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Ukraine association of religious freedom concerned about worsening of inter-church relations

Institute of religious freedom (03.11.2010) / HRWF (11.11.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 25 October, in the facilities of the Institute of Philosophy of the Ukrainian Academy of Science, there was a session of the Council of Directors of the Ukrainian Association of Religious Freedom (UARS). Participants in the conference analyzed the status of religious freedom in Ukraine. The UARS Council of Directors expressed worry over the worsening of interconfessional relations, the cause of which it considers to be the special relationship of representatives of the government with one church and the effective discrimination against all the others.

Experts also noted that the preparation of a new version of the Ukrainian law "On freedom of conscience and religious organizations" is being done without sufficient openness and without discussion of its provisions within a broad circle of interested persons—representatives of the churches and religious organizations, experts, and the believing public.

In addition, participants in the session analyzed the results of participation in and organization by UARS members of various events on the problems of religious freedom: academic and working conferences, round tables, and days of religious freedom in various cities. The leadership of the association considered most significant the international academic conference "Freedom of religion and democracy: old and new challenges," which was held in Kiev on 5-6 August.

It should be noted that in April 2011 the Ukrainian Association of Religious Freedom will celebrate the tenth anniversary of its founding. The Council of Directors of UARS decided

to mark the occasion with a jubilee conference and to publish a booklet devoted to the activity of the association.

UARS also decided to participate in the all-Ukrainian academic conference "The regional dimension of interconfessional and state-church relations" which will be held in Khmel'nitski on 25-26 November. Besides addresses by members of the association during this event, UARS plans to organize a round table including representatives of churches and religious organizations of the province. (tr. by PDS, posted 4 November 2010)

All-Ukrainian Council of Churches calls president of Ukraine not to change the law on freedom of worship hastily

Institute of religious freedom (05.11.2010) / HRWF (11.11.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On behalf of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, the chairman of the Council of Churches, Bishop Markian Trofymiak has sent an address on protection of the freedom of worship to President Viktor Yanukovich and the head of the State Committee on Nationalities and Religions, Yurii Bohutskyy, reports the Institute of Religious Freedom.

The heads of the confessions stressed that the consideration by the parliament of the initiatives on alteration of the current Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Worship and Religious Organizations" is relevant "only on condition of the principled agreement of all the subjects of the law-making process on the importance of religious freedom in Ukraine as one of the greatest achievements of our state in the area of ensuring of rights and freedoms of a person."

Representatives of Churches and Religious Organizations of Ukraine are unanimous in their position that such an important decision as revision of the law on the freedom of conscience should not be considered hastily and in the current conditions of transformation of the political system.

"It is important to engage at all the stages of this process of representatives of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, that is interested subjects whose opinion should be taken into account," stress the addresses.

Therefore, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious organizations called Viktor Yanukovich to decontrol the fulfillment of the paragraph of the presidential instruction charging the government with development and submitting to the parliament's consideration by 1 December, 2010 of the new wording of the Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Worship and Religious Organizations."

Ukrainian authorities impound Roman Catholic Church building

RFE/RL (07.09.2010) / HRWF (09.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The municipal authorities in Ukraine's eastern city of Dnipropetrovsk have impounded the Roman Catholic Church of St. Joseph, RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service reports.

Catholic parish leader Valeriy Hmyrko told RFE/RL that the Luhansk Oblast Economic Court decided this week to impound the church building, of which the parishioners are the legal owners.

The court provided no explanation for that ruling.

The church was built in 1887-90 with funds raised by the city's Roman Catholic community.

In 1998 the church building was privatized by Dugsberry, a private U.S.-registered company linked to former Ukrainian Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko, who is currently in prison in the United States for graft and embezzlement.

Ukraine's Supreme Economic Court ruled last year to return the building to the parish community.

Ukrainian Orthodox resist Ukrainian Catholics

Odessa directives of Ukrainian Orthodox church

ReligioPolis (02.09.2010) / HRWF (09.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The Odessa diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox church [UPTs] has published an official statement relative to the possibility of construction of a Greek Catholic church in Odessa.

"In Odessa, the overwhelming majority of whose residents are believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox church, there exists such a small number of Greek Catholics that there is no need to construct not only a cathedral but even a house of worship for Uniates," Orthodox Metropolitan of Odessa and Ismailsk Agafangel, who also is a "Party of Regions" deputy of the Odessa city council.

