transfers" of our communities to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. At the same time, our parishioners are not allowed to vote at the meetings, which are in fact summoned by persons who have no relation to our parishes. At such meeting, with the support of local authorities, fake protocols are drawn up to support the illegal transfer to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

Afterwards a church is illegally taken over with a subsequent announcement of "another legal transition". This is the way, how the media reported 150 parishes, which allegedly transferred to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Of course, there are cases when a community or a clergyman really moves to the OCU without any visible pressure, but such cases are fewer and they are exceptions to the general rule.

Q: You say that these changes are not free legal. Have you filed complaints about Strasbourg?

A: Since 2015, our communities have actively appealed to the police, the prosecutor's office and courts in terms of such crimes as disrupting services, seizing churches, and beating believers by the police. Unfortunately, since 2015, not a single criminal, even in cases where their identity is well known, has not been punished.

Our communities win trials, but the government is sealing churches on the basis of their own open criminal proceedings. For instance, the UOC church in the village of Ptycha, being the property of the community, despite court rulings, was arrested at the initiative of the police. In this case, our community has already appealed to the ECHR.

Moreover, so far our communities have filed more than 30 complaints to the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. Representatives of the UOC regularly speak at OSCE meetings, submit reports to the UPR procedures and other legal international mechanisms. Today, no one would dare to say that the international community is unaware of what is going on here in Ukraine, for the UOC has submitted numerous appeals and complaints at various levels since 2015.

Q: The UOC says it is in spiritual communion with the Russian Orthodox Church. What does that "spiritual communion" concretely mean?

A: The spiritual or canonical connection of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with the Russian Orthodox Church means mutual recognition of the conformity of our Churches to the Orthodox canons, that is, community in faith, as well as mutual commemoration of our church hierarchs in public prayers.

As for the structural or organizational position of our church, in 1990 the Russian Orthodox Church granted a Tomos [an ecclesiastical decree] on independence and self-governance to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Today, the degree of independence of the UOC from the ROC is equal to the scope of the rights of any Local Orthodox Church. This means that we freely ordain our bishops ourselves, as well as independently elect the Primate of the UOC, we are also autonomous

in financial, legal and organizational matters. All administrative and managerial issues are decided exceptionally in Kyiv.

Q .: What has been the official standpoint of the UOC about the annexation of Crimea? What is the position of the UOC about the situation in the Donbass?

A: Regardless of the boundaries and lines of demarcation, currently the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is spiritually guiding the Crimea, Central and Western Ukraine, and the Donbass. Our dioceses are located in all these territories, and as for the Crimea, our structures did not change their subordination, did not transfer to the Russian Orthodox Church, but continue to be under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. For the reason that our Church unites people not only of different political views, but even those who are at war with each other, we cannot give political assessment of armed conflicts and geopolitics. Under these circumstances, the UOC is the force that allows people to receive the most important thing - salvation. Therefore, we cannot accept this or that side of the conflict, thus pushing away a part of our flock because of politics. We look forward to and pray for the end of the military conflict. Today, Ukraine is in need of peace and harmony to put an end to hostility and military conflicts.

Q.: A number of churches have had to stop their activities in Crimea under Russian rule and Jehovah's Witnesses have been banned while they were free to practice their religion under Ukrainian rule. Has the UOC published any statement about restrictions to religious freedom in Crimea? A number of churches which are not affiliated to the UOC or the Russian Orthodox Church have not been allowed to go on in Donbass. Has the UOC published any statement about restrictions to the freedom of other religions in Donbass?

A: Where possible, we try to reconcile the warring parties. Since 1996, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRU) has been operating in Ukraine, of which our Ukrainian Orthodox Church is a member. In the framework of cooperation within AUCCRU, we develop a common position on religious issues and state-confessional relations in Ukraine. However, the Church does not have any capacity to force government structures to change their policies, nor can they, due to specific circumstances, take an active political position supporting one or other side in the conflict.

In the Donbass, blood continues to be shed. It is most alarming humanitarian situation. The victims and the destruction of entire regions have laid an indelible imprint on our entire country and on the fate of hundreds of thousands of people.

Under such circumstances, politicians and authorities while pursuing their personal interests often exert pressure on religious denominations and other groups in order to prioritize one party at the expense of another - of a group of weaker victims.

In this situation, the victims should be supported by international human rights structures, the media, international officials etc. It is the silence of these structures that makes possible the continuation of the violations and conflicts.

Therefore, we would also like to kindly ask you to address this issue to those officials of the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union, who not only have the capacity to make public statements, but have the duty to verify the facts of human rights violations and to respond to them in order to stop such violations.

CRIMEA: Occupiers want to set up 'rehabilitation center' for Hizb Ut-Tahrir Crimean Muslims

Human Rights Without Frontiers is concerned that Russia might follow the example of China with its "reeducation centers" in which 1 million Muslims are indoctrinated

RISU (04.08.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Ihaj0t> - The Kremlin-controlled authorities of the annexed Crimea plan to open a "rehabilitation center" for supporters of the Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir.

This is reported by the so-called MP of the State Duma of Russia from Crimea Ruslan Balbek, Ukrayinska Pravda wrote, with reference to RIA Novosti. The adherents of the organization -- which Russia deems extremist -- are supposed to be freed from criminal liability if they officially "renounce destructive political and religious views after a course of psychological and spiritual rehabilitation".

The "Rehabilitation Center" is to be placed at the "Religious Administration of Muslims of Crimea".

"Extremism and its doctrine need to be burned away not only by the strength of weapons, but also by spiritual education. The extremist organizations forbidden in Russia continue to secretly operate in Crimea, although most of them are law-abiding, but there are those who fall under the influence of these extremist sects," said Balbek.

CRIMEA: Raids, another criminal case, four appeals

By Felix Corley

Forum18 (02.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2YPAH7g> - On 20 March, armed Russian FSB security service officers raided at least six Jehovah's Witness homes in the southern Crimean city of Yalta and the nearby suburb of Alupka. At least one of the FSB officers was carrying what appeared to be an assault rifle over his shoulder, despite Jehovah's Witnesses known for being pacifist. Officers seized religious literature, money and other documents, and took several people for interrogation.

FSB officers seized Jehovah's Witness literature, much of which has been banned as "extremist" in Russia. However, they also seized Bible translations and a Bible concordance used by Russian Orthodox, Protestants and others and which the Russian authorities have not banned (see below).

The Crimean branch of the Russian FSB launched a criminal case against 34-year-old Yalta resident Artem Gerasimov. If eventually tried and convicted, he faces up to ten years' imprisonment. He has had to sign a pledge not to leave his home town as the FSB investigates the case against him (see below).

Gerasimov is the second Jehovah's Witness in Crimea facing investigation under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity").

One of the FSB Investigators refused to discuss the case against Gerasimov with Forum 18 (see below).

The Russian FSB is still investigating the criminal case launched in November 2018 against 46-year-old fellow Crimean Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov. The launching of the criminal case was accompanied by coordinated raids on eight Jehovah's Witness family homes in the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi involving an estimated 200 officers. One elderly Jehovah's Witness was tortured, while a young woman suffered a miscarriage soon after the raid (see below).

In January, Crimea's Supreme Court rejected challenges to their legality from three victims of the raids (see below).

Meanwhile, four Muslims convicted in January of membership of the banned Muslim missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat have appealed to Russia's Supreme Court in Moscow. Renat Suleimanov was jailed for four years, while the other three were given suspended sentences. The Supreme Court is due to begin hearing the appeals on the morning of 16 April (see below).

The four men had met in mosques to discuss their faith and denied meeting conspiratorially or promoting "extremism" (see below).

Suleimanov's lawyer told Forum 18 his client, who is 49, has refused to go to Moscow for the appeal hearing, saying he is too ill to travel all that distance. Suleimanov – who has been held since his October 2017 arrest - is still being held in Simferopol's Investigation Prison (see below).

"Extremist" organisations banned

Ukraine and the international community do not recognise Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea. After the annexation, Russia imposed its restrictions on freedom of religion and belief. Many religious communities have been raided, and many individuals have been fined for possessing books – such as the Muslim prayer collection "Fortress of a Muslim" - which have been banned as "extremist" in Russia.

Russia's Supreme Court banned the Tabligh Jamaat missionary movement as "extremist" in 2009.

Russia's Supreme Court banned Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist" in 2017. Prosecutors in Russia are investigating nearly 150 individuals on "extremism"-related criminal charges. Of these, at least 25 are in pre-trial detention and 26 under house arrest as of 2 April 2019. Others have had to sign pledges not to leave their home town without permission.

Following Russia's occupation of Crimea, the Russian authorities granted re-registration to Jehovah's Witness communities in Crimea, only to ban them following the Russian Supreme Court ban.

Raid, interrogations, confiscations

On 20 March, armed Russian FSB security service officers raided at least six Jehovah's Witness homes in the southern Crimean city of Yalta and the nearby suburb of Alupka. Officers seized religious literature, money and other documents, and took several people for interrogation.

FSB attention focused on Yalta resident Artem Vyacheslavovich Gerasimov (born 13 January 1985). FSB officers took him for interrogation to Simferopol, a two-hour drive away, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

The FSB announced the same day that during the raids its officers had seized religious literature "banned in Russia", computers and other equipment and money, some of it in foreign currency.

FSB video of two of the raids – released to the local media – shows officers in camouflage with FSB in large letters on the back of their uniforms and individuals in civilian clothes raiding Gerasimov's and one other home. One of the FSB officers raiding Gerasimov's home appears to be carrying an infantry assault rifle over his shoulder (Jehovah's Witnesses are known to be pacifists). Most of the intruders are wearing masks covering their faces except for the eyes.

Officers place religious literature on a bed. Some of the titles are Jehovah's Witness publications, such as their "New World" version of the Bible, which Russia banned as "extremist" in 2017. Others however are Bible translations and a Bible concordance used by Russian Orthodox, Protestants and others and which have not been banned.

Criminal case

Following the 20 March raids, the Crimean branch of the Russian FSB security service issued a statement to the local media. "It was established that a 34-year-old inhabitant of Yalta organised the activity of the local Jehovah's Witness organisation, conducted meetings, religious events and propaganda of the ideas of the given religious sect, as well as attracting new adherents to its ranks."

The FSB announced that it had launched a case against one individual (whom it did not name) under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity").

The FSB released Gerasimov later in the day after he signed a pledge not to leave his home town without permission from the FSB Investigator. He was allowed to return to his home in Yalta, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

The criminal case against Gerasimov is being led by FSB investigators Aleksandr Lavrov and Sergei Bosiev. Forum 18 reached Investigator Bosiev at the FSB headquarters in Simferopol on 1 April, but as soon as it had introduced itself he put the phone down.

First criminal investigation continues

The Russian FSB security service is still investigating the criminal case against Jehovah's Witness Sergei Viktorovich Filatov (born 6 June 1972) in the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi on the same "extremism"-related charges. He too faces a maximum possible prison term of ten years under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.

The criminal case – which the FSB launched on 10 November 2018 – was the first against Jehovah's Witnesses in occupied Crimea. Like Gerasimov, Filatov had to sign a pledge not to leave his home town.

"Interrogations of Sergei are continuing," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. The FSB security service commissioned five "expert analyses". Only one – to study the

characteristics of his voice – has been completed, they added. This implies that the FSB has recordings that they believe are of Filatov.

The FSB investigator Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin in Simferopol – who is leading the investigation of Filatov's case - again refused to talk to Forum 18 on 2 April.

Five days after the criminal case was opened, about 10 groups of FSB security service and OMON riot police officers from Simferopol raided Filatov's and seven other homes in Dzhankoi. During the raid on one home, officers beat the 78-year-old Viktor Ursu – deported to Siberia by the Soviet Union for his faith when he was 9 – put him up against a wall and handcuffed him. Soon after a raid on another home, a young woman suffered a miscarriage which Jehovah's Witnesses say was caused by stress.

Filatov tried to challenge the case against him, but Crimea's Supreme Court rejected these challenges in November 2018.

On 17 January 2019, and despite not having been convicted of any crime, Filatov was added to the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose assets banks are obliged to freeze (although small transactions are permitted).

Crimean Supreme Court rejects challenges to raids

Three other Jehovah's Witnesses whose homes were raided in November 2018 tried to challenge their legality.

Court decisions seen by Forum 18 reveal that FSB investigator Lieutenant Chumakin sought permission from Simferopol's Kiev District Court on 14 November 2018 for the raids "with the aim of finding items of significance for the criminal case" against Filatov.

Viktor Ursu (beaten and handcuffed during the raid and hospitalised afterwards), Liliya Bezhenar (whose husband Vladimir had to be hospitalised with a suspected stroke) and Vladimir Ostapchuk lodged suits against the search warrants on 11 January 2019 to Crimea's Supreme Court. However, in separate hearings on 31 January, Judge Alla Ovchinnikova rejected all three suits, according to the decisions seen by Forum 18.

Anna Turobova from the Crimean Prosecutor's Office in Simferopol led the case in court to reject the three victims' suits. Her telephone went unanswered each time Forum 18 tried to reach her on 2 April.

Moscow appeal for four convicted Muslims

The appeals of four Muslims convicted in January on charges of alleged membership of the Muslim missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat are due to begin at Russia's Supreme Court in Moscow at 10 am on 16 April, according to the court website.

The appeal is due to be heard at Russia's Supreme Court as it is the next level up from the men's original conviction at Crimea's Supreme Court in Simferopol.

The four men met openly in mosques to discuss their faith. "At lessons we studied ayats [verses] from the Koran, the value of praying the namaz, and the zikr [reciting devotional phrases as a reminder of Allah]," one of the men Talyat Abdurakhmanov told the court at their trial. "These lessons were not conspiratorial and took place in mosques."

On 22 January, at the end of their trial, Judge Sergei Pogrebnyak convicted the men under Criminal Code Article 282.2. This punishes organisation of or involvement in "the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has

adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity".

1) Renat Rustemovich Suleimanov (born 30 August 1969), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1, four years' imprisonment in an ordinary regime labour camp, followed by one year under restrictions.

2) Talyat Abdurakhmanov (born 1953), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2, two and a half years' suspended sentence, with a two year probation period, plus one year under restrictions.

3) Seiran Rizaevich Mustafaev (born 2 January 1969), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2, two and a half years' suspended sentence, with a two year probation period, plus one year under restrictions.

4) Arsen Shekirovich Kubedinov (born 6 August 1974), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2, two and a half years' suspended sentence, with a two year probation period, plus one year under restrictions.

All four of those convicted lodged appeals to Russia's Supreme Court on 11 March. Two days later, the court assigned the appeals to a judge from the fourth criminal division.

Suleimanov's lawyer, Aleksandr Lesovoi, told Forum 18 from Simferopol on 1 April that his client has refused to go to Moscow for the appeal hearing, saying he is too ill to travel all that distance.

18 months in Investigation Prison already

Suleimanov has been held since his October 2017 arrest in Simferopol's Investigation Prison. Until his appeal is decided, he is still deemed to be in pre-trial detention. During this time, each day of detention counts as a day and a half of his prison term.

Asked if Suleimanov has access to the Koran and is able to pray freely in prison, his lawyer Lesovoi responded: "He hasn't complained."

Suleimanov's address in Investigation Prison:

295006 Krym
g. Simferopol
Bulvar Lenina 4
Sledstvenny Izolyator No. 1
Suleimanovu Renatu Rustemovichu

DONBAS: Luhansk: Baptist Union Churches forced to halt public worship

By Felix Corley, Forum 18

Officials of the unrecognised Luhansk People's Republic threatened Baptist Union pastors not to meet for worship, sending "a clear message that they will not tolerate such meetings for worship any more". Officials regard all Protestant churches as "illegal". 82-year-old independent Baptist pastor Anatoly Tolstenko faces court on 21 March.

Forum 18 (15.03.2019) - http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2462 - Officials of the unrecognised Luhansk People's Republic in eastern Ukraine have ordered Baptist Union churches to halt their public worship or risk punishment. "Officials earlier didn't insist that our churches should not meet for worship," Pastor Igor Bandura of the Ukrainian

Baptist Union told Forum 18. "But they have now sent a clear message that they will not tolerate such meetings for worship any more."

"All Baptist churches that have prayer houses will halt meetings in them, so Sunday worship and other services from 17 March onwards will not take place," Pastor Bandura added. He said church members fear that if they do not halt their worship, officials could raid their worship meetings or arrest church leaders (see below).

The LPR authorities have rejected all registration applications from Protestant communities. "Unfortunately the situation for all Protestant churches is bad," a Protestant from a different community in contact with fellow church members in the region told Forum 18 from the Ukrainian capital Kiev on 14 March. "We do not have registration in the LPR and do not have the right to meet in our buildings, which have been closed."

Meanwhile, about ten masked and armed fighters raided a worship meeting in February of Path of Salvation independent Baptist church in the city of Luhansk. The church's 82-year-old pastor, Anatoly Tolstenko, is due again in court on 21 March accused of leading "illegal worship" (see below).

During a search, the men seized books which the authorities of the unrecognised entity have banned as "extremist", including Jehovah's Witness publications. Friends of the community insist the armed fighters planted the books. "These were not their books – the men planted them," Sergei Kosyak, a Protestant and former resident of Donetsk, told Forum 18 (see below).

Elsewhere, court bailiffs in Krasnodon have demanded that the pastor of a Council of Churches Baptist congregation, Vladimir Rytikov, must surrender his 1987 Volkswagen on 21 March to meet an unpaid fine and expenses of nearly 9,000 Russian Roubles (the LPR uses the Russian Rouble). The head of the Krasnodon bailiffs told Forum 18 she was not authorised to discuss with third parties moves to recover debts from individuals (see below).

On 30 November 2018, armed and uniformed officers of the State Security Ministry secret police stopped a 22-year-old man as he was driving near Stanitsa Luhanskaya. After finding a Jehovah's Witness business card in his car they took him to their base in Luhansk and beat him severely. The young man "was subjected to brutal treatment belittling his human dignity and to a restriction on his right to freedom of religion and belief", Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18 (see below).

