

**CENTRE FOR MONITORING  
THE RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF  
ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE**

# **ANNUAL REPORT**

**“Violations of the Rights of  
Orthodox Christians  
in Europe in 2015”**

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# Introduction

The Centre for Monitoring the Rights and Freedom of Orthodox Christians in Europe (CRFO), established in 2014 to monitor violations of the rights and freedoms of Orthodox Christians in Europe and supported by the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Council of Europe, presents its annual report for the year 2015.

Monitoring the rights and freedom of Orthodox Christians in Europe within 47 countries of the Council of Europe means registering violations of freedoms of conscience, expression, assembly and other freedoms and rights. Usually violations occurs as defamation, humiliation, hate speech and action, discrimination, intolerance, hostility against Orthodox priests, Church stuff or Orthodox believers. The Centre is observing only the violations, which are related directly or indirectly to the Orthodox Christian faith or morality.

As rule at the end of a chapter of the report it is presented the official reaction of the local Churches to the violations of rights of their believers in order to inform different national and international institutions about such cases. The appearance of such reactions speaks about serious attitude of communities to violations which happen.

This report is prepared on the basis of open sources accessible in the Internet and contains references to the sources. The preference, as rule, is given to the primary sources – websites of Orthodox Local Churches, dioceses and parishes, Church-linked media.

In 2015 the CRFO cooperated with different human rights' defenders such as organizations «*Public Advocacy*» and «*Forpost Advocacy*» from Ukraine, Institute «*State and Religion*» from Russia and used the materials of *UN*, *OSCE*, the *Council of Europe* and the *European Union*.

This report could not cover all facts due to the lack of information about different countries and to the difficulty of languages. It is necessary to recognize that a lot of information on the violations of the Orthodox Christians in Europe is not accessible in English. Therefore, it is very much welcomed any information that can be sent to the Center of Monitoring about the violations of the rights of Orthodox Christians in 2016 in Europe and which can also complete the present report.

## Chapter 1 :

# Defamation of Orthodox Churches and believers.

**The CRFO observed cases of defamation (presenting in public false information) of the Orthodox Churches in different European countries.**

### **Defamation of the Orthodox Church (LATVIA)**

**January 11, 2015.** In the program “Nekā Personīgā” (channel TV3) the head of the Security Police of Latvia Normund Mezhviets argued that the Orthodox Church in Russia is fused with the government.

“Relations between the leadership of the Orthodox Church in Russia and the ruling regime during recent years in the context of the crisis in Ukraine became especially close. The Orthodox Church believes that all Orthodox Christians who support this religion shape one community. It is closely linked with Russia and reproduces the unique role of Russia in the world civilization. The Russian and Latvian Orthodox Church (LOC), like any religious denomination, definitely has the potential to influence at least on a part of society, “- said the head of the police. Mezhviets also pointed out that in recent years the LOC has developed activity with children and youth, and is actively working with Latvians. “Given the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church is very closely linked with the government, this activity automatically generates loyalty to Russia, to the conception of the Russian world, to the unique mission of Russia in the global context,” – said Mezhviets.

The Synod of the Latvian Orthodox Church

published a comment on the statement of the Minister Mezhviets: “The Latvian Orthodox Church is an independent, self-guided by the law on the Latvian Orthodox Church and by other regulations of the Latvian State, is not involved in politics, and, by virtue of its independence, is not subject to any internal and external political influences. Making his ministry, it educates its faithful flock in the Orthodox faith, love of God and neighbor, loyalty for the Latvian state and the people. The Latvian Orthodox Church prays every day for the Latvian state and its people”.

#### **Sources:**

<http://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/latvia/pb-rossiya-ispolzuet-dlya-vliyaniya-na-latviyu-pravoslavnuyu-cerkov.d?id=45438712>

<http://www.pravoslavie.lv/index.php?newid=5929>

### **Fake information about the export of Wonderworking icon of the Orthodox Lavra of Pochayiv (UKRAINE)**

**March 23, 2015.** Law enforcement agencies and SSU (Security Service of Ukraine) identifies persons who spread fake information about possible substitution of the Wonderworking Pochayiv icon of Holy Lady the Mother of God with consequent export of the original out of the Holy Dormition Pochaiv Lavra as reports Department of UOC and UNIAN. This has been stated by chief of Ternopil Regional Militsiya Department Oleksandr Bogomol, at a press conference.

“The information had been spread with the aim of destabilization of the situation in the

region, and this will definitely be given the legal treatment”, – said Oleksandr Bogomol. According to his words, 80 law enforcement officers went to Pochayiv with the purpose of ensuring the rule of law and they have prevented destabilization in the city.

One day earlier, MIA Department in Ternopil region refuted the information about an attempt of substitution of the Wonderworking Pochayiv icon of Holy Lady the Mother of God with its copy. Chief of Ternopil Regional Militsiya Department had personally visited Abbot of Pochayiv Lavra metropolitan Volodymyr. During the meeting Metropolitan disclaimed the information about alleged export of the icon from the territory of the monastery and assured, that there has never ever been an intention to do this. The officers of Ternopil Regional Militsiya Department had also had an opportunity to get convinced that the icon is in its own place and is safe and fully protected.