The statement says that "the proposed construction in Odessa on the territory of Prokhorov square of a cathedral of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic church is an attempt to achieve aggressive expansion of Uniates in Odessa region."

As the press service of the Odessa diocese of UPTs reports, the construction of a UGKTs cathedral in Orthodox Odessa has evoked dissatisfaction and protest on the part of the clergy and Orthodox believers of the Odessa area, has created in the peaceful city a situation of inter-religious conflict, and will not promote the strengthening of peace and public harmony in the Odessa region.

In conclusion, the statement notes that the metropolitan of Odessa of UPTs and the clergy of Odessa diocese think that the construction of a worship object "of Uniates in the capital of our territory" is useless and extremely dangerous.

Information:

As of March 2010, there are 10,000 Greek Catholics in Odessa. In addition, as the chancellor of the Odessa-Crimea exarchate of UGKTs, Fr Vladimir Zhdan, reports, several large Greek Catholic communities exist in Odessa province, in Ilichevsk, Razdelnoe, Berezovka, and others.

As regards construction of a church of UGKTs in Odessa and the assignment of a lot for this, the Greek Catholic community has been trying to achieve this for many years now. After a number of refusals and delays, the government demanded that public hearings be held regarding the basis for locating a church of UGKTs in Odessa on Staroportofrankovsk

street (Prokhorov Square). The public discussion of the city-planning principles was scheduled for 4 September. At the request of the Odessa-Crimea exarchate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic church [UGKTs], it was cancelled and deferred indefinitely.

The city-planning premises for locating the UGKTs church were worked out on the basis of a decision of the executive committee of the Odessa city council of 24 June 2009. The document was agreed upon by bodies of land resources, environmental, fire and sanitary-epidemiological agencies, and town planning and architectural and cultural heritage protection. On 22 July 2010 a positive expert conclusion of city-planning documentation of the administration of architectural and city-planning policy of the Odessa provincial administration was received.

The situation for UPTs churches in Odessa is quite different. In those cases, the practice of public discussions for assigning land for construction of a church has not been undertaken. As the Religious Information Service of Ukraine has already reported, at the request of Metropolitan of Odessa and Izmailsk of UPTs Agafangel, the executive committee of the Odessa city council gave permission for the construction of a church of UPTsMP in the center of the city. The new church of the Holy Prelate Luka, which is 12 by 12 meters, is located on the territory of the city hospital No. 3, on Lidorsovsk boulevard. Before discussion of this question, Odessa Mayor Eduard Gurvits sent to members of the executive committee this question: "Who wants to anger God and oppose the construction?" There were no responses.

On 30 August, in accordance with a petition from Metropolitan Agafangel, who is a deputy of the Odessa provincial council for the Party of Regions, at a session of the commission of the Odessa provincial council, it was decided to permit the transfer of property to the Odessa diocese of UPTs of a building complex on Academician Vorobiev street, for constructing a church in honor of the Holy Saint John of Kronstadt. (tr. by PDS, posted 3 September 2010)

No hijab for a passport picture

HRWF (12.07.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The administrative court of Kyiv examined the application of Susanna Ismailova, a lawyer from Bakhchisaray (Crimea) who wanted to be photographed for her passport wearing a hijab - the traditional Moslem shawl - and ruled that according to Order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine No 600 she is not allowed to wear any sort of headgear.

"I have been wearing my hijab for ten years, as we are directed by the Koran", declared Susanna. "Without a hijab I feel uncomfortable in the street. A Moslem woman must cover all her body with clothes. Only her hands and face may be uncovered. It is our way of life. In a democratic country we must have this right".

Susanna Ismailova got about a thousand supporting letters from Crimea, Donetsk, Kharkov and other cities. A Moslem from Kharkov Nargiz Khuseynova wrote that "if a woman is without her shawl on a photo, it is morally difficult for her to show this photo to men". On the other hand, a Moslem from Makiyevka Adiliya Madyukova wrote that in her passport there is a photo, on which she does not wear a shawl. "And I feel no discomfort about it. We have become Russified Moslems already. Here in Donbass, where there are many Tatars, we wear our headgear only on religious holidays and during religious ceremonies.