The rebel LPR authorities have banned all exercise of freedom of religion or belief by communities that did not gain registration with their Justice Ministry by the extended deadline of 15 October 2018. Those rejected include all Protestant communities.

Communities which did not apply, such as Jehovah's Witnesses (who knew they would not be accepted) and Council of Churches Baptists (who choose not to seek registration on principle), are likewise regarded as "illegal" (see below).

Official threats lead Baptist Union churches to halt worship

Threats by LPR officials that they will not tolerate continued open public meetings for worship in Baptist Union congregations have led local church leaders reluctantly to halt such open worship. "They invited our local leaders in, and warned them not to meet," Pastor Igor Bandura of the Ukrainian Baptist Union told Forum 18 from Kiev on 14 March. "In some cases they were very direct, speaking with no hesitation. Others were more indirect."

Church members fear that if they hold public worship, they will risk raids and possible arrest or other punishment.

Most of the 48 Baptist Union congregations have a recognised prayer house, Pastor Bandura added. He said their Sunday worship meetings on 10 March were the last public services. "All Baptist churches that have prayer houses will halt meetings in them, so Sunday worship and other services from 17 March onwards will not take place."

Pastor Bandura said local church members believe they are under surveillance and that their phone calls are listened in to. They have warned pastors in Ukrainian government controlled territory that if they try to visit the region they risk being arrested. Some local pastors have already left the region.

In July 2018, the LPR State Security Ministry announced that it had banned the "destructive activity of the extremist religious organisation the All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Christian/Baptist Churches". The Ministry claimed that the Baptist Union "with its headquarters in Kiev" had refused to submit to compulsory state registration locally.

Luhansk: Raid on worship, prosecution of 82-year-old pastor

About ten masked and armed fighters raided a worship meeting in February of Path of Salvation independent Baptist church in the city of Luhansk. The intruders searched the premises, claiming to find "banned" literature, including Jehovah's Witness publications and a translation of the book "Hitler's Cross" by American Protestant pastor Erwin Lutzer, which examined the way churches stayed silent in Nazi Germany.

"These were not their books – the men planted them," Sergei Kosyak, a Protestant and former resident of Donetsk, told Forum 18 on 13 March.

The intruders drew up records of an "offence" of conducting "illegal worship" against the pastor, 82-year-old Anatoly Tolstenko, and two church members.

A case against Pastor Tolstenko was sent to a Luhansk court. It was due to be heard on 5 March, but postponed to 12 March. The case is now due to be heard on 21 March, Kosyak told Forum 18.

An official of the Religious Organisations and Spirituality Department of the Culture, Youth and Sport Ministry in Luhansk, who did not give her name, refused to discuss with Forum 18 on 14 March why Pastor Tolstenko is facing punishment for exercising his right to freedom of religion or belief.

The rebel authorities brought Pastor Tolstenko to court earlier to punish him for exercising freedom of religion or belief. But on that occasion he won the case, Kosyak added.

Krasnodon: Seizing car for unpaid fine and fees

Court bailiffs in Krasnodon [official Ukrainian name Sorokyne] have demanded that Baptist Pastor Vladimir Rytikov must surrender his 1987 Volkswagen on 21 March to meet an unpaid fine and expenses of 8,985 Russian Roubles (the LPR uses the Russian Rouble).

Pastor Rytikov, who is 59, leads the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in the town of Krasnodon, just a few kilometres from the eastern border with Russia. Like all Council of Churches congregations it does not seek official registration.

Officials raided the church's regular Sunday meeting for worship in June 2018. Pastor Rytikov refused to pay a fine of 8,000 Russian Roubles (about five weeks' average wages

for those in formal work) handed down on 11 July 2018 to punish him for leading an unapproved worship meeting. Krasnodon Town and District Court [rejected Pastor Rytikov's appeal against the fine the following month.](#)

On 27 September, court bailiffs opened proceedings to recover the money for the unpaid fine. On 18 October, they came to Pastor Rytikov's home in Krasnodon and summoned him to court that day. There, he told Judge Yuliya Kudrevatykh that he had no intention of paying the fine because he does not regard himself as guilty of any wrongdoing.

Judge Kudrevatykh found him guilty under Administrative Code Article 20.26, Part 1 of failing to pay the fine. She handed him an additional punishment of 20 hours' community service, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

Pastor Rytikov appealed against this extra punishment to the LPR Supreme Court in Luhansk. On 14 November 2018, the court overturned the community service punishment. More than 50 fellow Baptists attended the hearing to support Pastor Rytikov, presenting him with flowers. However, the July 2018 fine remained in force.

On 9 November 2018, four court bailiffs had come to Pastor Rytikov's home, going through all the rooms, recording what property he had and taking photographs, Baptists told Forum 18. "We told them Jesus loves them, and sang the hymn 'The love of Christ is immeasurably great!'," Pastor Rytikov noted after the bailiffs had left.

Court bailiff Yuliya Getman, in a 28 February 2019 order (seen by Forum 18), said Pastor Rytikov owed 8,000 Russian Roubles from the unpaid fine, a bailiffs' fee of 800 Russian Roubles and expenses in recovering the money of 185 Russian Roubles. She put a restraining order on his car and ordered him not to dispose of any of his other property.

In a 4 March order, also seen by Forum 18, the head of the Krasnodon bailiffs, Natalya Komissarova, ordered Pastor Rytikov to present his car to bailiffs on the morning of 21 March. She warned him that failing to abide by this would constitute an administrative offence with fines of 1,000 to 3,000 Russian Roubles.

Komissarova told Forum 18 on 14 March she was not authorised to discuss with third parties moves to recover debts from individuals. Asked if it is right to seize property from individuals like Pastor Rytikov who have been punished for exercising freedom of religion or belief, Komissarova responded: "We are a law-bound state and we all have our duties. He had the chance to appeal against his fine."

Stanitsa Luhanskaya: Stopped, detained, beaten, threatened

On 30 November 2018, armed and uniformed men from the State Security Ministry stopped a 22-year-old man as he was driving near Stanitsa Luhanskaya after his return to LPR-controlled territory, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. They seized his mobile phone, searched his car and found a Jehovah's Witness business card. They told him Jehovah's Witnesses, their website, literature and preaching had all been banned since February 2018. They detained him and took him to Luhansk to the former building of the Ukrainian Security Service.

The officers made the young man wait two hours before beginning their interrogation. They handcuffed the young man and ban to beat him, apparently using a book. "During this the armed men tried to get information from him about Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as his involvement in this religion," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. Officers asked him where the communities meet, who the elders are and when he was baptised.

The officers then took the young man from office to office after pulling a hat over his eyes. While he was in a corridor, one man issued a command: "You can". Someone hit the young man in the solar plexus, Jehovah's Witnesses complained. The young man asked to be allowed to phone his wife, but one of the officers told him: "You've disappeared without trace."

After six hours of interrogation, the officers took him to his home to conduct a search, expecting to confiscate religious literature. They seized several books. He was then released. Officers threatened the young man and his wife with imprisonment if they follow their faith, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

The young man "was subjected to brutal treatment belittling his human dignity and to a restriction on his right to freedom of religion and belief", Jehovah's Witnesses complained.

Who can still meet for worship?

Following the adoption of a local Religion Law in February 2018, all religious communities were required to re-register. Those that failed to do so would be deemed "illegal".

Following the re-registration deadline of 15 October 2018, the authorities regard many religious communities as illegal. All Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist and Pentecostal communities are among those denied re-registration. Even though no decision appears to have been adopted, officials have repeatedly said Jehovah's Witnesses have been banned since early 2018.

Colleagues of Andrei Litsoev, head of the Religious Organisations and Spirituality Department of the Culture, Youth and Sport Ministry in Luhansk, told Forum 18 on 14 March that he was not in the office. One official refused to discuss the problems many religious communities have faced gaining registration. "These are not our decisions," she insisted. She claimed "very many" religious communities have gained registration.

Officials at the Justice Ministry in Luhansk, which manages the registration process, referred Forum 18 on 15 March to Aleksandr Kirpa, who heads the section dealing with religious organisations. However, he categorically refused to give Forum 18 any information about the number of re-registered religious organisations, of what community they were, or why all Protestant communities that applied were rejected.

The Culture, Youth and Sport Ministry list of "religious organisations" on its website includes communities of only three faiths: the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, one Jewish community (which was registered in mid-August 2018) and one Muslim community. Hare Krishna devotees outside the region told Forum 18 in October 2018 that their community had been registered.

However, two Catholic communities and two parishes of the newly-established Orthodox Church of Ukraine (which were formerly under the Kiev Patriarchate) still function, despite not having registration.

The Roman Catholic parish in Luhansk (which also has a chapel in nearby Stakhanov), served by one priest, still functions, as does a Greek Catholic parish in Luhansk, also served by one priest, an official of the Catholic Diocese of Kharkiv-Zaporozhia told Forum 18 on 14 March. The Nuncio, Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, again visited Luhansk from Kiev earlier in 2019, together with Jan Sobilo, assistant bishop of Kharkiv-Zaporozhia. The diocesan official said they hope the parishes' status will soon be clarified.

The two parishes of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine are served by three priests and one deacon. "Police and other officials come, check and say we must register," Bishop Afanasi

(Yavorsky) of Luhansk and Starobilsk (who is based in the government-controlled part of Luhansk Region) told Forum 18 on 14 March. "They are constantly checking us." The Bishop insists the parishes will not seek registration from the LPR authorities.

UN OHCHR Report on human rights in Ukraine and Crimea temporarily occupied by Russia

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/ReportUkraine16Nov2018-15Feb2019.pdf> (Full report)

UN OHCHR (12.03.2019) - On 12 March, the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights published a report about human rights in Ukraine and in Crimea covering the period 16 November 2018 - 15 February 2019. Here are excerpts about freedom of religion:

Freedom of religion or belief in Ukraine

90. OHCHR continued to monitor developments related to granting autocephaly to the newly established church - the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. On 15 December 2018, members of the Unification Council of the Orthodox Churches of Ukraine formally agreed to create the new church and chose its leader. OHCHR documented incidents that could be perceived as acts of intimidation against members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

91. During the reporting period, the SBU in several regions of Ukraine initiated four criminal investigations into incitement to religious enmity and hatred; one of these cases has an additional charge of high treason, without issuing notices of suspicion.¹⁰⁷ The SBU conducted searches in the premises of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and places of residence of clergymen, questioning some of them.¹⁰⁸

92. On 20 December 2018, the Parliament of Ukraine launched a process of mandatory renaming of religious organizations that are affiliated with religious centers in the Russian Federation. OHCHR is concerned that this process is primarily targeting Ukrainian Orthodox Church communities and may be discriminatory.¹⁰⁹ OHCHR is also concerned that the Parliament warranted restrictions on access of the clergymen of such organizations to the premises of the Ukrainian Armed Forces on the basis of national security considerations, which contravenes article 18(3) of the ICCPR.¹¹⁰

93. Following the establishment of the new church, a number of religious communities decided to join. OHCHR received reports that in a few cases the transfers were not voluntary and were initiated by state or local authorities or even representatives of extreme right-wing groups, who were not members of those religious communities.¹¹¹ Furthermore, on 17 January 2019, the Parliament adopted amendments setting out a procedure for voluntary change of denomination by religious communities.¹¹²

Footnotes

107 OHCHR interview, 17 January 2019. The police launched criminal investigations in Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv, Zhytomyr and Rivne regions.

108 OHCHR interview, 17 January 2019.

109 According to law no. 2662-VIII of 20 December 2018, a religious organization that is affiliated with a foreign religious organization, the governing centre of which is located in a country, recognized as an "aggressor state", should include this affiliation in its name, or risk ceasing its operations. On 18 January 2018, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the law "On the peculiarities of the state policy to ensure the state sovereignty of Ukraine in temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk regions," which recognizes the Russian Federation as an aggressor state. President Poroshenko signed the law on 20 February 2018.

110 Human Rights Committee in para. 8 of its general comment No. 22 (1993) emphasized that Article 18(3) of the ICCPR permits restrictions on the freedom to manifest religion or belief only if limitations are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. This paragraph is to be strictly interpreted: restrictions are not allowed on grounds not specified there, even if they would be allowed as restrictions to other rights protected in the ICCPR, such as national security.

111 OHCHR interview, 25 February 2019.

112 According to the law, a decision to change subordination is made by two thirds of the community's quorum. The amendments reaffirm the principle of religious communities' independent determination of their membership and establish a moratorium on sale or other transfer of the religious community's property until the registration process is completed.

Freedom of religion in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation

107. Consistent with previous OHCHR findings, the pattern of criminalization of affiliation to or sympathy towards religious Muslim groups, banned in the Russian Federation, continued to disproportionately affect Crimean Tatars.

108. On 24 December 2018, a military court in the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don found four Ukrainian citizens, all Crimean Tatar men previously transferred to the Russian Federation from Crimea, guilty of membership in a terrorist organization and preparation to commit a forcible seizure of power. One man received a 17-year prison sentence, while three others - 9 years of imprisonment each. The accusations were based on the defendants' alleged membership in *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, an Islamic movement, which is legal in Ukraine but banned as a terrorist group in the Russian Federation. According to a court ruling,¹²⁷ the defendants were prosecuted for four meetings, during which they had discussed Islamic dogmas, *Hizb ut-Tahrir* ideology and sharia law. In a separate case, on 22 January 2019, the Supreme Court of Crimea found four Crimean residents guilty of membership in *Tablighi Jamaat*, another Islamic group banned in the Russian Federation. Three defendants received conditional sentences, while the fourth man was sentenced to four years of imprisonment.¹²⁸ In both cases, the defendants were found guilty based on their alleged membership in the banned Muslim groups, as well as the fact that they had possessed, read and discussed books deemed to be 'extremist' under the Russian law despite the absence of any evidence indicating that they had called for or planned to engage in any form of violence or violation of public order.

109. OHCHR notes with concern that in September 2016, four other Crimean Tatar men received long prison sentences for their alleged membership in the same organization,¹²⁹ while at least 11 other Crimean residents are currently on trial on similar charges.¹³⁰ OHCHR reiterates that freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may only be limited on the grounds prescribed by law, which are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.¹³¹

110. During the reporting period, at least five criminal cases against Crimean residents charged for their alleged anti-Russian statements in social media were closed following the de-criminalization of a single act of "incitement of hatred or violence" under Russian

Footnotes

¹²⁷ Judgment of the Severo-Kavkazskiy circuit military court of the Russian Federation, 24 December 2018, Case No. 1-42/2018.

128 Judgment of the Supreme court of Crimea, 22 January 2019, Case No. 1-1/2019.

129 See OHCHR report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 16 August - 15 November 2016, para. 164.

130 See OHCHR report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 16 May - 15 August 2018, para. 111- 112.
131 ICCPR, art. 18 (3).

132 Law of the Russian Federation No 519-FZ, 27 December 2018.

133 See *inter alia* OHCHR second thematic report "On the situation of human rights in the temporary occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine", 13 September 2017 - 30 June 2018, para. 46.

OHCHR Report on civic space and fundamental freedoms ahead of the presidential, parliamentary and local elections in Ukraine in 2019-2020

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/CivicSpaceFundamentalFreedoms2019-2020.pdf> (Full report)

OHCHR (12.03.2019) - On 12 March, the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights published a report civic space and fundamental freedoms ahead of the presidential, parliamentary and local elections. Here is an excerpt about freedom of religion:

30. Although tensions between Orthodox communities in Ukraine existed prior to the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, they have been significantly exacerbated by the ongoing autocephaly process.⁴⁴ Throughout the reporting period, OHCHR documented 10 incidents of threats and acts of intimidation against clergy and parishioners mainly affecting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (of the Moscow Patriarchate).⁴⁵ OHCHR is concerned that the current political environment further contributes to tensions negatively impacting the freedom of religion or belief, with possible negative consequences for other human rights, including the right to freedom of opinion and expression, ahead of elections.

31. In November 2018, following the refusal of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to join the newly established Orthodox Church in Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) launched a series of criminal investigations into allegations of incitement to religious hatred, with the additional charge of high treason in at least one case, without issuing notices of suspicion. In the context of these investigations, SBU searched the property of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the homes of the clergy hierarchy. SBU also interrogated clergymen in different regions of Ukraine.⁴⁶ Individuals interviewed by OHCHR, reported that such actions put them under pressure and said that despite the absence of direct threats or coercion, they considered these as attempts to influence their position on autocephaly.

32. On 20 December 2018, the Parliament voted to begin the mandatory renaming of the religious organizations affiliated with religious centres in the Russian Federation, primarily targeting the communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.⁴⁷ The Parliament also adopted restrictions on the access of clergymen of such organizations to the premises of the Armed Forces of Ukraine on the basis of national security considerations. This contravenes article 18(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as national security is not a permissible ground for a restriction of freedom of religion or belief.⁴⁸

Footnotes

⁴⁴ While the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate (hereinafter UOC KP) and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church supported and later joined the process of receiving autocephalous (independent)

status from Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, repeatedly referred to this as interference in internal canonical matters. On 6 January 2019, a newly established Orthodox Church in Ukraine received autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and was still awaiting registration as an official religious organization in Ukraine as at February 2019.

⁴⁵ Often referred to as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate to differentiate it from the UOC KP, but according to the official registration (data retrieved in January 2019) it is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and will be referred to as such.

⁴⁶ A criminal case under these charges was opened on 21 November, eight days after the Ukrainian Orthodox Church publically announced its refusal to support autocephaly.

⁴⁷ According to the Law of Ukraine no. 2662-VIII of 20 December 2018, a religious organization that is structurally affiliated with a foreign religious organization, the governing centre of which is located in the country, recognized as an “aggressor State”, should reflect in its official name that of the religious center is in such foreign state. Failure to follow this requirement within a four months deadline may render void the charter of the organization “in the part defining its full official name”.

⁴⁸ The United Nations Human Rights Committee, in its general comment No. 22 (1993) (para. 8) emphasized that Article 18(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights permits restrictions on the freedom to manifest religion or belief only if limitations are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. This paragraph is to be strictly interpreted: restrictions are not allowed on grounds not specified there, even if they would be allowed as restrictions to other rights protected in the Covenant, such as national security.