#### Sources:

<http://vzcz.church.ua/en/2015/03/24/pochayiv-law-enforcement-agencies-and-ssu-identifies-persons-spread-fake-information-about-export-of-wonderworking-pochayiv-icon-out-of-pochayiv-lavra/>

<http://religions.unian.ua/religinossociety/1058982-militsiya-ta-sbu-vstanovlyue-osib-yaki-rozpovsyudjuvali-nepravdivu-informatsiyu-pro-viviz-pochajivskoji-ikoni-z-lavri.html>

### Defaming documentaries during the Orthodox Holy week (GREECE)

**April 11, 2015.** The Holy Saturday and while faithful were prepared to go to the Church to attend the celebration of the Resurrection; a blasphemous documentary was broadcasted from the TV Channel Sky (ΣΚΑΙ), in Greece. The documentary was presented as a scientific work against Christ and was trying to prove the “creation of a Messiah”, as reports The Holy

Metropolis of Peiraus.

Metropolitan of Piraeus Serafim and metropolitan of Kalavryta Amvrosios reacted against the documentary. Metropolitan Serafim sent a personal letter to the owner of the Channel Sky (Mr. Giannis Alafouzos), in order to cancel the broadcasting of this documentary. The building of the channel is located in the territory of the spiritual jurisdiction of the dioceses of metropolitan Serafim. He asked politely the owner of the channel to respect the religious feelings of faithful during the Holy Week. Instead of a reply the channel ignored the petition of the metropolitan and provocatively it broadcasted the documentary. For this reason metropolitan Serafim announced that from now on, the diocese of Piraeus interrupts any charity cooperation with this TV channel and he gave in public a communiqué so as to inform the faithful.

Metropolitan of Kalavryta Amvrosios denounced this documentary in his personal blog. He posed very important questions: Where are the judges to apply the dispositions of the law against racism? Why there was no reaction from the audio-visual council which is responsible? He also underlined the important detail that the documentary was broadcasted at 22:00, time when all faithful were prepared to go to the Church. He continued by saying that the channel didn't stop the night of the Holy Saturday. The day of Easter they broadcasted two documentaries: at 22:00 “The secret lives of the Apostles” and at 23:00: “Jesus, theories of conspiracy”. Metropolitan Amvrosios mentions that both the documentaries had a common and awful context: they called Saint Mary Magdalene as the “girlfriend” of our Lord. For this reason he urges people not to watch from now on any emission, documentary or film from this

blasphemous channel.

#### Sources:

[www.imp.gr/2012-03-27-20-22-23/916-έθος-του-σκαί-η-κατά-την-αγία-μεγάλη-εβδομάδα-ανασταύρωσις-του-κυρίου.html](http://www.imp.gr/2012-03-27-20-22-23/916-έθος-του-σκαί-η-κατά-την-αγία-μεγάλη-εβδομάδα-ανασταύρωσις-του-κυρίου.html)

[http://www.mkka.blogspot.fr/2015/04/blog-post\\_14.html](http://www.mkka.blogspot.fr/2015/04/blog-post_14.html)

### **Defamation of the Russian Orthodox Church by Appearance of 'Stalin Icon' (RUSSIA)**

**May 31, 2015.** Representatives of the Belgorod Archdiocese of the Russian Orthodox Church have issued a statement denouncing a painting created in the style of an Orthodox icon featuring Joseph Stalin and Soviet the Second World war generals as reports Sputnik.

In the end of May people gathered at Prokhorovka field, the site of a key the Second World war battle in Russia's Belgorod region, to hold a ceremony dedicated to the fallen, featuring the painting, entitled 'Sovereign Holy Mother', which shows Stalin and his marshals on Red Square under the gaze of Mary, the mother of Christ.

The painting was carried and transported by vehicles through the site of the battle, passing churches and monuments; a monk priest named Athonogenes prayed for the fallen heroes.

The Battle of Prokhorovka was one of the largest armored clashes in history, and part of the larger Battle of Kursk of July-August 1943, which broke the Nazi offensive and gave Soviet forces the strategic initiative for the rest of the war.

Commissioned by the Izborsk Club, a conservative think tank led by Russian literary figure and political commentator Alexander

Prokhanov, the icon has raised controversy and led to debates about the appropriateness of depicting Stalin, who played an instrumental role in the destruction of the Church in the 1930s, in an icon. Prokhanov himself described the painting as a symbol of the "victory of light over darkness."

Responding to the controversy, the Archdiocese of the Belgorod region slammed the painting, saying that the image cannot be counted as an icon, and verges on blasphemy: "Although the painting is done in the style of an icon, for many reasons, it cannot be considered as such. Firstly, the Russian Orthodox Church counts none of the depicted historical personalities as canonized saints. Secondly, some of those pictured in the painting were persecutors of the Church." The Archdiocese suggested that the painting "serves as a manifesto and illustration of the idea of a 'civil religion,' which is opposed to revealed religion and to the Orthodox Church."

Pointing out that monk priest Athenogenes is not a member of the Belgorod Archdiocese, the Church's statement also noted that participants in Thursday's celebrations did not appreciate the painting's presence, "expressing their confusion and frustration about the pseudo-religious views being imposed on them." This is not the first time in post-Soviet Russian history that lone religious figures and believers have attempted to fuse images of Stalin with those of Orthodox Christianity. A scandal blew up in St. Petersburg in 2008 surround a painting entitled 'Matron and Stalin', featuring the controversial leader's alleged wartime meeting with the Blessed Eldress of Moscow, a canonized 20th century Orthodox Saint. The 'icon's' presence in a local church led to the dismissal of the priest who had hung it up, despite the priests'



protestations that Stalin was a man of faith.