Source: Religious Panorama Nr 1/ 2010

Council of Churches calls to ensure right of believers to peaceful gathering

RISU (24.06.2010) / HRWF (12.07.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The constitutional right to peaceful gatherings is an integral component of ensuring another right which is especially important to believers, the right to the freedom of confession, reads the letter of the head of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, Bishop Markian Trofymiak, to the head of the parliamentary committee on human rights, national minorities, and international relations, Oleh Zarubinskyi. The letter contains proposals to Bill 2450 in the area of organization of peaceful events, reports the Institute of Religious Freedom.

The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations directs the attention of the deputies to the fact that the effective regulations of Part 5 of Article 21 of the Law of Ukraine On the Freedom of Worship and Religious Organizations as of today contradict Article 39 of the Constitution of Ukraine and discriminate believing citizens and religious organizations as they request the organization receive permission and give a 10 day notice to organize a public peaceful event of religious character.

"These regulations absolutely contradict Bill 2450, which is directly aimed at regulating the procedure of organizing peaceful events of citizens. Therefore, we believe that Part 5 of Article 21 of the Law of Ukraine On the Freedom of Worship and Religious Organizations should be replaced by a blanket norm with reference to the Law on the Procedure of Organizing and Holding Peaceful Events," notes the letter of Bishop Markian Trofymiak on behalf of the Council of Churches.

According to the representatives of the churches, such an approach will eliminate the existing discrimination of believers and stop the negative practice of the local self-government bodies, which, due to the unconformity of the current law of Ukraine, increasingly often hinder believing citizens to realize their constitutional right to peaceful gathering.

At the same time, the council stressed to the parliamentary committee the necessity to further elaborate the current wording of the draft law on procedure of organization and holding peaceful events, which has been submitted to the parliament for a second reading.

Bill on prohibition of totalitarian sects recalled from Parliament of Ukraine

RISU (15.06.2010) - Ukrainian deputy Lev Biruk (Yulia Tymoshenko's Motherland faction) recalled his Bill 6493 on making alterations and addenda to the Law of Ukraine On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations regarding religious sects.

According to the Institute of Religious Freedom (IRF), information this will soon appear on the portal of the Supreme Council of Ukraine.

The bill was recalled a few days after information about the proposed alterations was published, which provoked criticism of experts. In addition, concern about the document's drawbacks was expressed by the participants of the session of the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches of Ukraine of June 9, 2010, and heads of the Christian Churches of Ukraine at the meeting of June 10.

In his statement addressed to the parliament's speaker, the author of the initiative announced the recall of the submitted bill on the basis of Article 104 of the Law on the Rules of Procedure of the Supreme Council of Ukraine.

On the request of the IRF, the chairman of the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches of Ukraine, Mykhailo Panochko, commented on the recalling of the bill: "Undoubtedly, we approve of such a decision of the deputy Biriuk, who took into account the position of the believing public and heads of the churches."

Sevastopol city council refused to allocate land plot for monastery of the Kyivan Patriarchate

RISU (14.05.2010) / HRWF (20.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The Sevastopol City Council refused to allocate a land plot of 0.61 hectares in the village of Morozivka for the construction of a monastery of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyivan Patriarchate (UOC-KP). Only four deputies voted for it, reports "Religion in Ukraine."

According to the report, as he called on his colleagues not to vote for the allocation of land, a deputy Artem Maltsev noted that Ukraine's former President Leonid Kuchma once refused to pass to the UOC-KP St. Volodymyr's Cathedral in Khersones and that Patriarch Kirill of Moscow did not meet with Patriarch Filaret during his visit to Kyiv.

"It is a schismatic church established to bring discord among the Orthodox Slavs. Those who came to us and marched in masks for Tiahnybok, those who support OUN-UPA, pray in these churches," stressed Maltsev.

He stressed that the existing church of the UOC-KP in Morozivka was built in violation of the law as the land was allocated for the construction of a residential house.

The representative of the Crimean Eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate, Father Serhii, expressed gratitude to the deputies of the city council for their refusal to allocate the land plot for the construction of the monastery of the UOC-KP.