Will the Ukrainian Orthodox Church linked to Moscow suffer from a haemorrhage of its parishes?

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*



Press conference of the UOC on 21 February 2019: Archbishop Kliment, Archimandrit Pheophan Fedokevitch, Priest and Press Secretary Volodymyr Putchkov, Priests Mikolaï Danilevitch and Oleksandr Bakhov (HRWF picture)

HRWF/ EU Political Record (10.03.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2u259Ny> - Statistics about the change of jurisdiction by parishes of Metropolitan Onufry-led Ukrainian Orthodox Church in communion with the Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (UOC) to the newly created Orthodox Church of Ukraine, led by Metropolitan Epifaniy in communion with Constantinople (OCU) are clashing but do not show a haemorrhage. According to various sources, which are not always unbiased, there might have been 300 or 150 or 88 as of the end of February.

According to the Ukrainian Orthodox legislation, the general assembly of each parish is entitled to decide the status of the community but in many villages, there are no official registrars of members. In some parishes which changed their spiritual jurisdiction, the membership of the assembly is questioned. Some argue that it comprises actual members of the local church and not all the inhabitants of the village, even if they have been baptized in the Orthodox Church, while others contend the opposite.

On 21 February, HRWF interviewed Bishop Kotsaba in the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves and asked him how many parishes of his Church (UOC) had left. At that time, the UOC in communion with Moscow had registered 88 transfers of jurisdiction, he said, but he stressed that biased sources were publishing exaggerated statistics to reinforce the idea that the communion with Constantinople corresponded to a necessity and popular expectations.

Statistics of the UOC in communion with Moscow Patriarchate



Meeting with UOC Bishop Kotsaba in Kyiv (HRWF Picture)

According to Bishop Kotsaba, 36 parishes of the UOC had officially and freely chosen to join the Epifaniy-led Orthodox Church in communion with Constantinople, 23 with their priest and 13 without.

In 23 cases, the transfer of jurisdiction had been operated by force, he said, usually by groups of people coming from other villages and there are attempts at state interference.

In 29 other cases, the transfers were illegally operated, he argued, by votes of people who were not representing the local community. The decisions are contested and in a number of cases complaints have been lodged.

On the same day, a press conference was held at Ukrainski Novini press agency in Kyiv by leaders of the UOC: Archbishop Kliment, Archimandrit Pheophan Fedokevitch, Priest and Press Secretary Volodymyr Putchkov, Priest Mikolaï Danilevitch and Priest Oleksandr Bakhov.

The objective was to denounce forcible transfers of parishes to the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine and videos available on internet showing acts of violence were used as evidence.

Statistics of the Department of Religious Affairs

On 21 February, HRWF interviewed Andrei Yurash, Head of the Department on Religious Affairs and Nationalities at Ukraine's Ministry of Culture. According to him, local state administrations have received protocols of 365 parish meetings announcing their decision to join the Epifaniy-led Orthodox Church but in the meantime, the state has decided to simplify the registration process of parishes, which had been a long-standing request of religious organizations. Consequently, the registration of the defecting parishes has been suspended for a few weeks for technical and administrative reasons but it should resume by the end of March. Andrei Yurash expects that when the administrative staff is properly trained the process of transfer of jurisdiction will restart unabated.



Meeting with Andrei Yurash, Head of the Department on Religious Affairs and Nationalities at Ukraine's Ministry of Culture (HRWF Picture)

Recent timeline of the divorce

On 11 October 2018, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople 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 honoring Ukrainian armed forces.

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

On 15 December 2018, a unification council grouping together the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate) and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) under a new legal entity named the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) elected Epifaniy as their first Metropolitan.

On 6 January 2019, in Istanbul, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew handed the official decree of autocephaly (independence from the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church) to the head of the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), Metropolitan Epifaniy (Dumenko).

Although fears of violence were widespread, the process appears to be rather peaceful, albeit not everywhere, in particular in Western Ukraine under the impetus of nationalist movements, including from the extreme-right like Right Sector, and more recently in Odessa oblast and Vinnitsa oblast, the birthplace of President Poroshenko.

At this stage, whatever the statistics, the defections from the communion with Moscow Patriarchate have a limited extent as the UOC counts approximately 12,000 parishes.

Published by EU Political Report on 10 March 2019

<https://www.eupoliticalreport.eu/will-the-ukraine-orthodox-church-linked-to-moscow-suffer-from-a-haemorrhage-of-its-parishes/>

Poroshenko's church politics steers Ukraine further away from Europe

[By Oleg Sukhov](#)

Independent Journalist/Political Commentator

New Europe (24.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2XivlRg> -To save his sagging political fortunes, the man responsible for the failure of Ukrainian reforms, violations of human rights and corruption is putting on a priestly robe.

The sins of graft, lawlessness, and authoritarianism are now absolved. Ukrainian President **Petro Poroshenko** is busy putting on the unholy halo of a fake saint. He has claimed a saintly status while heavily meddling in the creation of a new Ukrainian Orthodox Church that is fully independent from Russia.

In December, the representatives of two unrecognised Orthodox churches – the Kyiv Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church – and of the Moscow Patriarchate's Ukrainian branch set up the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

They also elected **Metropolitan Epiphanius** as the head of the new church. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the highest authority in the Orthodox world, granted independence to the new church on January 6.

While the Ukrainian church's break with Russia, a semi-totalitarian state that's waging an aggressive irredentist war against Ukraine, is a positive development, the degree and context of Poroshenko's involvement in the matter have many negative aspects.

Poroshenko's private church

Poroshenko (who had been ironically a Moscow Patriarchate supporter until recently) has turned the newly-established Orthodox Church of Ukraine into his own personal propaganda tool ahead of the March 31 presidential election.

The number of omnipresent ads promoting Poroshenko's role in the Ukrainian church's independence on the Internet and in the streets is mind-boggling. It seems that he's trying to ram his newly-acquired status of a "saint" down Ukrainians' throats.

As a wannabe Byzantine emperor, Poroshenko sat in the presidium at the assembly that set up the Orthodox Church of Ukraine on December 15.

Poroshenko also went to Istanbul with Metropolitan Epiphanius to receive the tomos – a document on independence from **Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew** – on January 5-6.

When Epiphanius was supposed to bring the tomos into Kyiv's St. Sofia Cathedral on January 7, Poroshenko couldn't miss the opportunity and desperately seized the piece of parchment, with the audience having to watch the absurd spectacle of two people carrying the tomos at the same time. He appeared to be on the verge of snatching it away from Epiphanius and putting on a bishop's mitre.

Indeed, Poroshenko resembled Gollum from the Lord of the Rings, leering at the tomos and almost saying "my precious."

On January 10, Poroshenko started his "tomos tour", travelling with the document around Ukraine and delivering speeches in churches like a priest. He has also enjoyed myriads of insane panegyrics and extravagant praise in the best traditions of those lavished on Soviet dictators.

In October **Metropolitan Macarius**, then head of the unrecognised Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, urged Ukrainians to "bow to Poroshenko," while Metropolitan Epiphanius on January 7 compared Poroshenko to **Prince Vladimir the Great**, who Christianised Kyivan Rus in 988.

Poroshenko's political tricks will reduce the legitimacy of the new church and slow down the transfer of Moscow Patriarchate parishes to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Believers will be less likely to switch to Poroshenko's political church than to a neutral and apolitical arbiter.

Moreover, the aggressive and pushy publicity for Poroshenko's fake piety may have the opposite of the intended effect for many: they are realizing that his church rhetoric has nothing to do with genuine faith.

In a way, his evolution into a quasi-bishop resembles that of businessman **Alexander Petrovsky**, known as Narik (Junkie).

Narik, who has been described by Prosecutor General **Yuri Lutsenko** as a mafia boss, stood by the side of Poroshenko and Epiphanius in Dnipro in December and during the

granting of the independence tomos on January 6. Narik, a major sponsor of Orthodox churches, is closely connected with top government figures and denies being a mafia boss.

A copy of Russia

The irony is that, while banging on about independence from Russia, Poroshenko is thus turning the Orthodox Church of Ukraine into an identical copy of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Russian Orthodox Church is a subservient political tool of the Kremlin, and Poroshenko is transforming the Ukrainian church into his own public relations firm.

Just like Poroshenko, Russia's eternal president, **Vladimir Putin**, has used religious agenda to divert attention away from the corruption and authoritarianism of his regime, economic difficulties and rigged elections. This included hysteria over the case against members of the Pussy Riot punk band who were jailed in 2012 for two years for singing in a church.

In the same way as Putin and ex-President **Viktor Yanukovych**, Poroshenko has bussed in public-sector employees to attend his tomos tour rallies to imitate sincere popular support.

Poroshenko's religious agenda is a fig leaf intended to offset and replace much more important issues: Poroshenko's utter failure to reform Ukraine and his efforts to block and sabotage the reforms; his decision to spearhead corruption rather than fight it, with Ukraine remaining as one of Europe's most corrupt countries; the utmost poverty of Ukrainian citizens, with Ukraine being one of Europe's poorest countries; the Poroshenko regime's crackdown on human rights and liberties and his increasing authoritarian tendencies.

When asked by an activist on January 18 when he would start fighting corruption instead of staging his circus tricks with the tomos, Poroshenko called him an "unbeliever" and "Russian provocateur" and urged him to go to church and pray. Poroshenko's use of sham devoutness to make up for the greed and corruption of his government is so ridiculous that it requires no comment.

The theater of the absurd reached its apogee when a pensioner was photographed kissing Poroshenko's hand during his tomos tour on January 17. In his new imaginary world, he now sees himself as a medieval king blessing his slavish subjects with divine grace.

Another peak of insanity came on January 16, when Poroshenko claimed that the tomos was more important than victory in the war with Russia.

With this tirade Poroshenko shot himself in the foot since he's always been using the war with Russia as the most important thing ever and a universal excuse for all his failures. But it has also offended veterans of the war with Russia and those devoted to fighting the aggressor.

Pseudo-religious babble has now superseded everything else. Poroshenko has apparently forgotten his claim in November that Russia was on the verge of launching a full-blown invasion of Ukraine.

In November, Russia committed an act of open aggression, illegally seizing three Ukrainian boats on the border between Ukraine's internationally recognised territorial waters and neutral waters and capturing 24 Ukrainian sailors. Poroshenko also seems to have forgotten the fate of the sailors: he's busy donning priestly attire.

Back to the Middle Ages

Religion is part of the increasingly archaic and outdated agenda that Poroshenko is pushing: it is summarised in the triad "faith, language, army." As developed countries are

making progress on space technology, 3D printing and genetic engineering, Poroshenko – like Putin – is embracing an increasingly obscurantist, irrational and obsolete ideology.

Poroshenko's religious circus is yet another proof that, contrary to his claims, he's steering Ukraine away from Europe, Enlightenment rationalism and the European liberal values of the separation of church and state and freedom of worship. Instead of modernising and reforming the country, he is turning the clock back and trying to transform it into an isolated island of archaic bigotry.

If Poroshenko is re-elected, this irrational illiberalism will be set in stone, and Ukraine will drift further away from its people's aspirations to be part of a secular and free Europe. Thus the 2013-2014 EuroMaidan Revolution, which ousted Yanukovich, the brutally authoritarian and pro-Russian archetype of a post-Soviet oligarch, in favour of European values, will be ultimately defeated.

Indeed, European officials and taxpayers should pay more attention to Ukrainian politicians walking the walk rather than them talking the talk.

Autocephaly effect: almost 300 Ukrainian parishes pass from Moscow to Kiev

by Vladimir Rozanskij

Asia News (22.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2U4s71I> - Despite the worst fears, the transition is taking place in a non-violent way. The exodus is decided by the parish assembly. But there are attempts at state interference. The question of monasteries and places of pilgrimage, a reference point for Orthodox and Catholics. So far in 10 dioceses, only two have passed to Kiev: Vinnitsa and Odessa.



Moscow (AsiaNews) - One month after the delivery of the autochthonous Tomos, it is estimated that around 300 Russian parishes have passed to the jurisdiction of the new Ukrainian autocephalous Church.

At first glance this is a limited percentage: 2.5% of all the infrastructures of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine, counting also the monasteries, the dioceses and the synodal administrations. But considering the long times of ecclesiastical structures, it is a rather high percentage: in just one month the passage was four times higher than the previous five years, that is, starting from the anti-Russian "revolution" of Majdan, with calls for change.

Although fears of violence were widespread, the process appears to be rather peaceful. According to the Ukrainian legislation, the general assembly of each individual parish is the one that decides the status of the community: it is the meeting of the actual members of the local church, not a generic gathering of the inhabitants of a village or a neighborhood.

Over the years, the Ukrainian government has also been criticized for the desire to unify the laws regulating the internal life of religious communities, without distinguishing the different confessions and memberships.

Even the European Community - of which the new Ukraine aspires to become a member - has criticized this, and many local communities have announced that they will in future present appeals to the European Court against these rules.

Among Protestants, the community assembly meets according to a rigid classification of members, while in the statutes of the Orthodox parishes the criteria of belonging appear more elastic. There are the parishioners aged 18 and over, who profess to be Orthodox and who have never been convicted of civil or ecclesiastical crimes.

Some statutes include regular attendance of liturgical celebrations, or the declaration of approval by the parish priest. These variable formulas often allow the inclusion among the assembly so-called "tourists", external to the community of believers, who according to

the circumstances vote in favor or against the passage of the community to another jurisdiction.

In many statutes there is the rule that the assembly is valid if the majority (50% + 1) of the members of the community participate in it, and the passage of jurisdiction requires two thirds of the votes; based on these percentages, the number of "tourists" needed is calculated.

The functioning of the ecclesiastical structure, the autocephalous and the Russians is not limited to the parish administration: the law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations" foresees the existence of other structures such as monasteries, synodal districts, missions and dioceses. Even these can decide the passage of jurisdiction between the various orthodox obediences. Before the Tomos there were at least four, today there are substantially two, but with various small dissident organizations, especially at the local level.

The most delicate and significant structures are the monasteries, which gather large numbers of faithful and pilgrims, starting from the two Lavre (sets of several monasteries) of the Kiev and Pochaevsk Caves. These have masses of devotees from both the competing jurisdictions, and even the Greek Catholics, who leave considerable offers for rites and souvenirs.

Both the patriarch emeritus Filaret (Denisenko) and the new metropolitan of Kiev Epifanyj (Dumenko) have declared on several occasions that they expect the passage of the Lavre and the monasteries to the autocephalous Church, for which the assembly of the monks or the permission of the higher authorities is necessary. There is also the possibility of a state intervention, since the land is owned by the Ukrainian state: it could dissolve the leases and usufruct contracts and requisition the monasteries, to assign them to another jurisdiction.

However, the most desirable objects are the dioceses, whose administrations enjoy ample tax exemptions. In this case the passage is decided by the bishop, with the permission of the metropolitan and the meeting of the diocesan clergy, but here the legislation is very imprecise. So far, of the 10 dioceses that had announced they want to move to Kiev, only two have passed, those of Vinnitsa with metropolitan Simeon and Odessa, and in a personal capacity Metropolitan Aleksandr (Drabinko), who was vicar of Metropolitan Onufrij (head of Russian jurisdiction). The metropolitan diocese of Vinnitsa is now under legal dispute, as Onufrij has appointed a substitute for the "traitor" Simeon.

The pressures and reciprocal manipulations between Russian Orthodox and Ukrainians are taking place in various forms, but so far there have been no striking cases of mutual violence, as was feared. In many parishes, the faithful are waiting to see the outcome of the neighbors' assemblies, before deciding to organize their passage, and even the priests use different orientation tactics of their parishioners. The new Ukrainian Church will have to try to avoid the monopolistic temptations, sustained by local administrations, really leaving to the people the decision on such an important issue for the future of the country and of the whole Orthodox Church.

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

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

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

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

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

First, his words will be perceived in Ukraine as covert support for candidates oriented towards Russia rather than candidates focused on Kyiv and as an attempt to influence the votes of local populations in predominantly Russian-speaking regions. Hopes for a change at the head of the Ukrainian state are clearly expressed in the Patriarch's words. In the current geopolitical context, it will be viewed as another blatant intrusion of the Kremlin in an electoral process abroad. This comes at a time when Putin uses his political weight to dissuade Orthodox Churches in the European Union from recognizing the autocephaly granted to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

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

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

On 17 January, the Ukrainian parliament adopted a bill setting the procedure for changing the affiliation of religious communities in the country. It specifically targets 'those' that are part of "the structure of a religious organization whose governing center is located outside Ukraine", in 'a' state, which is recognized by law as having committed military aggression against Ukraine. Concretely, it is the sole UOC in communion with the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow that is on the radar. The bill provides for specific limitations of the activities of 'such religious organizations.' Among other things, it restricts access to military units for their clergy and chaplains.

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

CRIMEA: Russia moves to crush Orthodox Church of Ukraine in occupied Crimea

By Halya Coynash

Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (14.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2EiC46n> - The Orthodox Church of Ukraine has been ordered to vacate the Cathedral of Vladimir and Olga in occupied Simferopol by the beginning of March, with this likely to lead to eight parishes in rural areas also being forced to close. Archbishop Kliment of Simferopol and Crimea has appealed to the international community to prevent the effective destruction of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine [OCU] which has long been under attack in Crimea. He has also, however, suggested that if there was a choice between the Church being able to continue and a fully principled stand refusing to register under Russian legislation, he chooses the Church.

Kliment reported on 8 February that he had received a writ ordering that he leave the Cathedral which was now under the so-called ministry of property and land relations. The occupation authorities were thus terminating the agreement between the Church and the Crimean Property Fund in 2002, and the Church was given 30 days to vacate the building.

Perhaps coincidentally, on 5 February Kliment was appointed the head of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's Mission to help victims of rights abuses and illegal imprisonment in Russia and occupied territories.

During a press conference in Kyiv on 12 February, Kliment called on the international community, on the ambassadors of European countries, the USA and Canada in Ukraine to take the situation under their personal control. If pressure on the Church intensifies, he said, personal sanctions were crucial against those involved in terminating the Church's lease agreement.