**Source:**

<http://sputniknews.com/russia/20150531/1022778000.html#ixzz3crFDmLJC>

## **An Orthodox priest is accused of “a desecration of the national symbols” (UKRAINE)**

**August 20, 2015.** Archpriest Vladimir Greben, rector of the Orthodox church of Nativity of the Mother of God in the Verbichno village of the Turiysk district of the Ukraine’s Volhynia region was accused of desecration of the national symbols. Deputy of the Volhynia regional council Alexander Pirozhik (the All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda”) appealed to the public prosecutor’s office and the Security service of the Ukraine with the request to look into the “provocation”. The priest was alleged to paint over the Ukrainian state emblem on the church gate, as reports pravoslavie.ru.

According to the priest, the life of the Orthodox community had been peaceful until several “activists” appeared. The painting over of the national emblem of the Ukraine was merely a scheduled repair of the fence round the church territory: the fencing was repainted in blue and during the works, the upper yellow-blue plank on the gate was covered with a new layer of paint. Will the law-enforcement officers see a crime in this? It remains to be seen. According to the Pro.church.ua portal, there was no image of the national emblem on the church gate.

Fr. Vladimir who has served in this village for 38 years, says that the new Church-political group of activists is closely linked with the All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda” (“Freedom”) whose representative voiced the “sensational”

request at the session of the Volhynia regional council on August 14, 2015.

Fr Vladimir explains that the reason of the accusation is the church. The church of Nativity of the Mother of God was built in 1886. It is an architectural monument and, obviously, is another target of initiators of seizures of canonical Orthodox churches.

**Sources:**

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/81540.htm>

<http://pro.church.ua/2015/08/17/zvinuvachennya-u-bik-svyashhennosluzhitelya-upc-u-seli-verbichne-politichnij-naklep/>

## **The Ukrainian Orthodox Church found fraud in the collection of signatures for the transfer of the Kyiv Caves Lavra (UKRAINE)**

**December 14, 2015.** The press service of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), claims that there is fraud in the collection of signatures for the transfer of Kyiv Caves Lavra, as the website Interfax-religion reports.

Many users of the Internet, which in the e-mail came dispatch to confirm the signing of the said petition, explained that when the user opens the link with the purpose to know its contents, or to unsubscribe, will automatically receive the message that their vote has been counted in support of the petition.

The rector of Pochayiv Lavra, Metropolitan Vladimir, said that this initiative to transfer Lavra has the purpose to create a sectarian strife and he warned that it will end with unpleasant consequences. The transfer of the spiritual cradle of Orthodox monasticism in Rus’ Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra to the dissenters means to close it for Orthodoxy believers.



Everybody today knows very well that none of the Orthodox Churches of the world does not recognize the so-called “Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate”, said Metropolitan Vladimir in a letter.

The Rector of Svyatogorsk Lavra, Metropolitan Arseniy also made a statement in an open letter, and in his speech pointed out not only the seizures, but also the arson and looting of churches of the UOC: “Such things did not happen from Gentiles or pagans but from people who call themselves Christians. They do it under the guise of pseudo-religious slogans

and political expediency”, said Metropolitan Arseniy. He reminded that this is an effort to draw the attention of people from the serious things which happen at this moment in Ukraine.

#### Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=61299>

<http://news.church.ua/2015/12/11/vidkritij-list-namisnika-svyato-uspenskoji-pochajivskoji-lavry-mitropolita-pochajivskogo-volodimira/>

<http://svlavra.church.ua/2015/12/11/otkrytoe-pismo-namestnika-svyato-uspenskoji-svyatogorskoji-lavry-mitropolita-svyatogorskogo-arseniya/>

## A.Reaction of the Orthodox Local Churches to the defamation against the Orthodox Churches and their believers.

### **The Synod of the Latvian Orthodox Church published a comment on the statement of the head of the Security Police of Latvia Normund Mezhviets (LATVIA)**

**January 11, 2015.** The Synod of the Latvian Orthodox Church published a comment on the statement of the Minister Mezhviets who in the program “Nekā Personīgā” (channel TV3) accused the Church to work for Russia:

“The Latvian Orthodox Church is an independent, self-guided by the law on the Latvian Orthodox Church and by other regulations of the Latvian State, is not involved in politics, and, by virtue of its independence, is not subject to any internal and external political influences. Making his ministry, it educates its faithful flock in the Orthodox faith, love of God and neighbor, loyalty for the Latvian state and the people. The Latvian Orthodox Church prays every day for the Latvian state and its people”.

#### Sources:

<http://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/latvia/pb-rossiya-ispolzuet-dlya-vliyaniya-na-latviyu-pravoslavnuyu-cerkov.d?id=45438712>

<http://www.pravoslavie.lv/index.php?newid=5929>

### **Reaction of the Volyn diocese to the defamation by Kyiv Patriarchate (UKRAINE)**

**March 13, 2015.** The official website of the Volyn diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) – UOC MP – made the official statement about the public offences of metropolitan Michael (Kyiv Patriarchate).

Several Ukrainian web-based media communicated that the head of the Volyn diocese of the Kyiv Patriarchate metropolitan Michael made a statement during events honoring the memory of the Ukrainian poet Tharas Shevchenko in Lutsk (Ukraine). In his speech he called the priests of the Moscow Patriarchate “separatists in cassocks” and the

faithful of the Moscow Patriarchate – “slaves”.