"The Kyivan Patriarchate has a certain legal status. Therefore, it is possible they will try again. But I wish to stress that autocephaly and schism are not typical of Sevastopol. Sevastopol has always been outside the schism. I believe that the deputies of the city council will pass the right decision," summed up the priest.

Ukraine's president speaks on church-state relations

RISU (13.05.2010) / HRWF (20.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On May 13, 2010, at the first session of the Public Humanitarian Council, Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovich spoke on church-state relations, reports the presidential website.

The president stressed: "The humanitarian policy in modern Ukraine should gradually bring our society to the state when the differences in the historic development of the regions and their cultural traditions are no longer used for political purposes: It is only then that we will be able to fully state that we have integrated into the cultural space of the united Europe."

As for church-state relations, President Yanukovich said: "The church is a powerful factor of the spiritual improvement of the society, rise of its morality, responsibility before the

present and future generations. For the Ukrainian state, all the churches and religious organizations are equal and at the same time native. We will require observance of this principle by state officials at all levels. The state will never interfere in the matters of the church. This should be dealt with by the communities and the soul of each person.

Dividing people on the basis of religious, national, or language attributes is a grave sin. The Ukrainian state will not interfere in inter-church matters but we should as much as possible facilitate reconciliation and the overcoming of confrontations and misunderstandings."

According to the president, the main objective in the area of church-state- elations is "to create the most favorable conditions for the realization of the spiritual mission of the church."

The report of the president also stressed that the use of wide cultural autonomy of the regions with the right to define their own cultural policy will secure preservation of the inter-ethnic and inter-confessional peace in Ukraine.

Yanukovych also spoke about preserving and actualizing the national cultural and historic heritage. "In this area we must legalize the preservation of the historic environment of our cities, first of all, the historic zone of the Sophia of Kyiv and Kyiv Cave Monastery in the capital of Ukraine. Illegal site development on the slopes and banks of the Dnipro, parks, and public gardens in Kyiv and other cities should be stopped," stressed the report.

Ukraine's oldest Lutheran church re-opens in Odessa

RISU (26.04.2010) / HRWF (21.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - After nearly a century, one of the oldest Evangelical Lutheran churches of Ukraine re-opened its doors for parishioners. The Lutheran St. Paul Church in Odesa will now have room for 500 people. Concerts of organ players from all over the world will be held here. A modern lighting system "smart house" has been installed in the church.

A Tragic Story with a Happy Ending

Many generations of Odesa residents almost came to terms with the image of the bare skeleton that was once one of the more beautiful buildings in Odesa – the Lutheran St. Paul Church.

The church was built in 1827 and closed down in 1937. In the Soviet era, the cross was removed from the top and the church was used as a library, a gym, and later a storehouse. Germans are certain that unwanted people were shot in the building. And the building itself was to be demolished. But the cultural and student public of the city saved the church. "In the Odesa Conservatoire (facing the church), works Professor Yuriy Dylji. As a student he headed an initiative group that opposed the demolition of the church. Many Odesa cultural figures opposed the destruction of the building. They went to Moscow where they obtained permission to meet with the then minister of culture, Kateryna Furtseva. And Furtseva said no to the destruction," said Claus Roepke, the retired senior advisor and "godfather" of the church.

In 1976, the church was set on fire and the building burned down. The persons responsible were never found. From time to time, donations rolled in from higher education institutions and companies of the city to renew the architectural monument. However, by the end of the 1990s, the physical deterioration of the building exceeded 80%. In 2005, Germans undertook to restore the church.

The restoration of the building cost 7 million euros. Two thirds of the amount was provided by the Lutheran Church in Bavaria, certain contributions were made by the governments of that land and Germany. Only 300 thousand euros were donated by private individuals. They were spent on bells, an organ, and the painter's work. The interior of the church was painted by a renowned German painter, Tobias Kammerer. "Taking into account the traditional canons, the painters are oriented towards modernity and even try to glimpse into the future. The red, blue, and golden colors symbolize the Trinity," explained the painter.

The crucifix is the central element of the interior. One can see figures of saints Peter and Paul at the feet of Jesus. On the ceiling Tobias painted a sea and a ship in the form of a church with sails. Its masts cross to form a cross. Claus Roepke calls the painting symbolic: "Saint Peter traveled a lot in boats." In addition, one should remember that Odesa is a coastal city and the church itself used to serve as a beacon for sailors for its cross was seen from afar. Nowadays, the landscape of the city has changed and modern sailors no longer have the need for such landmarks. However, the Germans decided to make the cross illuminated.