The following day, Anna Anyukhina from the occupation 'government' claimed that they had offered to 'legalize relations', that the Church had not re-registered as a legal entity, under Russian legislation, and that they therefore did not have such a possibility.

The Church has, indeed, refused to re-register under Russian legislation, which would require adding words to its association papers claiming that Crimea is part of Russia. Lack of such registration has meant that the Church is not considered to be a legal entity at all.

As mentioned, Kliment addressed this question in an interview to Krym.Realii on 13 February, saying the following:

"You know, when the principled position of the Ukrainian government is that "we won't accept anything from Crimea" and they reject all responsibility for what is happening in Crimea, I don't know what I should do now, and how. If there is a choice between the Church, religious services and people (and the stand on registration), then I choose the Church".

This is not the first time that the Archbishop has expressed bitterness that the Ukrainian government is not doing enough to support his Church under siege in occupied Crimea.

It is, in fact, not guaranteed that the occupation regime would not have used other methods to hound out the Church and Kliment has said that he was offered a large amount of money very early on if he vacated the Cathedral.

It was Kliment and the Church that first came under attack following annexation, almost certainly because of its openly pro-Ukrainian position and its public statement on 11 March 2014 condemning Russian occupation of Crimea. It was this opposition that led to its refusal to enter into any agreement with the Russian Defence Ministry (over church premises in Sevastopol 'handed over' to that ministry or to re-register under Russian legislation. There has, however, been an attack on all things Ukrainian since Russia's invasion, and the Church has provided a vital focal point for people wanting to hear Ukrainian and be with Ukrainians. That alone, as well as Kliment's impassioned appeals to the international community in defence of Ukrainian political prisoners, were surely behind the attempts to deprive the Church and believers of their places of worship and of other rights. Other methods included the threat of physical reprisals by the armed paramilitaries, especially in 2014, vulnerability over the lack of Russian citizenship and also economic intimidation. There have been threats, for example, against those businesspeople who provided premises for the Church to use, with this a reason why many religious communities have lost their places of worship.

During the first year after Russia's invasion, 38 out of the 46 parishes under what was then still the Kyiv Patriarchate ceased to exist. In at least three cases, churches were seized by the occupation regime: in Sevastopol; Simferopol and in the village of Perevalne.

At a press conference in October 2018, Kliment reported that only five priests now remained against 25 in 2014. Five had left recently for mainland Ukraine after a number of searches of the homes of members of the Ukrainian Cultural Centre and after it became clear that the lack of a Russian passport was likely to be used against them. The remaining clergy try as far as is possible to continue services, sometimes helped by priests who come for one or two days from mainland Ukraine.

While the Cathedral is not the only remaining church in Crimea, it is the main cathedral and eparchial centre of the Church. It is also the only Ukrainian Orthodox place of worship in Simferopol and for many believers, it would simply not be possible to travel to other parts of the peninsula for services.

The new moves to drive the Church out of Crimea are probably also retaliation for the creation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine with autocephaly or independent status. The developments were met with rage by both the Kremlin and the Moscow Patriarchate and Archbishop Kliment had anticipated measures against the Church in Crimea as revenge. He had earlier spoken of how Sergei Aksyonov, the Russian-installed 'leader' of Crimea that the occupation regime's restraint was due to a request from Metropolitan Lazar, head of the Russian Orthodox Church in Crimea who was worried that persecution of the Ukrainian Church in Crimea could lead to a backlash against churches of the Moscow Patriarchate in mainland Ukraine. After Ukraine receives the Tomos of autocephaly on January 6, 2019, there is nothing and nobody, Kliment said, save God, who can restrain the Russian authorities in occupied Crimea.

Tragically, he was right.

Unknown individuals attempt to set church in Ukraine's Nikolayev Region on fire

Interfax Religion (12.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2TTd7nj> - Kiev: Unidentified persons threw a bottle bomb in the building of the church of St. Elijah the Martyr in the village of

Zelenyi Bor, Ukraine's Nikolayev Region on Sunday night, no one has been injured, the information and education department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church said.

"It emerged that a window was smashed in the church and a bottle bomb was thrown in. It's a miracle that the fire did not engulf the entire church, the fire went out. Windows were broken and smashed in the church, a curtain burned down and two carpet strips on the floor were damaged, the walls are covered in soot, icons and cloths on the icons were blackened with ash," the Ukrainian Orthodox Church said.

Before setting the church on fire, the wrongdoers cut off electricity thus turning off the alarm and video surveillance in it, it said. They also attempted to pull out the wooden cross installed in front of the church.

The police and firefighters came to the incident scene.

«ЛІЦЕНЗІЯ НА ЗЛОЧИНИ». ПРЕЗЕНТАЦІЯ ФІЛЬМУ

Ukrinform (2019) - <https://bit.ly/2TJUFNU> - 22 лютого о 14:00 відбудеться прес-конференція, присвячена презентації художньо-документального фільму «Ліцензія на злочини» (Зала 1).

Організатор: Громадська організація «Кавальєр».

Учасники: Людмила Филипович - доктор філософських наук, професор, віце-президент Української асоціації релігієзнавців; Віллі Фотре (Willy Fautre) - засновник і директор організації «Human Rights Without Frontiers» (Бельгія); Олег Мальцев - академік Української Академії наук, кандидат психологічних наук, експерт у галузі безпеки; Олександр Саїнчін - доктор юридичних наук, професор; Олексій Оніпко - президент Української Академії наук (УАН); Максим Лепський - доктор філософських наук, професор, голова дослідницького комітету Соціального прогнозування «Соціологічної асоціації України».

Коротко. Фільм «Ліцензія на злочини» знайомить глядачів з методами підготовки релігійних екстремістів, які використовуються для реалізації внутрішньої та зовнішньої політики Російської Федерації.

Як повідомляють організатори, під час заходу вперше буде представлений внутрішній «Підручник патріотів РФ», в якому детально описана система підготовки осіб, здатних знищувати будь-яке інакодумство, як на території Росії, так і за її межами.

Численні документальні матеріали, а також історії двох інсайдерів, наочно продемонструють механізми роботи машини репресій, яка сформувалася в Росії за останні 20 років.

Учасникам заходу буде наданий екземпляр «Підручника патріотів РФ», який з'явиться у вільному доступі 25-го лютого.

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The enthronement ceremony of Kiev's Epiphanius (video)

The ritual was adapted by bringing together the Russian tradition and that of Constantinople. Only 200 chosen personalities attend, including President Petro Poroshenko and former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. Patriarch Emeritus Filaret absent. Present the head of the Greek Catholic Church, Svjatoslav Shevchuk, Latin Rite and Protestant representatives. Representatives of the Churches of Constantinople, of Mount Athos and of the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches of the United States and of Canada also present.

By Vladimir Rozanskij

AsiaNews (04.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Sd2KxV> - Metropolitan Epiphanius (Dumenko) was officially proclaimed head of the new Ukrainian autocephalous church, recognized by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, during a ceremony of enthronement held yesterday, February 3, in St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kiev. On this date the new metropolitan turned 40, and thus fully began his mission as a guide for the Ukrainian Orthodox.

At the end of the liturgy, after Holy Communion, Epiphanius was given the ministry as metropolitan and was solemnly declared primate of the Holy Church Ukraine, according to the Tomos of autocephaly. The parish priest of the church showed him to the throne, recently realized for the occasion (the church had remained until now a state museum), where he took possession of the authority conferred upon him. The ancient thrones of the country, as noted by the parish priest, the protoierej Aleksandr Trofimljuk, "had been transferred to St. Petersburg, and some were destroyed by the Bolsheviks".

The ritual of enthronement was rewritten and adapted for the occasion, becoming a synthesis between the Russian use – where the enthronement is part of the liturgy itself – and the Constantinopolitan one, which places it outside the liturgical act. The detail is not without symbolic value: since the time of Ivan the Terrible, crowned in 1547, the Russians have always tried to stand out from Constantinople, in the settlement of tsar, patriarchs and metropolitans. The new rite wanted to symbolically show the meeting of the two souls of Orthodoxy, the Greek one and the Slavic one.

There were just over 200 people at the ceremony, including Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and party leader Batkvischina ("The dear motherland"), former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, the president's main opponent in the upcoming elections at the end of March.

There were also representatives of the Churches of Constantinople, of Mount Athos, and of the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches of the United States and of Canada. Among the guests was also the head of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, the Major Archbishop Svjatoslav Shevchuk, some representatives of the Catholic Church of the Latin rite and of the Protestant communities of the country. Patriarch Emeritus Filaret (Denisenko) was absent for health reasons, but sent a message to the new Metropolitan. At the end of the

ceremony, Metropolitan Epiphanius, addressed a heartfelt appeal to all the Churches of the world to recognize the new Ukrainian Church.

The church and the square in front of it were strictly guarded by police forces, the National Guard and a vast security, although the participants in the ceremony were a very small and select group. Even around the square there was no great participation of the people: the access routes had been blocked to traffic and free passage. The atmosphere was rather surreal, remembering above all the mass demonstrations in favor of the establishment of the new Church that took place in the last months right in front of St. Sophia.

Watch the video here: <https://youtu.be/Bu9tcgQmK74>

Kyiv Metropolis of the UOC (OCU) registered

RISU (31.01.2019) - https://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/orthodox/ocu/74542/ - On January 30, the website of the Ministry of Justice published information on the registration of the Religious Organization KYIV METROPOLIS OF UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE) (KYIV METROPOLIS OF UOC (OCU)) (Identification code of the legal entity is 42783113).

The founder of the religious organization is the Local Unification Council of the OCU, and the governing body of the Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine, who nowadays is Metropolitan Epifaniy (Dumenko Serhiy Petrovych).

Location of legal entity: 01601, Kyiv, Triokhsvyatytelska street, 6.

Director of the Department of Religious Affairs and Nationalities of the Ministry of Culture Andriy Yurash reported today on January 30, at the conference The Jurisdictional Status of the Kyiv Orthodox Metropolis in 1686: Theology, Canon Law and the Cultural-Historical Aspect that the new Church was registered along with its Charter, which was adopted at the Council on December 15, 2018. The Charter of the Kyiv Metropolis of the UOC (OCU) was registered as well.

"These two names (the UOC and the OCU - Ed.) will be used as synonymous and it has been agreed directly with the Phanar. Therefore, the use of terms of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine are assigned exactly to the administrative unit, which is called the Kyiv Metropolis," said Andriy Yurash.

Constantinople delegation visits Tbilisi to discuss Ukrainian autocephaly with Georgian patriarch

Interfax (30.01.2019) - <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=14902> - The meeting between Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, a representative of the Constantinople Patriarchate, and Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II on the issue of recognition of the Ukrainian church's autocephaly did not yield any results, Metropolitan Emmanuel told reporters after the meeting.

"We discussed all vital issues faced by the Orthodox Church. The main goal that all Orthodox Churches share is to maintain our unity. I discussed that with the patriarch of Georgia," the metropolitan said.

The issue of the autocephaly of the Ukrainian church was also raised, he said. "We discussed the issue of the Ukrainian church's autocephaly and the tomos. Our purpose was to inform [each other] about some details, we didn't want for force any positions. It was just an information meeting. We know that the catholicos-patriarch has a lot of wisdom and can make the right decision," he said.

Metropolitan Shio (Mujiri), the patriarchal locum tenens, who also attended the meeting, told reporters that the delegation of the ecumenical patriarch had not tried to convince the patriarch to make a particular decision.

"The Constantinople Patriarchate understands our slowness on the issue of recognizing the autocephaly of the Ukrainian church. Unfortunately, some of our people say that the slowness of our Church is associated with Russian influence, which is not true," Metropolitan Shio said.

The Georgian Orthodox Church will make a decision regarding Ukraine's autocephaly at the meeting of the Holy Synod in the spring.

Odessa parishioners abandon Moscow and choose Kiev

The decision to follow the new autocephalous Church comes after a community debate and vote. Priests are braking. Determinants of the wounds of the war: the son of a parishioner is a prisoner of the Russians. "We cannot remain in a church that blesses the Cossacks and those who kill Ukrainians".

By Vladimir Rozanskij

AsiaNews (30.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2HIRZid> - The parishioners of the church of St. Demetrius in the village of Puzhajkovo, near Odessa, recently decided to leave the Moscow Patriarchate to join the new Ukrainian autocephalous Church. Leading the initiative was one of the parishioners, Viktor Soroka, father of one of the sailors arrested in the Kerch Strait incident on 25 November, when some Ukrainian ships were blocked by the Russians. Soroka's son is still held in a Russian prison.

The passage of the church had become a matter of honor for Viktor: "We must understand that after five years of war, today we cannot remain in a Church that blesses the Cossacks and those who kill the Ukrainians," he told the press. The decision on the change of jurisdiction was decided by a majority of the parishioners assembly.

Another voter, Larisa Cheban together with her whole family noted: "The vote was very transparent, we collected the signatures and no one quarreled; I think everything went very well ". According to Larisa, only one resident of the village voted against the passage to the autocephalous Church, even though the parish priest tried to convince those present to remain with the patriarchate of Moscow, saying that he would not pass. "But he is young, does not realize how things are and what people want," said Larisa.

The priest is gone, and at the village they are waiting for Kiev to send a new parish priest. The church for prudence has been sealed and no ceremony takes place; the outgoing parish priest refused to make statements. Only the sacristan Mikhail, the only one to vote against, tells of the pressures of the promoters towards the assembly: "It all happened very quickly,

within three days ... to take the initiative were the most influential parishioners and richer, who could afford to go around the houses to convince others, had more contacts than everyone else. We, on the contrary, were not very organized".

Other parishioners, who refused to attend the assembly, were resentful with the group of promoters: "It was a real coup, they took the church without any discussion," said Natalia Petrova. She does not consider legitimate the new autocephalous Church, despite the concession of Tomos from Constantinople: "They did not even want to listen to the parish priest, they just told him to step aside", Natalia complains.

The group of promoters respond to the accusations showing the video of the assembly, in which everyone expressed themselves freely and without pressure in favor of the new Church. In their view, undue pressure is being exerted by the minority of pro-Russian parishioners. "Russian priests are always trying to scare people, it's their way of doing things, they know that they are losing their power and their churches here," warns Viktor Soroka.

According to Viktor, the four surrounding villages are also deciding to pass under the authority of Epifanyj of Kiev, and soon the respective parish assemblies will take place. The area of Odessa, a large port on the Black Sea immortalized by the famous film Battleship Potemkin, is one of the most affected by the conflict with Russia, but the reality is that the debate is raging in parishes throughout Ukraine.

Metropolitan Ioann to head Russian Orthodox in Europe

The young bishop, 44, is responsible for the Churches of the Moscow Patriarchate in 13 European countries. The new Exarchate was revived after the break between Constantinople and Moscow over autocephaly granted to Ukraine. In the recent Synod of Moscow, the new Exarchate of South-East Asia was founded, which includes about 10 countries: North and South Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore.

By Stefano Caprio

AsiaNews (05.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2RqwjqA> - A few days ago, Metropolitan Ioann (Roščin), former vicar Patriarchal vicar and bishop of Bogorodsk, was appointed to head of the Russian Orthodox in Europe. Last November he was named administrator of the parishes of the patriarchate of Moscow in Italy, based in Rome at the church of St. Caterina, in the territory of the Russian embassy to Italy. At the end of December, when he went to Moscow for the meeting of the Patriarchal Synod, the young bishop (born in 1974) was catapulted to the new position of "metropolitan of Korsun and Western Europe". He quickly bought a white "klobuk" (the miter of the metropolitans), he was solemnly consecrated to the new office in the Assumption Cathedral, in the Kremlin in Moscow. We met him as he was passing through Rome on his way to Paris, to ask him some questions.

Eminence, tell us about your new assignment and about the structure you have been called to lead.

The Russian exarchate of Western Europe was established in 1945, and remained active until the 1990s, when it was dissolved to reflect the new conditions of the Russian Diaspora after the end of the Soviet regime. It was founded by Metropolitan Evlogy (Georgievsky) in 1945 [who did not want to join the other "Tsarist" bishops, who founded the Russian Church abroad in opposition to the Soviet regime - ed.]. At first it was recognized as an

independent structure by Constantinople, so it gathered around the patriarch of Moscow Sergij (Stragorodskij). At that time, at the end of the Second World War, the Russian Church once again had the opportunity to care for its faithful at home and abroad after a long period of persecutions. A part of its priests remained under the authority of the patriarch of Constantinople. For the Russians in Europe there were therefore two parallel exarchates: one under Moscow and one under Constantinople. The latter was abolished a few weeks ago, after the decision to grant autocephaly to the Ukrainians. Now, following the events that led to the breakdown of relations between Moscow and Constantinople, Patriarch Kirill decided to reorganize the care of the many Russians living abroad, in Europe in particular, reviving the Exarchate of Paris.

How big is this exarch?

The new metropolis supervises the dioceses and parishes of 13 States: France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Great Britain, Ireland, Belgium, Holland and Switzerland, as well as smaller states such as Andorra, Lichtenstein, Monaco and Luxembourg. There are already many parishes and 5 dioceses, those of Spain and Portugal (newly established), then in Belgium, Holland and Italy, which are now subjected to the Metropolitan of Paris, even if they have their bishops who autonomously guide the life of the Local Churches, which will be reunited in an Exarchate Council. We will meet to discuss the various questions, both internal to the life of the Church, and in external relations with the society of these European countries. In Italy I retained the See, having obtained it only two months ago, and I'm not willing to give up this beautiful country too soon.

How much did the conflict with Constantinople influence these decisions?

I would simply say that this is a reorganization of existing structures. We have essentially never divided ourselves from the patriarchate of Constantinople. We have always recognized his primacy of honor and his role as mother-Church, from whom we received baptism. But with the latest events, our relations have become very complicated. In particular, with regards the pastoral care of the Russians in the Diaspora, we cannot leave them without assistance, according to the Lord's command; they must be able to receive what they come to the Church for, beginning with the sacraments.

Apparently, the reorganization does not only affect Western Europe, but the whole Russian Diaspora in the world.