In particular, the statement of the Volyn diocese (Moscow Patriarchate) says: “In such a case he presented false information as if our priests do not perform funerals for soldiers of the Antiterrorist operation (ATO) and do not participate in the panikhidas (commemorations of the dead faithful). Moreover metropolitan Michael mentioned that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is supposed to transfer its dioceses of Crimea to Russia. Metropolitan Michael’s speech is not just a deliberate lie, but his speech contains signs both of administrative offences and crimes. Firstly, it is a slander. Secondly, it’s a public insult. Thirdly, it’s an inciting of religious hatred”. The Volyn diocese announced that they will appeal to public prosecutor office and security services of Ukraine to check the facts described above.

The Volyn diocese (Moscow Patriarchate) also refutes the information which the head of the Volyn diocese (Kyiv Patriarchate) mentioned in his speech. In particular, on the 11th of March this year at the official press-conference, which took place in the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, there were given documentary evidence that the dioceses of Crimea stay a part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

The Volyn diocese (Moscow Patriarchate) assures that its priests always perform funerals of the ATO soldiers upon their relatives’ requests. The priests of the diocese make also prayers for the state authorities and the army of Ukraine during each religious celebration. In the statement is affirmed: “Moreover the Church could not but perform funerals of its parishioners, there’s a big amount of our faithful among ATO soldiers. The Priests and laity of Ukrainian Orthodox Church always help to the Ukrainian army and forced

migrants. So it is immoral to blame our faithful to be “slaves”, “of little worth” and “antichrists”. Hiding behind the soldiers of the ATO and trying as if to “assign” all of them, metropolitan Michael offends those real fighters who are our believers, calling them “antichrists”.

The document concludes: “In the light of the all mentioned above we call for metropolitan Michael to make official public apology for his words. In addition, by the fact of his speech the Volyn diocese of Ukrainian Orthodox Church will appeal to law-enforcement authorities.

#### **Source:**

<http://volyn.church.ua/2015/03/13/volinska-jeparxiya-podavatime-do-sudu-za-naklep-ta-rozpalyuvannya-religijnoji-vorozhnechi/>

### **Appeal from Metropolitan of Pochayiv Volodymyr with regards to rumours about alleged export from Pochayiv Holy Relics out of Ukraine (UKRAINE)**

**March 22, 2015.** Metropolitan of Pochayiv Volodymyr, Abbot of the Holy Dormition Pochayiv Lavra, published the appeal with regards to rumors that have been spread about alleged export from Pochayiv Holy Relics out of Ukraine as reports Department for External Church Relations of the UOC.

“Dear brothers and sisters, dear contemporaries and fellow countrymen!

Glory be to God, the Lord has vouchsafed us this year to go through more than half of Great Lent. This time of year, for us Orthodox Christians is very special. According to the teaching of the Church, Lent is seen as being both “soul-saving and favorable”. We analyze the image of our lives, repent and mend and remember that life on earth – is merely a preparation for the future, for eternity.

Unfortunately, after the third Sunday of Great Lent, the Veneration of the Cross, the mass media started to make accusations against the inhabitants of Pochayiv Lavra. Once again, old accusations are being repeated: namely, that Holy Relics are being exported, anti-Ukrainian sentiment within the Lavra and the like. St Apostle Paul warns us: Do not listen to those who cause divisions and offences between you, they that are such serve not God (Rom. 16:17).

I, as Abbot of Pochayiv Lavra, assure you all that the Holy Relics, to which both we and pilgrims daily pray, are in their place. I invite everyone to come and worship them, because it is through the Holy Relics that the grace of God acts and enlightens our minds and hearts, if with faith we accept this grace. Who, in your opinions, do you think are the visible custodians of our monastery relics? The answer is: the Abbot and the brethren of the monastery. We bear a responsibility – to guard, as the apple of one's eye, that we ourselves were bequeathed, and then to subsequently hand down to those who come after us, for posterity.

A living example of how carefully the Pochayiv relics were preserved and defended, are testified to by events from the second half of the twentieth century where the Pochayiv monks were convicted several times for not leaving the Lavra and for not allowing it to be converted into a museum and a centre of atheism. Pilgrims who visit the Pochayiv Lavra see how this shrine, has in recent years, been transformed into a glorious temple built on the Pochayiv hill. Does this not testify to the fact of how the brothers of the monastery care about this Holy Place?! Be on your guard! Unfortunately, there are forces that divide our people and divert it from God. Do not listen to those who spread gossip and lies that in Pochaiv, we do not pray for Ukraine and

our nation. In fact, we fervently pray for “our God-holding nation” – for Ukraine, and in the prayer “of peace for all the world” clerics pray and for peace in the whole world.

Some may ask, “Why is there no peace in our country?” This may be simply because people do not live their lives in as righteous and devout way as Christians must do. And we may ask in our turn: “What percentage of people actually attends church services every Sunday?”

Once again I assure you that Lavra relics are in their place, and implore you not to listen to those, who have for the past fifteen to twenty years been saying that everything has been taken from the Lavra. To where would we export? This is our spiritual home that we dearly love and to which we have dedicated our very lives. The brothers of the Lavra – are your fellow countrymen who might have been once villagers or may have been close relatives, grandchildren, they have hence devoted that what is most precious – their youth and life. This can be seen by all who visit the Lavra.

St Apostle Peter says: beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness (2 Pet. 3:17). Let us live in peace and harmony, for so teaches us our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. He promised that if we fulfill this and the other commandments, then he shall take us up to our heavenly fatherland after our earthly lives – something that I wish for all of you. May God help us with rejuvenated souls and enlightened hearts live so till Holy Week, after which we may celebrate the glorious day of Christ's Resurrection”.