"It will not be illuminated by searchlights but it will be covered with special optical fiber to radiate light. It is a unique solution for Odesa," said the project supervisor Torsten Oswald.

Interior Decoration

Returning to the interior decoration of the church, one can see an icon of the Mother of God from the 18th century near the silvery alcove of the church. "The icon was presented by a resident of Odesa. In Soviet times, she took it out of a church in western Ukraine and secretly kept it at home all of these years," said Claus Roepke.

During the restoration of the church, the workers found an old Bible, a small amount of money of that time, a letter signed by the first architect of the building, and other interesting antiquities. The Germans inventoried the findings and placed them on exhibit in glass cases. Thus, a small exposition of its history was established in the church. One can see here fragments of church plates, books, and other documents. In addition, a manually controlled concert organ was brought to the church. "One can perform music of any age using the organ. We have all necessary conditions to organize organ concerts in the church," assured Claus Roepke at the opening ceremony.

Inside the church chandeliers were placed in the form of scrolls of ancient manuscripts. The altar and baptismal font were made from the old stones of the church.

In the process of the reconstruction, many stones had to be replaced due to their poor condition. "In Ukraine, the worst condition of a building is described in technical documents as 'unfit for use.' The building of the church was much worse when we began to work on it," said the director of the main contractor company, Volodymyr Sukhanov. During the nearly two years of the reconstruction, the builders strengthened its foundation with piles. In addition, they had to reject many original stones from the walls of the church due to their terrible condition and replace them with new ones. Reinforced concrete posts were installed in the walls of the church and a special belt was put round them to make them stronger.

In addition, the Germans made sure that the building would meet all modern requirements as well as be energy efficient. "A special installation supplies power and heat. We used economy bulbs and additional heat insulation in the façade. The building is controlled by the 'smart house' system," said Oswald.

Despite the modern approaches, the church has retained its old appearance. Though it did become a little smaller. Due to the complete destruction of the holy place, the apse, the building had to be reduced by one third. The construction of a cultural and educational center is being completed in the place of the former apse. The local representative office of the national minority and charitable organization Bavarian House will be located here. Some of the offices will be put on lease.

The church's warm pink shade of limestone is pleasant to the eye. The Germans assure that the color will not fade with time. "We have tried many mixes to soak the stone with in order to avoid deterioration and preserve the color. We chose the material used to paint the famous cathedral in Keln," said Oswald

Passing through the massive wooden doors decorated with forged metal one will see glass doors with the inscription "Peace to You" in nine languages.

The Germans foresee the church attracting a lot of tourist. The opening of the church was a grand celebration that lasted for a week. The first service was attended by the burgomaster of Bavaria, who presented 250 bushes of roses for the church. A brass band played in the city garden and a celebratory concert of Bach's pieces was held in the church.

Supreme Court of Ukraine confirmed ownership of church to Roman Catholics in Dnipropetrovsk

RISU (09.02.2010) / HRWF (10.02.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - On January 21, 2010, the Board of the Judges of the Supreme Court of Ukraine rejected the cassation of the American corporation Dugsbery and confirmed that the Roman Catholic parish in the eastern Ukrainian city of Dnipropetrovsk has full ownership of the Church of St. Joseph.

"Having discussed the arguments of the cassation and having studied the materials of the matter, the judges did not give their consent to the revision of the Resolution of the Supreme Economic Court of Ukraine of November 26, 2009. The resolution is final and without the right of appeal," says the resolution of the Supreme Court of Ukraine, reports the [press service of the Parish of St. Joseph](#).

Therefore, the highest court institution of Ukraine finally specified that the Church of St. Joseph belongs to the Roman Catholic parish of Dnipropetrovsk.

As RISU reported earlier the Roman Catholic community has sought to regain the cathedral for fifteen years. It was built by Roman Catholics in the second half of the 19th century. It was confiscated by the Soviet regime and used for non-intended purposes.

While Pavlo Lazarenko was in power, the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Council secretly sold the church to a Panamanian company that later sold it to Dugsbery Incorporated, which according to the media is associated with Lazarenko as well.