This is true. In fact, the new Exarchate of South-East Asia was also constituted, which includes about 10 countries: North and South Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore (where the Esarca will be based) and in the other Asian States where the mission of the Russian Orthodox Church is particularly active and fruitful, with the recent opening of many new churches. For now there is only one exarch, but soon the bishops of some other countries should also be named, and the exarch will probably also be elevated to the dignity of Metropolitan.

In North America there is the network of the so-called "patriarchal parishes": those churches that wanted to remain directly under the patriarchate of Moscow when, in 1970, Moscow granted autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of America [not recognized by Constantinople - ed.]. They represent the patriarchate of Moscow in the United States, but today they are unified in the administration to those of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, which met at the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007.

In South America there is one single Eparchy, which is currently governed by Metropolitan Ignatij (Pologrudov) based in Buenos Aires, founded again in 1945. There are parishes in Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, practically in all the countries of the continent.

It is what is called the "Russian world".

In fact, the tragic events of 1917 have left us a legacy that today, 100 years later, we can evaluate in a positive sense. Many people have had to leave the country to escape atheistic oppression, and the Church has moved following their tracks, realizing their vocation to preach the truth of Christ, baptize and distribute holy communion, forming new Christian communities throughout the world.

You just recalled that in 1970 Moscow granted autocephaly to the Americans. Could not you do the same with the Ukrainians?

Our Synod never discussed Ukrainian autocephaly, for the simple reason that it was never requested by the bishops and the faithful in Ukraine. A schismatic attempt was made by Metropolitan Filaret (Denisenko) in the 1990's, but was based more on political than ecclesial premises. If there were no political motives or pretexts of anti-monastic primacy on the part of Constantinople, we would be ready to face the question, I stress only for ecclesial reasons. If Constantinople had listened to the council that came from our Church, even in last August's meeting with Patriarch Kirill, we could have resolved the issue together, on the basis of canonical rules and mutual love.

Does it not seem to you that there is a bit of confusion among the Orthodox on these "canonical rules"?

The problem is that of the interpretation of these norms, which were written at the time of the seven ecumenical councils of the fathers of the Church, more than 1000 years ago. These rules reflect the situation of the Church in those times, and we are not always able to bring out the spirit of those precepts, becoming bogged down in the letter of the law. And this means that they are treated in opposing ways, especially with regard to the mission in the Diaspora: some believe that this is a prerogative of Constantinople, for others it is a duty of every single local Church. These questions should be addressed in the meetings between the heads of the Churches, in a dialogue made of love and truth, without ultimatums and without haste. History shows us that many questions could have been solved if there had been a real willingness to dialogue. At the moment it is difficult to think of possible pan-Orthodox meetings or councils. Unfortunately, the 2016 Council of Crete was not pan-Orthodox because there were four local Churches missing.

This break is a tragic fact, but perhaps clarity is emerging in the concept of universal Orthodoxy.

Some contrapositions between Moscow and Constantinople, about the interpretation of canonical norms and the structure of the Churches, have always existed. Since the patriarchate of Constantinople has begun to act in a unilateral way, threatening even the canonical integrity of our Russian Church, benevolent dialogue has been interrupted, and we cannot see now how we can restore it in the future.

The Russian Orthodox Church has always proposed a model of autonomous and independent local Churches, which have every right to preach the Gospel and take care of their faithful, without interference from other local Churches. The mission of the Church, throughout the world, always remains one: to proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ, everything else is just a consequence. All this situation must lead only to a greater willingness to respond to this call of the Lord, not only for us Orthodox, but for all Christians of the world, to seek the unity of faith together.

European Russian Orthodox stuck between Constantinople and Moscow

The churches of Russian emigration were under the protection of the Patriarch of Constantinople during the Soviet period. After the break between Bartholomew and Kirill, they risk being absorbed into the Greek Byzantine world. The risk of losing the Russian identity. A Letter from Metropolitan Joann to Bartholomew I.

By Stefano Caprio

AsiaNews (28.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2MBAjE1> - The Patriarchate of Constantinople has suspended a divine father Dionisij Bajkov (see photo) for three months. The Orthodox priest was serving in San Remo at the historic church dedicated to the Most Holy Savior, Saint Katherine and Saint Seraphim of Sarov. It is one of the churches of the Russian archdiocese that was suppressed last November by the ecumenical patriarchate, who were told to stop commemorating their Archbishop, to join the clergy of the Greek metropolises, to consider the parishes and communities as part of these metropolises, and finally to deliver all the required documents and parish registers.

The suspension was decided by Metropolitan Gennadios (Zervos), head of the Greek Orthodox in Italy, based in Venice. Father Bajkov ignored his directives, and continued to commemorate the Archbishop of Paris Ioannis of Chariopoulis, born Jean Renneteau, a 76-year-old Frenchman born in Bordeaux, who represents the historic "French orthodoxy" originating from the Russian emigration of the following years to the revolution. Furthermore, the parish priest of San Remo did not attend the meeting convened in Venice on 23 January. Like him, other priests in Italy also deserted the convocation to Venice, and further suspensions and threats are expected for days.

The church of San Remo is perhaps the most famous among the Italian Orthodox churches; as Father Dionisij himself reiterated in an interview with Nezavisimaja Gazeta, "is the city's visiting card, and is shown on all tourist maps, which is why it has long been targeted by the Greeks. To avoid controversy, we will keep it closed until February 23rd, when there will be the assembly of our Archdiocese". The parish priest also added that he is ready, if necessary, to "lock the doors". Other priests, 10 in total, that make up the exarchate of Paris, have decided to abstain for the next month from all the liturgical celebrations.

The conflict between Greeks and Russians in Europe will not be easily resolved given the different sensibilities of the two ethnic Orthodox communities. The coexistence under the Constantinopolitan jurisdiction dates back to the period after the revolution, when the Russian emigrants found welcome in part in the ecumenical patriarchate, but was reactivated in an explosive way after the quarrels between Moscow and Constantinople in recent months, which led to the creation of the Ukrainian autocephalous Church (there are many Ukrainians and Moldovans among the "European Russians").

Last September, as soon as the news was released that Bartholomew would grant autonomy to the Ukrainians, some priests of the European Russian community began to agitate. Already in October, Archpriest Georgi Blatinskij, in service at the other prestigious Nativity church and St. Nicholas in Florence, had announced the decision to leave the Greeks to return under the authority of the patriarchate of Moscow. Probably to cut off all controversy, in November the Russian archdiocese was suppressed, eliminating any ambiguity between Greeks and Russians in the patriarchate structures.

Faced with this unexpected turnaround, at the end of December the patriarch of Moscow Kirill made the decision to restructure the network of Russian churches in European countries, appointing the young bishop Ioann (Roščin), recently sent to Italy, with the title of metropolitan Korsun and all of Western Europe, based in Paris. One of the purposes of this appointment is precisely the desire to attract Russian priests to the Moscow jurisdiction, disappointed by Constantinople, which in part date back to the post-revolutionary diaspora, but in part still greater they had escaped from the Muscovite patriarchate.

The Assembly of the now ex Greek-Russian Archdiocese will take place next February 23, which will have to decide whether to subject itself to Constantinople and lose its identity, or seek an agreement with Moscow, hoping to preserve at least a semblance of autonomy. Meanwhile, Bishop Ioann of Charioupolis has sent a dense and respectful letter to Bartholomew, which traces the history of the European Russian community and defends the reasons for a very particular ecclesiological vision.

The European Russians, in fact, have tried in this century to keep the Russian identity, which seemed to have been canceled by the Soviets at home, intact, through the Byzantine tradition and integration into democratic and secularized Europe. Fidelity and innovation, two concepts difficult to harmonize even for Catholics and Protestants, all the more so for a Church that is often defenseless in the face of history and politics, like the Orthodox Church, which is now being tested again like never before.

For Bartholomew, the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is an act of justice

By NAT da Polis

AsiaNews (26.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Tkz3ru> - On the feast day of Saint Gregory of Nazianus, the ecumenical patriarch defends his decision to grant autonomy to the Ukrainian Church, as well as upholding the "primus inter pares" status for himself and the Mother Church of Orthodoxy.



Istanbul (AsiaNews) – The anniversary of the death of one of the great Fathers of the undivided Church was commemorated yesterday at the Phanar, headquarters of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Gregory of Nazianzus, theologian and patriarch of Constantinople, was a close friend of Saint Basil the Great, whose cultural and ecclesial education he shared, and a great rhetorical stylist, so much so that he was dubbed the "Christian Demosthenes".

Bartholomew used the occasion to defend the Patriarchate's decision to grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, insisting that that he did the right thing.

In his homily, the ecumenical patriarch noted that in 1923 the Phanar had granted autonomy to the Estonian Orthodox Church, autonomy which was suppressed following the Soviet invasion of 1940, and the Church's forced incorporation into the Patriarchate of Moscow.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union between 1990 and 1991, Estonia achieved its independence, as did its Orthodox Church. This angered the then Patriarch of Moscow Alexy II, who broke sacramental communion, but only for a short time.

"Although we have received unjust insults, we have tried to do the right thing," said Bartholomew. This was done "according to the wisdom of the ancient millennial Orthodox tradition, accumulated over the centuries," whereby the See of Constantinople is "primus inter pares".

"Based on this accumulated treasure, we proceeded," Bartholomew noted, "as we consider it right to grant autocephaly to our Ukrainian Orthodox brothers, who have been deprived of sacramental communion with other Orthodox Churches for almost 30 years, for the mere purpose of punishing Filaret, because he had dared to ask Moscow for the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Church."

"It is very clear, that there were no dogmatic, doctrinal differences. Simply, with the independence of 45 million Ukrainians from the Soviet regime, the metropolitan of Kyiv, as an expression of popular conscience, asked for autocephaly."

For the Ecumenical Patriarch, "Filaret was wrong to ask autocephaly from Moscow. He had to ask the Mother Church in Constantinople, who had given them baptism, culture, and the Cyrillic alphabet, and was therefore the only one that had this right and privilege to grant autocephaly."

In any case, "Filaret asked Moscow for autocephaly and got excommunication instead, which is why we intervened as a Mother Church to restore the wrong they suffered. The rest is bad information of northern provenance."

It should be noted that in granting the Tomos to the new metropolitan of Kyiv Epiphanius on 6 January, Bartholomew also reminded him to respect those Orthodox Ukrainians who want to remain under the jurisdiction of his brother patriarch of Moscow.

CRIMEA: Four years' jail for mosque meetings

Crimea's Supreme Court jailed 49-year-old Muslim Renat Suleimanov for four years for meeting with others in mosques to discuss their faith. Three others were given suspended sentences. All were accused of membership of the Tabligh Jamaat missionary movement, banned in Russia. All denied any "extremism".

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (24.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2TjTowM> - After more than 15 months in pre-trial detention following his October 2017 arrest by the Russian FSB security service, the Supreme Court in Russian-occupied Crimea has jailed 49-year-old local Muslim Renat Suleimanov for four years. He was punished on "extremism"-related charges for alleged leadership of a group of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, which Russia has banned. He denied all accusations of "extremism".

Three other Muslims sentenced with Suleimanov in the Crimean capital Simferopol on 22 January were given two and a half year suspended sentences, when they will live under restrictions, the group Crimean Solidarity noted after the verdicts were handed down. All four are from the Crimean Tatar minority (see below).

The four men met openly in mosques to discuss their faith. "At lessons we studied ayats [verses] from the Koran, the value of praying the namaz, and the zikr [reciting devotional phrases as a reminder of Allah]," one of the men Talyat Abdurakhmanov told the court. "These lessons were not conspiratorial and took place in mosques" (see below).

The four men admitted that they were adherents of Tabligh Jamaat, telling the court they supported its aims of conducting missionary activity among fellow Muslims. However, they rejected any "extremism" or "terrorism". These are believed to be the first criminal convictions in occupied Crimea related to the Tabligh Jamaat movement (see below).

"The men simply gathered in the local mosque to discuss religious questions," a legal specialist familiar with the case told Forum 18 in November 2018. "This is of course a question of freedom of conscience."

The case had been brought by the Russian FSB security service, based on its secret recordings of the meetings in mosques, testimony from unidentified "witnesses" and books seized from the men's homes (see below).

Judge Sergei Pogrebnyak issued the written verdicts to the men's lawyers on 24 January.

Aleksandr Lesovoi, Suleimanov's lawyer, told Forum 18 on 24 January that it was too early to know if his client will appeal against the conviction. So too did Yegor Zvantsev, lawyer for Abdurakhmanov.

Arsen Kubedinov's lawyer Jemil Temishev announced on his Facebook page on 22 January that he would not be appealing on behalf of his client.

The four Muslims were convicted under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2. This punishes "Organisation of" or "participation in" "the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity".

As alleged organiser, Suleimanov faced a maximum 10-year jail term, while the other three – deemed to be participants – faced a maximum 6-year jail term each.

The Russian FSB security service is still investigating the criminal case against Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov on the same "extremism"-related charges. The case – which the FSB launched on 10 November 2018 – is the first against Jehovah's Witnesses in occupied Crimea. The FSB investigator Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin again refused to talk to Forum 18 (see below).

Five days after the criminal case was opened, about 10 groups of FSB security service and OMON riot police officers from Simferopol raided Filatov's and seven other homes in the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi. During one raid, officers put a 78-year-old man – deported to Siberia by the Soviet Union for his faith when he was 9 – up against a wall and handcuffed him (see below).

On 17 January 2019, and despite not having been convicted of any crime, Filatov was added to the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose assets banks are obliged to freeze (although small transactions are permitted) (see below).

"Extremist" organisations banned

Russia's Supreme Court banned Tabligh Jamaat as "extremist" in 2009. The Russian ban was imposed in Crimea after Russia annexed the peninsula from Ukraine in March 2014.

Russia's Supreme Court banned Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist" in 2017. Prosecutors in Russia are investigating more than 90 individuals on "extremism"-related criminal charges. Of them, 25 were in pre-trial detention and 22 under house arrest as of 1 January 2019, Jehovah's Witnesses noted. Others have had to sign pledges not to leave their home town without permission.

Following Russia's occupation of Crimea, the Russian authorities granted re-registration to Jehovah's Witness communities in Crimea, only to ban them following the Russian Supreme Court ban.

Annexation, restrictions imposed

Ukraine and the international community do not recognise Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea. The peninsula is now divided between two Russian federal regions, the Republic of Crimea (with its capital in Simferopol) and the port city of Sevastopol.

After the annexation Russia imposed its restrictions on freedom of religion and belief. Many religious communities have been raided, and many individuals have been fined for possessing books – such as the Muslim prayer collection "Fortress of a Muslim" - which have been banned as "extremist" in Russia.

Religious communities and individuals continue to be fined for not displaying the full name of their registered religious organisation at their place of worship, for meeting for worship without Russian state permission or advertising their faith. Forty such administrative prosecutions are known to have been brought in 2018 of which 28 ended with punishment.

Supreme Court verdicts

On 22 January, Judge Sergei Pogrebnyak at Crimea's Supreme Court in the capital Simferopol convicted four local Muslims of involvement in "the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity" under Criminal Code Article 282.2.

The four men were convicted of involvement in the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, which Russia has banned. Judge Pogrebnyak handed down these sentences, Crimean Solidarity noted:

- 1) Renat Rustemovich Suleimanov (born 30 August 1969), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1, four years' imprisonment in an ordinary regime labour camp, followed by one year under restrictions.
- 2) Talyat Abdurakhmanov (born 1953), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2, two and a half years' suspended sentence, with a two year probation period, plus one year under restrictions.
- 3) Seiran Rizaevich Mustafaev (born 2 January 1969), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2, two and a half years' suspended sentence, with a two year probation period, plus one year under restrictions.
- 4) Arsen Shekirovich Kubedinov (born 6 August 1974), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2, two and a half years' suspended sentence, with a two year probation period, plus one year under restrictions.

Prosecutors had originally handed the criminal case against the four men to court in September 2018, but the court rejected the case because it had been "completed with violations of the provisions of the Code" and sent it back. Prosecutors overturned this on appeal.

Prosecutors resubmitted the case to the Supreme Court on 28 November 2018. The trial itself began on 17 December 2018, according to court records, with six further hearings. Court hearings were open, and relatives of the accused men were able to attend, Suleimanov's lawyer Aleksandr Lesovoi told Forum 18 on 24 January.

"I didn't engage in anti-Russian or anti-constitutional activity"

An officer of the Russian FSB security service – which had launched the criminal case in September 2017 – was questioned in court on 10 January as a prosecution "witness".

Suleimanov told the 10 January hearing that two meetings of Muslims had taken place in April and October 2016 but denied that they had been "conspiratorial". They had discussed

Islam and missionary activity. He said he shared Tabligh Jamaat's views on calling people to Islam, but did not know anything about – and did not share – any calls to terrorist or extremist activity.

Suleimanov rejected a linguistic "expert analysis" of what he had said at the meetings (as secretly recorded by the Russian FSB) which he claimed was manipulative and often ignorant. He did not contest the religious studies part of the "expert analysis" which he said had portrayed the religious movement accurately, the Crimean blogger Igor Vorotnikov wrote for RFE's Crimean Realities website on 12 January.

Abdurakhmanov told the 14 January 2019 hearing that he had been a member of Tabligh Jamaat, "but I didn't engage in anti-Russian or anti-constitutional activity", Crimean Solidarity noted. "At lessons we studied ayats [verses] from the Koran, the value of praying the namaz, and the zikr [reciting devotional phrases as a reminder of Allah]. These lessons were not conspiratorial and took place in mosques."

Abdurakhmanov added that he had learnt of the Russian ban on Tabligh Jamaat in 2016 after others had been arrested. By 2017 he had already left the group and no longer attended lessons. Asked by the Prosecutor if he had said that it was necessary to fight against people of other faiths, Abdurakhmanov told the court: "No."

Kubedinov, who was defended by the lawyer Jemil Temishev, similarly confirmed that he had been a member of the group, Crimean Solidarity noted, but insisted no extremist discussions had taken place.

Judge Pogrebnyak rejected a motion by Suleimanov's lawyer Lesovoi (supported by the Prosecutor) to summon the linguistics "expert" Fomina to examine whether statements contained any calls to fight and, if so, in what form.