#### **Source:**

<http://vzcz.church.ua/en/2015/03/23/appeal-from-abbot-of-the-holy-dormition-pochayiv-lavra-his-eminence-metropolitan-of-pochayiv-volodymyr-with-regards-to-rumors-that-have-been-spread-about-alleged-export-of-pochayiv-holy-relics-out-of>

## **Reaction of Serbian Orthodox Church against the accusations of the Montenegrin Minister of Foreign Affairs (MONTENEGRO)**

**May 4, 2015.** The statement of Montenegrin Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Lukšić on the occasion of his discussions with the head of German diplomacy Frank Walter Steimayr – confirmed by the report by the Montenegrin Embassy in Berlin which was disclosed – according to which “The Russian pressure on Montenegro is developed through many structures of the Serbian Orthodox Church, opposition to some NGOs”, caused many reactions in Montenegro, especially after the confirmation of its authenticity as Evening News and Orthodoxie.com report.

The Bishop of Nikšić-Budimlje Joannice told the Belgrade newspaper “Novosti” that such conduct and such statements are not those of a statesman. “This declaration degrades the image of Montenegro and discredits Mr. Lukšić as head of its diplomacy. It is shameful for a foreign minister to slander his people and the Church, which has the highest trust of the population of that state. Besides the fact that public money is spent on the lobbying and on the intense campaign, the feeling of the majority of the population remains firmly opposed to Montenegro’s entry into NATO”, said the bishop Joannice whom newspaper “Novosti” interviewed on the return from his visit of several days in Russia.

“Can we blame the Church to remember and commemorate in prayer innocent victims of its attacked people? We can not forget the crime done by the NATO against the innocent population, especially Murina [17 bombs were dropped on the village, killing including three children], also not the previous crimes and the terrible destruction of our Homeland during

the two world wars by the states that are now members of the military union... To forget the innocent victims, cross the river of the innocent blood is what, obviously, our NATO propagandists are ready to do and for a utopia that can only lead to new misfortunes and new divisions in Montenegro”.

The bishop also mentioned that the relations of the Serbian and Russian Orthodox Churches traditionally were good. “We have always been closely linked to Russia and Russians in the first place by the common faith, but also on the basis of a common origin, tradition, writing, historical and cultural ties through the centuries. I think that no nation in the world has such a capacity for understanding us and share with us our joys and difficulties, to recognize and highly appreciate the values that we inherited, and for being so open to every aspect of fraternal collaboration in the highest mutual respect” has even said bishop Joannice. In St. Petersburg, he visited the archbishop of Ohrid John, who is recovering at the Novodevichy Monastery. “Glory to God, he endured imprisonment, being unjustly imprisoned; he witnessed the apostolic way in the word and in the deed of the holy Orthodox faith and fought for the unity of the Church. I hope that his sacrifice will be the foundation of the solution to the schism in Macedonia, which is greatly damaging, above all, for the people who live in a spiritual isolation. The Russian Orthodox Church has done everything for us to help ourselves and Archbishop John. He will soon return to Macedonia on his episcopal cathedra, to his people, and to his sacred ministry”, concluded the bishop Joannice. The Archbishop of Peterhof Ambrose, President of the Ecclesiastical Academy of St. Petersburg, honored him with the Medal of St John the Theologian.



## Sources:

[www.novosti.rs/вести/планета.480.html:545559-Luksic-kleveta-narod-i-crkvu](http://www.novosti.rs/вести/планета.480.html:545559-Luksic-kleveta-narod-i-crkvu)

<http://orthodoxie.com/leveque-de-budimlje-niksic-joannice-montenegro-a-reagi-aux-accusations-du-ministre-montenegrin-des-affaires-etrangees-a-legard-de-leglise-orthodoxe-serbe/>

## **Reaction of Metropolitan of Borispol and Brovary Antony of Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) to the defamation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)**

**October 7, 2015.** Metropolitan of Borispol and Brovary Antony of Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) commented the attack of Ukrainian media against the canonical Church, as reports pravlife.org.

Metropolitan Antony invited the faithful to concentrate on liturgical life as a way of reaction against the defamation of the Church. He said that the lies will be soon uncovered after the triumph of the truth. All the false information, the attacks and the brutality from the opponents of the Church proved their truth face.

He also said that the pressure against the Canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church is unprecedented and that fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Ukrainian Constitution are now violated. He encouraged the faithful by mentioning the example of the persecutions during the totalitarian Soviet period and the attitude of the priests of that time.

## Source:

<http://pravlife.org/content/mitropolit-antony-veruyushchih-lyudey-fakticheski-obyavili-vne-zakona>

## **The Albanian Orthodox Church's press release about the defamation made by the Albanian Parliament (ALBANIA)**

**October 17, 2015.** The Albanian Orthodox Church published a press release reacting to the session of the Albanian parliamentary assembly on 15th October, where it was a discussion about the destruction of the church of St Athanasius in Dhermi (Drymades). The Albanian Orthodox Church was accused that "at least during the last two years she has not given money for the restoration of the Albanian monuments", as the official website of the Albanian Orthodox Church reports.

According to the statement of the Albanian Church, it is very sad that the responsible services informed falsely the Albanian Prime Minister and for this reason, he created an unfair image of the Church by not informing objectively the Albanian people.

The Albanian Orthodox Church reminds that even though she has not still taken back her propriety and she had financial problems, she achieved to gather more than 11 million euros from donators in order to restore more than 60 monasteries and churches, which are cultural monuments in several regions of Albania.

The press-release also mentions that some relative documents have already been published in the newspaper «Ngjallja» and in other newspapers under the titles: «Lynette Hope, Resurrection. The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania 1991-2003», «Restaurimi i Kishave Orthodhokse Monumente Kulture në Shqipëri. Tiranë 2005.» "Vepra ndërtuese e Kishës Orthodhokse Autoqefale të Shqipërisë gjatë viteve 1992-2012. Volumi I. Tiranë 2012. "Vepra ndërtuese. Përzgjedhje e vëllimit II dhe III". Tiranë 2014. "Vepra ndërtuese e Kishës Orthodhokse Autoqefale të Shqipërisë gjatë

viteve 1992-2012. Volumi II, Tiranë 2015».

The Albanian Orthodox Church reminds about her donations about monuments which after the restoration by the Church, were abandoned by the State and for this reason they were destroyed again. The Church gave 54,830 USD for the restoration of Saint Athanasius in Karavasta and 130,000 USD for the church of Saint Spyridon. Unfortunately, the State did not do anything to keep the safety of the monuments.

Lastly, the Albanian Church considers that it is very strange that her great contribution to the restoration of the Albanian cultural monuments is kept in silence even though in the official information of the Parliamentary Assembly. For this reason she gives in public photos of the restored monuments by the Church.

**Source:**

<http://orthodoxalbania.org/alb/index.php/el/lajme-2/blog/3603-11>

**Press release of the diocese Montenegro and Littoral about the efforts of defamation against it (MONTENEGRO)**

**December 24, 2015.** The diocese of Montenegro and Littoral expressed its discomfort concerning the wrong image, which is created from the local authorities of Montenegro, and the defamation of the Church, as the official website of the diocese reports.

There is defamation of the Church concerning the financial reparation that it is owned from the municipality about the construction of the road in the land of Budva. The church of Saint Petka is exempted from this compensation.

It is presented that each owner is entitled to compensation from the state except for the church. This is illegal treatment to the Church property. The authorities try to lead the public opinion to the assumption that the request for reimbursement of the Metropolitan is something dishonest, although this does not correspond to the truth.

The diocese was deprived and confiscated large assets after the Second World War and it is not entitled to demand from the municipality and the local authorities those funds. The assets were acquired by the faithful in a legal way and certainly, they would not want the Church to manage them carelessly and irresponsibly. Therefore, the Church is obliged to take care of the property, which was inherited or received in lawful possession. The obligation of the state towards the Orthodox Church, as well as the other religious communities, for the return of the confiscated property will not stop, as long as these assets are not returned.

The largest part of these funds paid on this occasion by the municipality of Budva will be invested to the completion of the Cathedral of St. John Vladimir in Bar. The consecration is expected next year, on the celebration of one thousand years from the Martyrium of the Saint. The rest will be spent on a number of charitable and other activities in Montenegro. The money after these activities will be returned to the citizens of Montenegro.

The new law about freedom of religion and the confiscation of the church property is not a surprise even if the local government tries to confiscate the property that left after the post-war government. The authorities of Budva consider that it is justice to fight against the Church, just because the Church wants to defend its assets. It is better for those who consist the government of Budva to stop making defamation to the Church and find



solutions to make better the life of citizens.

**Source:**

<http://www.mitropolija.com/mitropolija-crnogorsko-primorska-sredstva-dobijena-od-opstine-budva-mali-djelici-onoga-sto-je-drzava-konfiskovala-crkvi/>

**Metropolitan Onufry urges to end the war of defamation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)**

**December 29, 2015.** On the annual assembly of Kyiv Diocese, Metropolitan Onufry of Kyiv and all Ukraine has spoken about the issue of defamation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as press service of the UOC MP reports.

“Today all of us are witnesses to the open and planned informational war against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, using unchecked and sometimes even slanderous information,” the Primate said at the annual meeting of the Kyiv Diocese. According to him, such actions lead to “growing tensions in society and threaten internal security and stability in the country.”

Metropolitan Onufry urged clerics to denounce actively such false information and stated, “Certainly, your own life should not give any grounds for journalistic or public discussions. You should be as careful as possible to not give any reason for conflicts and pay maximal attention to your flock.”

**Source:**

<http://news.church.ua/2015/12/28/dopovid-blazhennishogo-mitropolita-kijivskogo-i-vsiyeji-ukrajini-onufriya-na-richnix-jeparxialnix-zborax-kijivskoji-jeparxiji/>

## Chapter 2 : Humiliation, hate speech, inhuman treatment and murders of Orthodox Christians.

In 2015 CRFO registered incidents of offensive statements, inhuman treatment, batteries, murders which violate the Article 2 (*Right to life*) and 3 (*Prohibition of torture*) of the European Convention on human rights.

### **Bus with Orthodox pilgrims stoned in Djakovica on Christmas Eve (KOSOVO TERRITORY)**

**January 6, 2015.** A bus which with about 40 displaced Serbs from Djakovica was stoned in front of the church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God in that southwestern Kosovo-Metohija city on Orthodox Christmas Eve, by Kosovo Albanians as report tanjug.rs and inserbia.info.

“On the occasion the driver of the bus suffered minor injuries,” president of the Association of the Displaced from Djakovica, Djokica Stanojevic, told Tanjug. Stanojevic added that the incident occurred despite the police escort the Serbs had.

“This year we again failed to light a Yule log (young and straight oak log burnt on the evening of Christmas Eve) in the city from which we were exiled. At the entrance to the church a group of Albanians was waiting for us and they threw stones at the bus,” he said.