During the trial the head of the Crimean Muslim Board, Chief Mufti Emirali Ablaev, appealed to the court not to jail the four Muslims, Kubedinov's lawyer Jemil Temishev noted after the verdict was announced.

At the 16 January 2019 hearing, the Prosecutor (Forum 18 was unable to find her name) called for Suleimanov to be jailed for five years in an ordinary regime labour camp, followed by two years of restricted freedom. She called for the other three each to be given four years' deprivation of freedom, with a three year probation period.

Aleksandr Lesovoi, Suleimanov's lawyer, told Forum 18 on 24 January that the Judge has not yet issued the written verdicts. He said it was too early to know if his client will appeal against the conviction.

Kubedinov's lawyer Jemil Temishev announced on his Facebook page on 22 January that he would not be appealing on behalf of his client. Temishev thanked Crimea's Chief Mufti Ablaev for his appeal to the court not to imprison the four Muslims.

October 2017 raids, arrests

The Supreme Court trial concluded nearly 15 months after Russia's FSB security service launched the criminal cases against the four Crimean Tatar Muslims on 29 September 2017. Masked men raided their homes early on 2 October 2017.

Masked FSB officers and OMON riot police raided Suleimanov's home in the village of Molodezhnoe just north of Crimea's capital Simferopol. They arrived at 6 am with a search warrant as he was returning from early prayers at the mosque. Officers seized a computer, as well as five copies of three Muslim books. The books were by two members of the

Kandahlawi family, key figures in the Tabligh Jamaat movement. Two of the three titles have been banned as "extremist" by Russian courts.

Suleimanov is married with three young daughters.

The same morning officers raided the homes of and detained three other Muslims. At 6 am, men in balaclavas raided the home of Abdurakhmanov in the village of Melnichnoe in central Crimea. Abdurakhmanov has difficulties with his hearing.

Also on 2 October 2017, officers raided the home of Kubedinov in Simferopol and detained him. Kubedinov is married with four children, the oldest of whom is now 11. Officers raided the home of Mustafaev in the village of Pionerskoe, south east of Simferopol, and detained him.

The day after the raid, a Simferopol court ordered that Suleimanov, Abdurakhmanov and Kubedinov be held in pre-trial detention. It ordered that Mustafaev be held under house arrest. Abdurakhmanov and Kubedinov were later freed under a pledge not to leave their home towns. This left only Suleimanov in Simferopol's Investigation Prison. All his legal challenges to his long pre-trial detention were rejected.

The criminal case was initially investigated by the FSB. It was then handed to Crimea's Prosecutor's Office, where it was assigned to Deputy Prosecutor Sergei Bulgakov. He refused to discuss the case with Forum 18 on 23 January 2019. "I'm not authorised to talk to you," he told Forum 18 and put the phone down.

FSB investigating Jehovah's Witness, bank accounts blocked

Investigator Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin of the FSB security service in Simferopol is continuing to investigate the criminal case against Jehovah's Witness Sergei Viktorovich Filatov (born 6 June 1972), who lives in the town of Dzhankoi. Chumakin launched the investigation on 10 November 2018.

Filatov is the first individual to face "extremism"-related criminal charges linked to the Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea. He headed the Sivash Jehovah's Witness community in Dzhankoi, one of two Jehovah's Witness communities in the town registered by the Russian authorities in April 2015. Both communities were liquidated through the courts in May 2017 following the Russian Supreme Court ban.

Filatov faces up to 10 years' imprisonment if eventually convicted under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1, of leadership of "the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity".

On 17 January, and despite not having been convicted of any crime, Filatov was added to the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose assets banks are obliged to freeze (although small transactions are permitted).

On the evening of 15 November 2018, about 10 groups of FSB officers, OMON riot police and possibly officers of other agencies who had come from Simferopol raided the homes in Dzhankoi of eight families who were members of the two local Jehovah's Witness communities before they were banned in 2017.

Officers who raided the home of 78-year-old Aleksandr Ursu pushed him up against a wall, during which he fell to his knees. Officers then handcuffed him. One of those detained for questioning returned in the morning to find his home ransacked. His pregnant wife had to be rushed to hospital, where she suffered a miscarriage. Jehovah's Witnesses say this was

caused by psychological stress. "The young couple do not have children and have taken this tragedy very badly," Jehovah's Witnesses added.

On 16 November 2018, Lieutenant Chumakin ordered Filatov to sign a pledge not to leave Dzhankoi without his specific permission.

The man who answered FSB Lieutenant Chumakin's phone on 23 January 2019 repeatedly insisted it was a wrong number and put the phone down.

Filatov said since the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses across Crimea, their Kingdom Halls lie empty. "We're not allowed to use them," he told Forum 18 in November 2018. "I read the Bible together with my family."

The criminal case against him has had an intimidating effect. "I no longer meet my friends," Filatov added, "because it might cause them problems. We simply ask the authorities to respect our rights to meet together and read the Bible. We're not law-breakers and we're not against the government."

Religious freedom threatened: Ukrainian Parliament adopted the draft law #4128-D without discussion with the churches

The Parliament of Ukraine hastily adopted the draft law #4128-D without any discussion and without a second reading, ignoring numerous remarks of the churches and experts.

IRF (24.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2HBKPw6> - At a meeting on January 17, 2019 the Ukrainian Parliament decided to adopt a new version of the draft law #4128-D immediately as a law – without the necessary revision in the Committee, and thus introduced a new procedure for the registration of religious organizations without any consultation with them, the Institute for Religious Freedom reports.

With the third attempt, 229 parliamentarians voted for the bill out of all 423 MPs.

The adopted Law adds amendments to the articles 8, 14 and 18 of the Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" introducing new requirements for the registration and re-registration of religious organizations, as well as creating a "united window" for submitting the documents.

One of the biggest problems of the adopted Law is the call for a new re-registration of all religious organizations with the requirement to provide lists of all believers who participated in the general meeting of the religious community.

This is due to the provision of the adopted Law on the necessity of bringing the statutes of all religious communities into conformity with the new Law within one year from the moment of its publishing. At the same time, such re-registration will cost believers considerable expenses, since each signature on the new version of the statute and on the minutes of the general meeting of a religious organization must be notarized.

On the eve of voting the list of significant remarks to the draft law #4128-D was sent to the members of Parliament and the leadership of the main committee and parliamentary fractions but the Parliament ignored it. The head of the Board of the Institute for Religious

Freedom Oleksandr Zaiets, chairman of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations of Ukraine, the Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine Jacob Dov Bleich, sent appeals to the Parliament to finalize the draft law in the second reading.

It is noteworthy that during his speech from the parliamentary rostrum, the chairman of the Committee on Culture and Spirituality Mykola Kniazhytsky said that such appeals with the remarks to the draft law #4128-D are allegedly "fake" and contain groundless criticism of the suggested amendments.

It should be noted that the revised draft law #4128-d appeared on the Ukrainian Parliament's website only at the night before voting day (authors – Mykola Kniazhytsky, Iryna Podolyak, Viktor Yelensky). Despite this, even before the publication of the text of the draft law, the main Committee reviewed it at a meeting on January 16 and recommended the parliament to adopt it immediately as a law – without a second reading, without consulting with the religious community and experts.

Of the 16 significant remarks by the IRF to the adopted law, the following can be distinguished:

- The requirement of the Law to register with the new edition of the statute of a religious community together with the list of all members of the community is, on the one hand, unjustified interference with the internal affairs of the religious community, violation of the right of believers to confidentiality of their religious beliefs and, on the other hand, an excessive aggravating condition of preservation of legal entity status;
- The provisions of the Law that "the decision to change subordination and make appropriate amendments to the statute shall be adopted not less than 2/3 of the number of members of the religious community" cannot be realized in practice in those religious communities that do not have a fixed membership, and the parish councils or other similar governing bodies perform functions of the general meeting;
- The requirement of the Law that "the decision to change the subordination and make appropriate amendments to the statute shall be certified by the signatures of the members of the religious community present at such general meetings", it will be impossible to practice this in numerous religious communities with dozens, hundreds or thousands of members, since their signatures will have to be notarized, which involves making a payment for the certification of each signature;
- The non-alternative requirement for monasteries, religious fraternities, missions, religious educational institutions to submit documents confirming ownership or right of use of the premises indicated by their location is an unjustified aggravating obstacle to their religious activity;
- The requirement of the Law to submit "an original version or a duly certified copy of the current version of the statutes on the date of filling the documents for re-registration" cannot be performed for those religious organizations whose statutes have been published by the state registrar in an electronic version on the portal of the Ministry of Justice without providing a certified original.

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 in communion 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.

Orthodoxy, the "Ukrainian schism" turns into a political match

The "Tomos" which sanctioned the birth of the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church is being taken on tour to provinces throughout the country. While President Poroshenko, running to be re-elected in the end of March elections, does not miss one «thanksgiving ceremony»

By Gianni Valente

La Stampa (21.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2HD4yLY> - The independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church has just seen the light, and is already being called in the match for the uncertain Ukrainian presidential elections scheduled for 31 March next. The outgoing president Petro Poroshenko co-starred and was a decisive sponsor of the entire process that ended on 6 January with the attribution of the "Tomos" (decree granting autocephaly) delivered by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I to Metropolitan Epiphany, primate of the new Ukrainian Orthodox Church. After the solemnity of Christmas - celebrated in Ukraine on 7 January - Poroshenko's institutional agenda has been jam-packed with trips to urban areas of the different Ukrainian provinces in the company of the metropolitan Epiphany and other senior representatives of the new independent Ukrainian Church, to celebrate the granting of autocephaly in a long series of "thanksgiving ceremonies". During these celebrations, the same "Tomos" is taken on tour to provinces throughout the country (starting with Vinnycja and Volinia), to be exhibited and celebrated as a relic in different cathedrals.

Participation in thanksgiving ceremonies seems to play a key role in Poroshenko's planned schedule of initiatives and commitments in his election campaign's final sprint. During the celebrations, in his speeches always in the presence of the "Tomos", the outgoing president claims the birth of an Orthodox Ukrainian Church as a turning point in the path to assert the interests of the nation. In mid-January, in Luc'k Cathedral, he said that the process of strengthening the state is underway and the independent Ukrainian Church provides the spiritual foundation for the independence of the nation.

On that occasion, the mass was celebrated by Metropolitan Filaret, who in the 'nineties of the last century proclaimed himself "Patriarch of Kiev" and led an ecclesial structure considered schismatic by the other Orthodox Churches (and now merged as a majority component in the new Ukrainian Orthodox autocephalous Church). "There have been many moments", Filaret said on that occasion, referring to the process of obtaining the "Tomos" of granting autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church "in which it seemed as if had reached a deadlock, but thanks to the wisdom and perseverance of the President we have overcome the crisis".

The former self-proclaimed Patriarch of Kiev also referred to the Ukrainian Orthodox who did not support the process to obtain autocephaly and remained in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church linked to the Patriarchate of Moscow, led by Metropolitan Onufry: "Those who do not want to join us - Filaret said - hope in the strength of Moscow, but Moscow will lose its strength and the victory will be ours, Ukrainian, along with the entire civilized world ... And, most importantly, God is with us".

The creation of a Ukrainian Church independent from Moscow is, de facto, the argument that Poroshenko most insists on when asking voters to confirm him at the head of the country. But it is precisely the strong interweaving of the result obtained at the ecclesial level and the changing alchemy of politics that weighs heavily on the future of the Christian communities in Ukraine in ways that are imponderable. The outcome of the upcoming presidential elections hangs like an unknown factor even on the path of the new ecclesial "autocephalous" structure. If Poroshenko wins, the project of creating a national Ukrainian Church will find its political consecration. But currently the outgoing president is only third in the polls, behind former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko and outsider actor Volodymyr Zelenski. If the response of the polls were to confirm the orientation of the last electoral results, the outgoing Ukrainian president would not even have access to the ballot of the second round of voting and would be barred from any chance of succeeding himself. At that point, the choice of those who intertwined the demands for independence of Ukrainian Orthodoxy with Poroshenko's political design could prove - in the long run - to be a short-sighted gamble.

The uncertain outcome of the Ukrainian presidential elections also partially explains the substantial absence of official reactions from the other Orthodox Churches to the emergence of a new autocephalous Church, which took place with the legitimization of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Patriarchate of Moscow is increasing initiatives and pressure to denounce the canonically invalid profile of the new Ukrainian ecclesial entity. The other primates, for now, are taking time, also to see how the match for the Ukrainian presidency will end. And to wait and see if a possible change in the political scenario could open up new prospects on the ecclesial side. Almost all the candidates in the presidential elections are in favor of the autocephaly of Ukrainian Orthodoxy, but not all share the strategy used by Poroshenko to achieve the goal and the way he is collecting the political earnings of the operation.

Putin "the theologian"

The leaders and synods of the Orthodox Churches seem to be waiting for further developments before taking clear and official action on the "Ukrainian issue". Yet Vladimir Putin is not playing along those same lines. During his recent - and triumphal - visit to Serbia, the Russian president also resorted to ecclesiological and spiritual arguments to stigmatize the birth of the Ukrainian national Orthodox Church as a "political operation". "The Ukrainian administration," said Putin in interviews with Serbian media such as Politics and Vecernje Novosti, "is ready to sacrifice the inter-confessional accord in the country to the campaign of the outgoing president, which is based on the search for enemies and attempts to keep power at all costs".

The Kremlin leader assured that Russia "has no intention to interfere in ecclesial processes, especially ones unfolding in the territory of the sovereign neighbor state". But he dismissed the whole process as an attempt to "legitimize the schismatic communities present in Ukraine" and as "an exclusively political, secular plan", which aims to "divide the peoples of Russia and Ukraine, sowing seeds of ethnic and religious discord" and has "nothing to do with the spiritual life". Putin also argued that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church at the Moscow Patriarchate "is in fact completely independent in its actions, and its connection with the Russian Orthodox Church is of a purely canonical character.

The effects on dialogue with Catholics

Meanwhile the Holy See also records the effects of the intra-Orthodox conflict in Ukraine on the ongoing theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches on the themes of the Primacy and Synodality. "Despite the position of absolute neutrality of the Catholic Church on the matter of Ukrainian autocephaly - Don Andrea

Palmieri, Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, wrote in L'Osservatore Romano - the decision of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Moscow taken on 14 September, following the nomination of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of two exarchs for Ukraine, according to which, among other things, the participation of representatives of the Patriarchate of Moscow in all the commissions presided over by a bishop of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is forbidden, is fraught with potentially negative consequences on the work of the Joint International Commission (of theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, Ed.).

CRIMEA: "Anti-missionary" prosecutions double in 2018

Compared to the first year they were implemented, punishments in Russian-occupied Crimea for ill-defined "missionary activity" doubled in 2018. Of 23 prosecutions for sharing faith or holding worship at unapproved venues, 19 ended in punishment. Also, 17 cases were brought for communities not using their full legal name.

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (09.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2RNzdtR> - In Russian-occupied Crimea in 2018 there were 23 prosecutions brought against individuals for ill-defined "missionary activity", of which 19 ended with punishment, Forum 18 has found. Many of those punished were prosecuted for sharing their faith on the street or for holding worship at unapproved venues. Cases against two more are due to be heard in mid-January 2019.

This represents a doubling of such cases in the Crimean peninsula since the first year such punishments for "missionary activity" were imposed. July 2016 to July 2017 saw 13 known cases of which 8 ended in punishment.

"These punishments do have an impact," one member of a religious community in Crimea who was earlier fined for sharing their faith on the street told Forum 18 on 9 January 2019. "Believers go out to share their faith less often, and give out publications or invitations less openly. It is a question not just of fines – if you don't pay then fines are doubled, then if you still don't pay they impose compulsory labour."

Twelve of the people punished in Crimea in 2018 – all Russian citizens – were fined about 10 days' average local wages each (Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 - "Russians conducting missionary activity").

A further seven people – all longtime residents who are Ukrainian citizens - were punished for participating in religious meetings of a community they belonged to. Six of the seven were given far higher fines of up to nearly two months' average local wages (Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 5 - "Foreigners conducting missionary activity"). These seven cases against Ukrainian citizens appear to be the first use in Russian-occupied Crimea of this Russian Administrative Code article, which is specifically aimed at non-Russians.

There were also 17 cases brought in Crimea in 2018 against 12 religious communities and 5 individuals to punish them for failing to use the full legal name of a registered religious community (Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 3 - "Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and

printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label").

Nine of these 17 cases ended with fines of 30,000 Russian Roubles (nearly two months' average local wages) each and another with a warning. The communities known to have faced administrative cases are: 6 Pentecostal, 2 Baptist, 1 Lutheran, 1 Russian Orthodox, 1 Muslim and 1 Karaite. The others seven cases ended with no punishment.

This represents a slight increase in the number of such cases under Article 5.26, Part 3. In the first year of the imposition of such punishments – between July 2016 and July 2017 – Forum 18 found 14 such administrative cases, of which 8 ended in punishment.

A full listing of known 2018 cases in the administratively separate Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol - based on court decisions and court records seen by Forum 18 - is at the foot of this article.

Administrative prosecutions are also brought against those who have or are deemed to be in charge of religious literature the Russian authorities consider "extremist". One 2018 prosecution was of a doctor in an oncology department where a prayer room library was located (see below).

In addition to these punishments under Russia's Administrative Code, at least five individuals are facing criminal prosecution for exercising their freedom of religion or belief. The trial of four Muslims accused of membership of the banned "extremist" missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat is due to begin at Crimea's Supreme Court on 10 January. A criminal case – also on "extremism"-related charges – has been launched against the former head of a Jehovah's Witness community in Dzhankoi (see below).

Wide-ranging and ill-defined "anti-missionary" penalties

The 40 Russian Administrative Code cases in Crimea in 2018 were all brought under wide-ranging and ill-defined "anti-missionary" Russian legal changes made in July 2016. The Russian authorities immediately imposed these punishments in Crimea, which they occupied in March 2014.

Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 3 punishes the "Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label". This incurs a fine of 30,000 to 50,000 Roubles and the confiscation of any literature or other material.

In upholding a Russian Pentecostal Pastor's appeal in November 2017, Russia's Supreme Court declared that Article 5.26, Part 3 does not apply to private individuals or people employed in an official capacity, only to legal entities. This may account for why cases under this Part against three individuals in Crimea in 2018 were returned for correction. In two of these cases, against Protestant pastors, cases were then submitted against their churches. However, one individual, Artyom Morev, was fined (see list below).

Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 punishes "Russians conducting missionary activity". This incurs a fine of 5,000 to 50,000 Roubles. For organisations (legal entities), the fine is 100,000 to 1 million Roubles. Unregistered religious groups must notify the authorities of their existence, activities and membership and are not legal entities. Their members are therefore subject to prosecution as individuals.

Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 5 punishes "Foreigners conducting missionary activity". This incurs a fine of 30,000 to 50,000 Roubles with the possibility of expulsion from Russia.

Human rights defender Aleksandr Sedov of the Crimean Human Rights Group stated in 2017 that the punishments violate the rights to freedom of religion or belief enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. He also pointed out that they also break the Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which enshrines the rights of civilians in occupied territories.

Tight Russian freedom of religion and belief restrictions

Since the March 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, local religious communities which wanted to continue to function had to re-register under Russian law. Many were forced to restructure themselves to meet Russian requirements. This usually entailed cutting ties to their fellow-believers elsewhere in Ukraine.

Individuals and religious communities in Crimea were also subjected to the web of restrictions on exercising freedom of religion or belief enshrined in Russian law. They have faced raids, fines, religious literature seizures, government surveillance, expulsions of invited foreign religious leaders, unilateral cancellation of property rental contracts and obstructions to regaining places of worship confiscated in the Soviet period.

Awaiting hearings

Two prosecutions under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") are about to be heard.

Magistrate Svetlana Uruyupina of Kerch Magistrate's Court No. 51 is due to hear the case of local Pentecostal Vasily Olovyanishnikov in the afternoon of 10 January 2019, according to court records.

Magistrate Yekaterina Chumachenko of Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 75 is due to hear the case of Hare Krishna devotee Andrei Tereshchenko in the morning of 14 January, according to court records.

One case is about to be heard under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label"). Magistrate Andrei Karnaukhov is due to hear the case against Sevastopol's Hare Krishna community at noon on 29 January, according to court records. The case had originally been brought against the community leader Valentin Penzov (see below).

Fines for "extremist" religious literature

Individuals are also fined for having or being deemed to be in charge of religious literature the Russian authorities consider "extremist".

Officers of Russia's FSB security service searched a small library next to a prayer room in the oncology department of the city hospital in Feodosiya on 29 June 2018, Radio Free Europe's Crimea Realities service noted on 20 September 2018. The prayer room was "open to all", the subsequent court decision notes, and the library included religious items of several faiths, as well as literary and historical works.

FSB officers discovered two Islamic books and one brochure which Russian courts had banned as "extremist" and which are on Russia's Federal List of Extremist Materials. One item was by the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi and another by the contemporary Istanbul Naqshbandi Sufi teacher Osman Nuri Topbas.

Even though the subsequent court decision quotes one witness as declaring that "no one in the [oncology] department was responsible for the library", prosecutors deemed urologist Smail Temindarov responsible. They noted that he had stamped the books to try to prevent patients and visitors from taking any books away from the department.

Prosecutors brought a case against Temindarov under Russian Administrative Code Article 20.29 ("Production or mass distribution of extremist materials included in the published Federal List of Extremist Materials, as well as their production or storage for mass distribution").

On 20 September, Judge Yelena Gurova of Feodosiya City Court found the doctor guilty, according to the decision seen by Forum 18. She fined him 2,000 Russian Roubles. Temindarov did not appeal against the decision.

Since the Russian annexation of Crimea, religious communities, libraries and individuals have repeatedly faced raids and punishment over religious literature which is banned as "extremist" but which does not appear to violate the human rights of others.

Officers – often armed – have raided numerous madrassahs (Muslim colleges), libraries, Muslim-owned homes and Jehovah's Witness meetings seizing such literature. Individuals have been punished under Russian Administrative Code Article 20.29 ("Production or mass distribution of extremist materials included in the published Federal List of Extremist Materials, as well as their production or storage for mass distribution").

Criminal cases also underway

In addition to these Russian Administrative Code cases, five individuals are known to be facing criminal prosecution to punish their exercise of freedom of religion or belief.

The trial of four Muslims – accused of membership of the banned Muslim missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat – is due to begin at Crimea's Supreme Court in Simferopol at 10 am on 10 January 2019, according to court records. Renat Suleimanov, Talyat Abdurakhmanov, Seiran Mustafaev and Arsen Kubedinov are being tried under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2.

Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 punishes "Organisation of" and Part 2 punishes "participation in" "the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity".

Russia's FSB security service launched criminal cases against the four Crimean Tatar Muslims in late September 2017. Days later, masked men staged early morning raids on their homes. Suleimanov has been in Simferopol's Investigation Prison since then. The other three are awaiting trial under restrictions at home.

The Russian FSB security service opened a criminal case in mid-November 2018 against Sergei Filatov, who headed a Jehovah's Witness community in Dzhankoi until it was forcibly liquidated in May 2017 following the Russian Supreme Court ban on all Jehovah's Witness communities.

About 10 groups of FSB officers, OMON riot police and possibly officers of other agencies who had come from Simferopol then raided the homes in Dzhankoi of eight families (including that of Filatov) who were members of the two local Jehovah's Witness communities before they were banned in 2017. Violence was used against some of them, while a pregnant woman suffered a miscarriage following the raids.

Known Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26 cases in Crimea in 2018

The list of known 2018 prosecutions under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 3, 4 and 5, based on court records and other information (date of court hearing, name of individual/community, punishment, court, material on which prosecution based, appeal):

- Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label")

1) 9 February 2018

Name: A. Selivanov

Punishment: none

Court: Bakhchisarai Magistrate's Court No. 27

Circumstances: Returned for correction

Appeal: none

2) 21 February 2018

Name: Jesus is Lord Pentecostal Church

Punishment: none

Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 15

Circumstances: Returned for correction

Appeal: none

3) 5 March 2018

Name: Alushta Pentecostal Church

Punishment: none

Court: Belogorsk Magistrate's Court No. 22

Circumstances: Returned for correction

Appeal: none

4) 6 March 2018

Name: Victory Pentecostal Church

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles

Court: Yalta Magistrate's Court No. 97

Circumstances: Registered church failed to have sign on worship building

Appeal: none

5) 14 March 2018

Name: Sevastopol Lutheran Parish

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles

Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 9

Circumstances: unknown

Appeal: none

6) 27 March 2018

Name: St Paul Pentecostal Church

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles

Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 17
Circumstances: Registered church failed to have sign on worship building
Appeal: none

7) 20 April 2018

Name: Pozharskoe Baptist Church
Punishment: 30,000 Roubles
Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 76
Circumstances: Registered church failed to have sign on worship building
Appeal: none

8) 18 May 2018

Name: Light of the Resurrection Pentecostal Church
Punishment: 30,000 Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 11/13
Circumstances: Notice with full name of church on door of hall, but not on outside of building
Appeal: Sevastopol's Lenin District Court, 19 June 2018, no change

9) 24 May 2018

Name: Andrei Konstantinov
Punishment: none
Court: Kerch Magistrate's Court No. 47
Circumstances: Pastor of Pentecostal Church of Blessing (see below); Returned for correction
Appeal: none

10) 13 June 2018

Name: St Paisy Velichkovsky Orthodox Monastery
Punishment: 30,000 Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 2
Circumstances: Registered community failed to have sign with full name on worship building
Appeal: Sevastopol's Balaklava District Court, 13 August 2018, no change

11) 26 June 2018

Name: Ikhlyas Muslim Community
Punishment: 30,000 Roubles
Court: Dzhankoi Magistrate's Court No. 35
Circumstances: Crimean Muslim Board community failed to have sign on worship building
Appeal: Dzhankoi District Court, 19 July 2018, no change

12) 10 September 2018

Name: Artyom Morev
Punishment: 30,000 Roubles
Court: Bakhchiserai Magistrate's Court No. 29
Circumstances: Pastor of Generation of Faith Pentecostal church from Yalta
Appeal: none

13) 17 September 2018

Name: Pyotr Dukh
Punishment: none
Court: Razdolnoe Magistrate's Court No. 68
Circumstances: Pastor of Berezovka Baptist Church (see below); Returned for correction
Appeal: none

14) 18 September 2018
Name: Pentecostal Church of Blessing
Punishment: none
Court: Kerch Magistrate's Court No. 47
Circumstances: Returned for correction
Appeal: none

15) 10 October 2018
Name: Berezovka Baptist Church
Punishment: Warning
Court: Razdolnoe Magistrate's Court No. 68
Circumstances: unknown
Appeal: none

16) 20 December 2018
Name: Valentin Penzov
Punishment: none
Court: Gagarin District Court, Sevastopol
Circumstances: Leader of registered Hare Krishna community; Transferred to different court; Case later brought against community (see above)
Appeal: none

17) 24 December 2018
Name: Karaite Religious Community
Punishment: 30,000 Roubles
Court: Yevpatoriya District Magistrate's Court No. 42
Circumstances: Failed to have sign outside place of worship
Appeal: none

- Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity")

1) 12 January 2018
Name: Yuri Moiseev
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 5
Circumstances: Spoke of faith, sang at bus stop
Appeal: none

2) 12 January 2018
Name: Aleksei Gabrielyan
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 5
Circumstances: Spoke of faith, sang at bus stop
Appeal: Appeal Gagarin District Court 26 February 2018 cancelled fine as case filed too late

3) 12 January 2018
Name: Mikhail Leppik
Punishment: none - acquitted
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 5
Circumstances: Offering leaflets at bus stop
Appeal: none

4) 12 January 2018
Name: Yevgeny Kornev

Punishment: none - acquitted
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 5
Circumstances: Offering leaflets at bus stop
Appeal: none

5) 27 February 2018
Name: Pavel Dyakov
Punishment: 20,000 Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 16
Circumstances: Council of Churches Baptist gave out Christian magazines on the street
Appeal: Sevastopol's Lenin District Court, 19 April 2018, fine reduced to 5,000 Roubles because of low family income; Sevastopol City Court 22 October 2018 no change

6) 9 March 2018
Name: D. Adamenko
Punishment: none
Court: Bakhchisarai Magistrate's Court No. 27
Circumstances: Returned for correction
Appeal: none

7) 29 March 2018
Name: Gennady Gorbatovsky
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Feodosiya Magistrate's Court No. 90
Circumstances: Protestant leader organised worship meetings in hotel
Appeal: none

8) 5 April 2018
Name: Aleksandr Ivanenkov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 21
Circumstances: Pentecostal House of the Potter Church member addressed worship service ("sectarian events") without church's due authorisation
Appeal: Simferopol's Central District Court, 7 June 2018, no change

9) 25 April 2018
Name: Ebazer Abdulzatov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 12
Circumstances: unknown
Appeal: none

10) 26 April 2018
Name: V. Kotenkov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Belogorsk Magistrate's Court No. 22
Circumstances: unknown
Appeal: none

11) 3 May 2018
Name: L. Kotenkova
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Belogorsk Magistrate's Court No. 22
Circumstances: unknown
Appeal: none

12) 7 June 2018

Name: Vitaly Savchuk

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Lenin District Court

Circumstances: Pentecostal member of Russian-based church held worship meeting in House of Culture

Appeal: none

13) 20 June 2018

Name: A. Islyamov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 76

Circumstances: unknown

Appeal: none

14) 13 July 2018

Name: D. Ivanov

Punishment: none

Court: Feodosiya Magistrate's Court No. 87

Circumstances: Transferred to different court, then returned for correction

Appeal: none

15) 24 October 2018

Name: Maksim Karpukhin

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Yalta Magistrate's Court No. 94

Circumstances: Formed religious group (affiliation unknown) without notifying authorities

Appeal: none

16) 4 December 2018

Name: V. Svetaev

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Kerch Magistrate's Court No. 51

Circumstances: Pentecostal pastor whose registered church held services at unapproved locations

Appeal: none

- Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity")

1) 12 April 2018

Name: Yekaterina Bochkareva

Punishment: 15,000 Roubles

Court: Gagarin District Court, Sevastopol

Circumstances: Ukrainian citizen and longtime resident participated in Pentecostal worship meeting

Appeal: none

2) 12 April 2018

Name: Olga Vorobyova

Punishment: 15,000 Roubles

Court: Gagarin District Court, Sevastopol

Circumstances: Ukrainian citizen and longtime resident participated in Pentecostal worship meeting

Appeal: none

3) 24 May 2018

Name: D. Polish

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles

Court: Balaklava District Court, Sevastopol

Circumstances: Ukrainian citizen and longtime resident participated in Pentecostal worship meeting

Appeal: none

4) 25 May 2018

Name: Archil Gevorkov

Punishment: 15,000 Roubles

Court: Gagarin District Court, Sevastopol

Circumstances: Ukrainian citizen and longtime resident participated in Pentecostal worship meeting

Appeal: none

5) 25 May 2018

Name: Denis Bochkarev

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles

Court: Gagarin District Court, Sevastopol

Circumstances: Ukrainian citizen and longtime resident participated in Pentecostal worship meeting

Appeal: none

6) 25 May 2018

Name: Yekaterina Bochkareva (second case)

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles

Court: Gagarin District Court, Sevastopol

Circumstances: Ukrainian citizen and longtime resident participated in Pentecostal worship meeting

Appeal: none

7) 23 November 2018

Name: Anatoly Tkachenko

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Kerch City Court

Circumstances: Ukrainian citizen and longtime resident, participated in Good News Pentecostal Church worship meeting, case transferred 20 November 2018 from Magistrate's Court No. 44

Appeal: none

Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas amid internal divisions

RFE/RL (07.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2TB5OjN> - Most Orthodox Christians celebrated Christmas as believers gathered in Moscow, Kyiv, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Cairo, and cities throughout the world to mark in the holy day.

Catholics as well Orthodox churches in Romania, Greece, and Bulgaria celebrate Christmas on December 25 under the Gregorian calendar.

The Armenian Orthodox Church celebrated Christmas on January 6.

The January 7 celebrations come amid tensions between the largest Orthodox denomination - the Russian church - and the spiritual headquarters for the Orthodox faith in Istanbul.

The Istanbul headquarters, known as the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, recently backed an effort by Ukraine to establish its own Orthodox church, independent of Moscow.

Patriarch Bartholomew on January 6 handed over a document known as a "tomos" to the head of the new Ukrainian church, Metropolitan Epifaniy, at a ceremony in Istanbul on January 6.

Hundreds of Ukrainians lined up at Kyiv's St. Sophia Cathedral complex on January 7 to view the document enshrining the newly gained independence of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

"For the first time, we celebrate Christmas with an independent autocephalous church," President Petro Poroshenko said after attending services in St. Sophia Cathedral.

"It is the basis of our spiritual freedom, we broke the last fetters tying us to Moscow," he added.

Efforts by Ukrainians to establish an independent church intensified after Russia seized Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in March 2014 and began supporting separatists shortly thereafter in parts of Ukraine's eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Orthodox churches, including those in Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Serbia, and Jerusalem are among Orthodox and Eastern Rite churches that celebrate Christmas observing the old Julian calendar. Currently (1901–2099), the Julian calendar is 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar.

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The Armenian Orthodox Church celebrated Christmas on January 6.

In St. Petersburg, Russian President Vladimir Putin on January 7 presented the Transfiguration Cathedral with the icon of Christ Pantocrator as a Christmas gift, while Patriarch Kirill, the head of Russia's Orthodox Church, conducted services in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior.

Attendance at midnight Christmas Mass has become a tradition for Russian leaders -- some of whom, like longtime KGB officer Putin, were staunch supporters of the communist system during the Soviet era.

Meanwhile, Putin fired a cannon in his native St. Petersburg to mark Christmas. Together with Putin, 85-year-old Vladimir Bendet pulled the lever on the howitzer that fires a daily noontime salute at the Petropavlovsk Fortress on the banks of the Neva River.

In Bethlehem, hundreds of people marked Christmas on January 7 with Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III at the Church of the Nativity, which was established on ground traditionally recognized as Jesus's birth site.

Palestinian police stood guard as several dozen demonstrators shouted "traitor" in protest of the Greek Orthodox Church's sale of property in mainly Palestinian east Jerusalem to groups promoting Jewish settlements.

Israeli purchases of church land and property in east Jerusalem have angered Palestinians -- including many Orthodox Christians -- who consider the territory to be the capital of their future state. Israel has annexed east Jerusalem, but the move has not been recognized by the international community.

In Cairo, Egypt's president in a symbolic gesture inaugurated a new cathedral for the Coptic Orthodox Church and one of the region's largest mosques. It comes at a time when Islamic militants are increasingly targeting the country's minority Christians in deadly terror attacks.

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has spoken of sectarian harmony as a major policy goal, but he has still faced criticism for not doing enough to protect Christian and other minorities.

"This is a historic and important moment. But we still have to protect the tree of love we planted here together today because seditions never end," the president said from inside the cathedral.

With reporting by AFP, AP, Reuters, and TASS

NOTE: This article has been amended to clarify that some Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas according to the Gregorian calendar on December 25.

Ukrainian Orthodox Christians formally break from Russia

By Carlotta Gall

New York Times (06.01.2019) - <https://nyti.ms/2RziB8R> - ISTANBUL - The spiritual leader of Eastern Orthodox Christians worldwide recognized the independence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in a four-hour ceremony in Istanbul on Sunday, formalizing a split with the Russian church to which it had been tied for more than four centuries.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader, handed a Tomos of Autocephaly containing a decree of independence to the newly appointed Metropolitan Epiphanius of Ukraine, cleaving millions of Ukrainians from the Russian Orthodox Church.

The independence effort outraged political and religious leaders in Russia. But for President Petro O. Poroshenko of Ukraine, who stood before an elevated throne throughout the ceremony in Istanbul, the occasion was an affirmation of independence from Russian influence in his embattled country and a boost ahead of elections in March.

"Tomos for us is actually another act of proclaiming Ukraine's independence," Mr. Poroshenko said in an address. "For Ukrainians, our own Church is a guarantee of our spiritual freedom. This is the key to social harmony."