Stanojevic said that front glass on the bus was broken and the driver suffered minor cuts. “We returned without bringing Yule log in the church,” he added.

Stanojevic condemned the incident, recalling that this is not the first time and that something similar happened a year ago and earlier.

**Source:**

<http://inserbia.info/today/2015/01/djakovica-albanians-stoned-bus-with-displaced-serbs-in-front-of-a-church/>

### **Humiliation of the Orthodox believers (GREECE)**

**January 8, 2015.** The Greek popular website LIFO.GR republished the well-known drawing of the French magazine “Charlie Hebdo” but adapted it to the Greek audience. The drawing shows the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity in sexual action among them and it is addressed to the bishop of Thessaloniki Anthimos by saying that “Anthimos has three daddies”. As the magazine claims this title is related to the gay marriage and to children who have two parents of the same sex. The article of the magazine is full of hate speech against Orthodox Christians alleging that the Orthodoxy offends and humiliates people as it does not accept the satire against Christ or against the Saints. The article says clearly that whoever does not accept this type of satire is a fascist. Regardless the opinion of the Greek website our Centre is not willing to reproduce this image on its pages, as it is extremely offensive to the Christian faith. Nevertheless, to see the caricature you can go to the website of LIFO.GR. Image:

**Source:**

<http://www.lifo.gr/team/bitsandpieces/54438>

### **Novosibirsk NGOs protested against insults of shrines and believers (RUSSIA)**

**March 1, 2015.** The activists of a dozen of

non-governmental organizations expressed their distrust to Novosibirsk personnel and cultural policy of the Marie, of the Governor and of the Government of the Novosibirsk region as reports the Novosibirsk diocese. The protestation gathered about 2 thousand people.

The protesters opposed to the demonstration of the famous Tannhäuser in the interpretation of the director Timofei Kuliabin in the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theatre with the support of public funds. According to the participants, this interpretation offends the main symbol of the Christianity – cross and distorts the life of Jesus Christ. The Theater presented the story of the allegedly sinful life of Jesus Christ in his young days, and the main background decoration is made as a huge poster with a lying naked woman between the spread legs of which the crucifixion is put. Several musicians, scholars and public figures came also to support the protestation.

The gathered people think that “cultural experiments”, which destroy traditional spiritual and moral values, are unacceptable. Such an experiment as the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theatre presented is a provocation, which can destroy the unity of society.

**Source:**

<http://nskmitropolia.ru/metropole/news/1247/>

### **In the region of Kyiv unidentified persons tortured an Orthodox priest (UKRAINE)**

**March 10, 2015.** In the region of Kyiv unidentified persons kidnaped and tortured several hours a priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) as reports MIA of Ukraine. The press-service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the region

of Kyiv informs: “In Borispol unidentified persons kidnaped a priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) from Kramatorsk and tortured him several hours. The plan “Interception” was launched in Kyiv and in its area. The priest was found in the district Baryshevsky. He refused to be hospitalized. The police started criminal proceeding according to the article 146 of the Criminal code («Kidnapping of a person »).

**Source:**

<http://www.mvs.gov.ua/mvs/control/kyivska/ru/publish/article/147551>

### **Court drops case against Novosibirsk opera theatre director (RUSSIA)**

**March 12, 2015.** A magistrates’ court in the Central District of Novosibirsk acquitted the opera director, Timofey Kulyabin, and the director of the Novosibirsk Opera Theater, Boris Mezdrich, in an administrative case over the stage production of Richard Wagner’s opera “Tannhauser” at the theater as reports Interfax.

It was reported earlier that local prosecutors had opened the case against the pair on charges of “intentional public defilement, damage or destruction of religious or liturgical literature, items of religious worship, signs or emblems, symbols and attributes of faith.”

The contemporary adaptation of the opera, written by the 19th century German composer, is set in modern times.

The inspection was carried out at the request of Metropolitan Tikhon of Novosibirsk and Berdsk, who complained, in particular, about the misuse of church symbols in the opera.

Kulyabin’s adaptation of “Tannhauser” premiered in December 2014. In it, the minnesinger Tannhauser was portrayed as a film director who made The Venus Grotto film. The leading part was performed by Stieg

Andersen, a soloist at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen. The musical performance was directed by the Latvian conductor Ainars Rubikis.

**Source:**

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=11897>

## **Representatives of Kyiv Patriarchate attacked a priest of the Moscow Patriarchate in Volyn region (UKRAINE)**

**March 18, 2015.** In the village Ugriniv (Volyn region, Ukraine) the Kyiv Patriarchate's supporters attacked father Rostislav Sapozhnyk, priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) and rector of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross church as reports Volyn diocese.

The new possessors of the church – the Kyiv Patriarchate – which has taken it over in autumn 2014, started its reparation ignoring its status as architectural monument and without the permission of the Department of architecture. Archpriest Rostislav Sapozhnyk sent a request about ongoing works to the appropriate authorities. When representatives of the Department of architecture arrived at Uhryniv, they met the main initiator of takeover of the church – local deputy and businessman A. Turako.

However, when father Rostislav, who is resident of the village Uhryniv, wanted to enter the church to see it from the inside, he was categorically and rudely denied to do this. The supporters of the Kyiv Patriarchate, using physical force, pushed the priest out of the church. Then father Rostislav from behind was hit on the head with a stick, so that he got a hematoma in the head. A.Turaco participated directly in attacking father Rostislav. The police was called and its representatives recorded the incident.