Recognition of the church's autonomy will resolve a problem for the many Ukrainians who had broken with Moscow and been declared noncanonical, he added.

The Ukrainian church had been under Moscow's jurisdiction since 1686, when, under pressure from Russia, it abandoned allegiance to Constantinople, the historical seat of the Eastern Orthodox Church now known as Istanbul.

With that longstanding relationship threatened by tensions between Russia and Ukraine, Mr. Poroshenko, as well as nearly 200 bishops and other church figures, gathered in December in St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, to choose the head of the future autonomous Ukrainian church. That decision sealed the country's intention to sever religious ties from the Russian Orthodox Church and the Moscow patriarch, Kirill I.

"I support separating from the Russian church," said Dmytro Khanenko, 20, a Ukrainian student who was following the ceremony on Sunday, "but I don't like how politics is involved."

Politicians were using the issue to gain popularity, he said. "The fact that Ukraine is in conflict with Russia means it is good to show that Ukraine is less dependent on Russia," he said.

The Moscow patriarch claims to have oversight not only of Orthodox communities in Russia but also most of the areas of the former Soviet Union, but it has been struggling to maintain its hold over what his church views as a wayward province ever since Ukraine declared independence in 1991.

Patriarch Kirill oversees the world's largest community of Orthodox Christians, some 150 million faithful — half of the number of Orthodox Christians worldwide. The loss of Ukraine's Orthodox faithful would shrink the number of parishes under Moscow's control by a third.

Patriarch Bartholomew now oversees 15 separate Orthodox Churches from his seat in Istanbul, the ancient cradle of Christendom that the Orthodox still call Constantinople.

He had signed the Tomos in a civil ceremony with Mr. Poroshenko on Saturday, and sanctified it in a Mass on Sunday. The ceremony began before dawn, with priests chanting hymns under a single chandelier in St. George's Cathedral.

The Cathedral was flooded with light as the patriarch blessed the new Metropolitan, dressed in blue, white and gold vestments and a glittering miter. As he was handed the Tomos, bells pealed and the congregation broke into applause.

Hundreds of faithful filled the side aisles and galleries above, including many from the dwindling Greek Orthodox community in Istanbul. The Ukrainian delegation included cabinet members and the speaker of Parliament.

Both Patriarch Bartholomew and the new autonomous Ukrainian church described the occasion not as a schism but as a long-needed alignment of Ukraine's independent state and church.

The patriarch called on the new metropolitan not to exclude any believers from his church, including those loyal to Moscow, and urged him to build bridges and unite the people, said an official from the patriarchate, who spoke on the condition of anonymity in keeping with protocol.

"The Orthodox Church had 14 independent churches, and today it has 15," said Nikolas Papachristou, a spokesman for the Ecumenical Patriarchate. "Together they create our Orthodox Church."

Church and national leaders in Ukraine had been pressing for self-governance for the church for 30 years, since Ukraine became independent with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Metropolitan Epiphanius said in a speech during the ceremony.

"With the support of the Ukrainian state and our president, the separation has been eliminated, and the unity has been restored."

The Tomos, read out during the signing ceremony on Saturday, declares that the Metropolitan of Kiev and all Ukraine, representing the Holy Synod of Ukrainian bishops, should turn to the Patriarchate of Constantinople for all decisions in the future.

"In this way, the affairs of the church in this country will be governed, as proclaimed by the divine and holy canon, freely and in the Holy Spirit, without hindrance, without any other external influence," it said.

Mr. Poroshenko, the Ukrainian leader, expressed his appreciation on Twitter. "Thank you to the millions of Ukrainians around the world who prayed for the establishment of the Single Local Orthodox Church," he wrote. "Thank you to the generation of Ukrainians who dreamed about this day."

Part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that remains loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate declared that the Tomos for the new church of Ukraine had been signed in violation of canonical rules, the Russian news agency Tass reported.

The agency quoted Archbishop Clement, head of the information and education department of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, as saying that Patriarch Bartholomew was veering into factionalism by supporting the schism.

Much of the Orthodox Church celebrates Christmas on Monday, when a celebration will be held in St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev and the Tomos will go on display to the public.

There has been concern that the schism dividing the Ukrainian and Russian churches could provoke violent clashes over church property, not least the famous monastery in central Kiev revered as the birthplace of Russian Christianity. President Vladimir V. Putin himself warned of that possibility last month.

Local Orthodox Christians attending the Mass on Sunday were barely aware of Ukraine's historical event and gathered after for an annual baptismal ceremony for the Epiphany on the shores of the Golden Horn, an inlet of the Bosphorus in Istanbul.

Dimitri, 32, who was born and raised in Istanbul but who did not want his last name published because of religious discrimination in Turkey, said "We are here to bless the water, especially for the fishermen."

"The split of the Ukrainian church doesn't mean much to us, because we all believe in the same things," he said. "But we support the split, as far as we've followed it from the news. We don't think there is bad intention underneath. Jesus said God is one, it applies to this situation, too."

Autocephaly: Balm or Bomb for Ukraine's Orthodox

By Geraldine Fagan

East-West Church Report (vol. 26, no. 4, 2018) - They're singing the Lord's Prayer, you might take of your hat!" Hearing the elderly woman's reproach, a man of similar age meekly slides his cap down to his chest. The pair stand near the editor of the East-West Church Report amid a 5,000-strong crowd facing the iconic St. Sophia's Cathedral, built a thousand years ago by the first Christian rulers of Kyiv. The occasion is a government-sponsored Prayer for Ukraine on the morning of 14 October. This is both the Eastern Christian feast day of the Intercession of the Mother of God and-as of 2015-Defender of Ukraine Day, a public holiday honoring the armed forces.

A day prior, some news reports claimed that local bureaucrats had pressured people into attending the event.[1] Yet perhaps a third present spontaneously cross themselves and join in prayers. Many more sing the unofficial national anthem, "O Lord, Almighty and Only" [Ukrainian: "Bozhe Velykyi, Edynyi"] and respond to the customary western Ukrainian greeting, "Glory to Jesus Christ!" [Ukrainian: "Slava Iisusu Khristu!"].

These official prayers are in thanksgiving for a decision to grant autocephaly-or full independence-to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, affirmed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople on 11 October. The move has implications for the development of all Christianity in Ukraine, as witnessed at the event by speakers from the country's Greek and Roman Catholic Churches, and Bible Society.[2]

Rivals for legitimacy

Ukrainian Orthodoxy is unusually factious. Inside the country, the post-Soviet period has seen the emergence of three major contenders to the status of canonical- or legitimate- Ukrainian Orthodox Church, one under the Patriarchate of Moscow and two breakaway entities. Until now, only the first of these has been acknowledged by the wider Orthodox world. (In diaspora, two further Ukrainian Orthodox structures formally under the Patriarchate of Constantinople are headquartered in Canada and the United States.)

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) retains the largest number of registered parishes in Ukraine, with approximately 12,000 (Russia has approximately 17,000). Its main rival, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate), has approximately 5,000. A third body, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), has some 1,000 parishes, concentrated in three far western regions of Ukraine that lay outside the Soviet Union before World War II.[3]

This ratio did not shift dramatically for 20 years. But since 2014-when clashes with pro-Kremlin forces erupted in eastern Ukraine-public allegiance to the Moscow and Kyiv Patriarchates has see-sawed. Respectively 35 and 22 percent in 2010, it is now 19 and 43 percent.[4]

National security concern

The Kyiv Patriarchate's anti-Kremlin stance is a key factor. During the 2013-14 demonstrations centered upon Kyiv's Maidan Square which ultimately toppled the pro-Kremlin regime of Viktor Yanukovich, the Kyiv Patriarchate's nearby St. Michael's Monastery provided refuge to those fleeing police batons. Today, the monastery's perimeter forms a Memory Wall displaying the names and photographs of 3,367 Ukrainian combatants killed in the Donbass conflict during 2014-17.

Ukrainian Autocephaly

Addressing the 14 October crowd and television audience, Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko thus characterized autocephaly as a question of national security. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, he explained, prays for the Russian authorities "who have committed aggression against our country." [5] The Orthodox leader conspicuously absent from the podium was Onufry, the Moscow Patriarchate's Metropolitan of Kyiv. 14 October is also a special feast day for the nearby Intercession Convent, and he leads worship there for approximately 1,000 faithful. Most senior Moscow Patriarchate clerics in Ukraine, including Onufry, oppose the autocephaly project. [6]

For them, the ambitious figure of Patriarch Filaret, head of the Kyiv Patriarchate, is a particular obstacle. [7] Nearly 90, Filaret was staunchly pro-Kremlin when a predecessor to Metropolitan Onufry. As late as 1990 he expressed alarm that the growth of "the so-called Ukrainian autocephalous church" might contribute to the independence of Ukraine from the Soviet Union. Such a separation from Moscow, he maintained at that time, "fundamentally contradicts our thousand-year tradition in which the Russian Church has always been the source of unity." [8]

After failing to be elected Moscow Patriarch that same year, Filaret reversed his position on Ukrainian autocephaly and state independence in 1991. Today, notwithstanding Kyiv's ongoing efforts at de-Communization, he still vigorously defends his and other Soviet-era bishops' collaboration with the KGB. [9]

Given Moscow's aversion to full independence for the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, President Poroshenko made overtures to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople—the senior Patriarchate in the Orthodox world. Following the president's April 2018 meeting with Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the Ukrainian parliament voted to support an appeal for autocephaly on the part of the state. In late August Patriarch Bartholomew hosted Patriarch Kirill of Moscow at his Istanbul headquarters. According to an alleged transcript of the meeting, Kirill disputed that Poroshenko and the Ukrainian parliament were legitimate representatives of the Ukrainian people, having "seized power as a result of a coup d'état during the Maidan uprising." [10]

A week later, Constantinople dispatched two exarchs—bishops of its Ukrainian diaspora structures—to Kyiv as its representatives "within the framework of the preparations for the granting of autocephaly." [11] The Russian Orthodox Church responded by suspending senior-level relations with Constantinople. [12]

On 11 October Constantinople went further, lifting Moscow's disciplinary measures against the heads of the two breakaway Ukrainian Orthodox entities, Filaret and Makary; restoring their faithful to Orthodox communion; and rescinding Moscow's authority to ordain the Metropolitan of Kyiv, granted in 1686. [13] Roundly rejecting these rulings, Moscow broke off all relations with Constantinople on 15 October. [14]

Unification council

A unification council tasked with forming the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine met at St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kyiv on 15 December. It elected a senior Kyiv Patriarchate hierarch, Epifany (Dumenko), as the entity's Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine, beating Metropolitan Simeon of Vinnytsia of the Moscow Patriarchate by eight votes. Out of 10 Moscow Patriarchate hierarchs reportedly among the 64 who voted, two participated publicly. Their synod took disciplinary action against them on 17 December. [15]

The situation is murky and volatile. Some Ukrainian Orthodox under Moscow fear the creation of the new church will lead to violent property seizures. While the Ukrainian

government rejects this suggestion, it may prove powerless to curb ultranationalist groups hostile to any perceived Russian influence.

Such a possibility was also plain on the afternoon of 14 October, when over 8,000 Ukrainian nationalists-some bearing Nazi insignia-took to the streets elsewhere in Kyiv. Although marginal, these elements could swiftly mobilize against Orthodox remaining under Moscow. As one youth engaged in such harassment in the far western region of Ivano Frankivsk explained in a 4 November BBC documentary, "These people don't love Ukraine. They is Russia [sic]."[16]

Yet the situation is also less binary than may appear. The wife of a Ukrainian-speaking Moscow Patriarchate priest whose Ivano-Frankivsk village church was seized by nationalists also told the BBC that her son had fought against Russian-backed rebels in the eastern Donbass region: "What kind of enemy are we?"

Local opinion overlooked

Such nuanced local opinion within Metropolitan Onufry's church lies unnoticed beneath the Moscow-Constantinople polemic. Particularly overlooked is patriotic defense of Ukraine combined with loyalty to the Moscow Patriarchate, still understood by many as the only canonical Orthodox option. Indeed, such sentiments are mainstream: Onufry himself may not have been at the 14 October event, but Metropolitan Avgustin of Bila Tserkva and Bohuslav-his church's representative to Ukraine's armed forces-read out a statement praising the Ukrainian military's committed defense of the Motherland. He was warmly applauded.

Over the following pages, the East-West Church Report presents diverging views-for and against autocephaly-held by two hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Both are auxiliary bishops of Kyiv, were born and raised in Ukraine, and are in their 40s. (The pro-autocephaly hierarch is one of those now facing disciplinary measures for participating in the 15 December unification council.) In forthcoming issues, the East-West Church Report will feature less prominent Orthodox voices in Ukraine, as well as a range of other local views on the situation for Christians in the country, including with respect to religious freedom and the Donbass conflict.

[1] For example, [in Russian] <https://123ru.net/kyiv/169810378>

[2] [In Ukrainian] https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=61&v=bo_7FE9a-QQ

[3] The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) isofficially called the UkrainianOrthodox Church. "(MoscowPatriarchate)" is added here for clarity. [In Russian] <https://religsvoboda.ru/content/religioznayastatistika-na-1-aprelya-2018-goda>; [In Ukrainian] http://mincult.kmu.gov.ua/document/245234300/Form1_MCU_Nakaz260-29032017.xls.

[4] [In Ukrainian] Biblioteka Tsentru Razumkova, OsoblyvostiReligiinoho i Tserkovno-Religiinoho Samovyznachennia Ukraïns'kikhGromadian: Tendentsii 2010-2018 rr., Kyiv,2018, 17.

[5] [In Ukrainian] "Vystup Prezidenta Ukraïny pid chas uchasti u molytovnomu zakhodi za Ukraïnu," 14 October 2018; [https:// www.president.gov.ua/news/vistup-prezidenta-ukrayini-pidchas-uchasti-u-molitovnomu-za-50446](https://www.president.gov.ua/news/vistup-prezidenta-ukrayini-pidchas-uchasti-u-molitovnomu-za-50446).

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The crisis in the Orthodox Church and the battle for Slavic history (Op-ed)

Now that the Russian Orthodox Church has severed ties with Constantinople, there will surely be chaos ahead



A meeting of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, Oct. 15.

Oksana Manchuk / BelTA / TASS

Moscow Times (17.10.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2PoRfRR> - On Oct. 11, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, **"first among equals"** in the Orthodox Christian world, decreed the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Kiev Patriarchate, and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church to be canonical, or legitimate.

The move is a step on the road to the granting of autocephaly, or independence, to Ukrainian Orthodox Christians, **allowing them to manage their own affairs without the oversight of the Moscow Patriarchate, which presides over the only Ukrainian Orthodox Church previously recognized as canonical.**

Predictably, Russian reactions to the decision of Patriarch Bartholomew I and the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Synod came swiftly. The Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate, which quickly called a synodal meeting of its own, **cut ecclesiastical ties with Constantinople, blaming it for the "schism."**

President Vladimir Putin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, invoked rhetoric associated with Russia's intervention in Ukraine's Donbas region and the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.

In a clear implicit threat of violence — though he himself insisted Russia would rely only on political and diplomatic means to resolve the situation — Peskov, said:

"In the event that the events which are developing take the course of illegal activities, then of course, just as Russia defends the interests of Russians and Russian speakers — and Putin has spoken about this many times—Russia will defend the interests of the Orthodox."

Why such a heated response from Moscow? To be sure, Putin is afraid of losing power in an area he regards as Russia's sphere of influence, and of seeing Russia's power diluted in the Orthodox world. There, **aggression in pursuit of influence vis-à-vis**

Constantinople has led to the isolation of the ROC, some of whose priests and hierarchs have been denied Greek visas they sought in order to make pilgrimages to Mount Athos.

The Moscow Patriarchate would certainly prefer to claim jurisdiction over the almost 30 million Ukrainians whose religious affiliations are distributed among the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate, the Kiev Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, or who identify simply as Orthodox. And they have reason to be concerned the 12.8 percent of the population that professes loyalty to the Moscow Patriarchate may decline.

Both the Kremlin and the ROC leadership would prefer to be able to effectively exercise discipline over Orthodox clergy in Ukraine. This issue, embodied in the refusal of UOC-MP Metropolitan Onufryi to stand when the Ukrainian parliament honored Ukraine's soldiers fighting in the conflict in Donbas, may have contributed to the erosion of the ROC's position in Ukraine.

Trust in Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill has fallen precipitously from 44.4 percent to 15.3 percent over the last eight years, according to the Razumkov Center. It should be noted, however, that Metropolitan Onufryi's trust has held steady at around 31-32 percent of the Ukrainian population.

There are also more subtle forms of power at stake. In the authoritarian dystopia George Orwell famously conjured in his novel "1984," one of the Party's slogans is, "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past."

That there is more than a grain of truth in this axiom is one reason Russia has reacted so sharply to **the Ecumenical Patriarchate's decree, which revoked the synodal letter of 1686 that granted the Patriarch of Moscow the right to ordain church hierarchs in what is now Ukraine, and what was then territory that had only recently been transferred from the Polish-Lithuanian state into the Russian Empire.**

In emphasizing that the letter had been issued only for reasons of "oikonomia" — meaning it was undertaken outside of the ideals prescribed by canon law for pragmatic purposes — Constantinople effectively declared that, from a canonical point of view, there has been a Ukrainian nation deserving of its own self-governed church for centuries. This view of history, which bolsters Ukrainian sovereignty and self-determination, is one that a Russian state still devoted to the idea of Ukraine as a "little brother" cannot abide.

Many questions remain about what happens from here. Constantinople will likely issue a Tomos of Autocephaly — the document officially recognizing an Orthodox Church's full independence — for Ukraine in November. In the meantime, Patriarch Filaret of the Kiev Patriarchate is maneuvering to take the lead while the processes for implementing Constantinople's decision are worked out.

There will surely be some chaos ahead, including property disputes, lawsuits, and likely some violence, as well as a possible escalation of pro-Russian hostilities in eastern Ukraine. But inasmuch as the containment of Russian soft power, and of Russian attempts globally to undermine democratic institutions and support for human rights, is tied to the struggle for Ukrainian sovereignty, we must recognize that Constantinople's bold move was the right one.

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