Earlier in September 2014 the church of the

Exaltation of the Holy Cross in Uhryniv was roughly taken over by the Kyiv Patriarchate's supporters led by A.Turaco. The community has repeatedly appealed to the court seeking justice, however, it has not found reaction up till now.

**Source:**

<http://volyn.church.ua/2015/03/23/v-ugrinovi-prixilniki-upc-kp-pobili-svyashhenika-upc/>

## **Priest and Nun of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate murdered in Kyiv (UKRAINE)**

**July 29, 2015.** Kyiv priest Roman Nikolayev (Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate), died of gunshot wounds on Wednesday morning at the age of 40.

“The venue of the funeral service and the burial place of the newly departed priest Roman Nikolayev will be reported later,” the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reported on its website.

The priest, who was prior of the Church of Martyr Tatiana in Kyiv, was attacked in a residential building on Heroyev Stalinhrada Avenue in Kyiv in the early hours of July 26. The attackers fired two shots to his head. The attackers left after the attack and the priest was found on the staircase by his neighbor, who called the police. The attackers did not rob the priest. Father Roman was in a coma before he died.

The investigative branch of the district department has entered the information into the unified register of pretrial investigations based on Part 2 of Article 115 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (premeditated murder). A pretrial investigation is underway.

The day before (July 28) sister Alevtina, a nun of Florovsky Convent in Kyiv, was found murdered in her apartment as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reported on its website.



Later her nephew found the nun's body with her hands tied and traces of torture. The late nun was 62 years old.

This is the second murder of a member of the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in a few days. The Head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill has expressed condolences in relation to the deaths of prior of the Church of St. Tatiana in Kyiv Father Roman Nikolayev and a nun of Florovsky Convent in Kyiv, Sister Alevtina. The text was circulated by the patriarch's press service.

"It is especially alarming that these outrageous murders of a priest and a nun were committed at the very time when seizures of churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church continue, when false charges and threats are voiced in the public space concerning its clergy, monks and laity," says the patriarch's message of condolences to Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine Onufry.

The patriarch voiced hope that law enforcers would conduct "an impartial and thorough investigation of the offenses, the offenders will be found and held duly liable." The document says the Patriarch prays for the souls of the departed, for the strengthening of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and also for saving from evil those who have chosen to dedicate their lives to God.

#### Source:

<http://news.church.ua/2015/07/29/pislya-vazhkix-vognepalnix-poranen-vidijshov-u-vichnist-klirik-mista-kijeva-svyashhenik-roman-nikolajev/>

### **Ukrainian Orthodox Church confirms 3 clerics arrested in Donbass (UKRAINE)**

**August 12, 2015.** President of Mercy Without Borders fund, archpriest Zakharia Kerstyuk has confirmed information on detention in Donbass of clerics of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reporting to Moscow Patriarchate. He

posted the confirmation in Facebook.

"Ukrainian military used brute force and arrested the nun Varvara (secular name Tatiana Shirolapova), archimandrite Nikon (Alexander Dublyazhenko) and priest Ledonid Mironenko," father Zakharia said. "The only thing mother Varvara managed to tell us by telephone was that the Ukrainian military had arrested them." reports TASS.

Father Zakharia also said the clerics had come to the buffer zone on a humanitarian mission.

"Mother Varvara delivers humanitarian aid to parishes located along the frontline at the risk of her life and it was the distribution of aid that she was doing at the moment of arrest," he said. "She had more than once received threats and warnings she should stop bringing aid to the frontline," Zakharia said.

Darya Morozova, the ombudsperson for human rights of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic confirmed detention of the clerics earlier on Wednesday. She said the Ukrainian military had accused them of assistance to a terrorist organization. Morozova said however she had information only on the two priests. "As for the nun, I don't have the data on it." She admitted it would be rather difficult to attain the priests' release. "This isn't the first case since the beginning of the year the clerics of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reporting to Moscow Patriarchate find themselves in detention," Morozova said. "Hieromonk Feofan was detained earlier but we managed to release him from captivity under a one-for-sixteen formula."

"A second arrest of clerics during the year cannot be called in any other way than an outrage on faith," she said. "The pro-Kyiv forces don't care for religion at all. To say nothing of a crude encroachment on human rights."

Morozova said all the data on the arrested clerics had been sent to representatives at the talks on settling the conflict in eastern

Ukraine. “Now we’ll wait and see how this situation will develop.”

**Source:**

<http://tass.ru/en/world/814112>

## **Orthodox priest beaten (ALBANIA)**

**September 10, 2015.** Fr Christos Pappas, a 77 year-old Orthodox priest in South Albania in the parish of Saint Haralambos (Sarande district) was the victim of an assault and battery.

Two men impersonating police officers wearing balaclavas intercepted the priest as he was about to enter his residence. They didn’t steal anything from the house and they left the residence after neighbours heard a commotion. Fr. Pappas was transferred to the local hospital.

The incident is linked with the recent events in Himare, where Albanian state authorities demolished the Orthodox church of Saint Athanasios because the authorities claimed that it was illegally built. The victim priest is the father of the new president of political party Omonia, Leonidas Pappas who reacted strongly against the actions of the Albanian authorities to destroy the Church.

**Sources:**

<http://en.protothema.gr/orthodox-priest-in-southern-albania-assaulted-by-suspects-dressed-as-cops/>

<http://www.romfea.gr/epikairoτητα-xronika/2961-iereas-epese-thuma-agriou-julodarmou>

<http://www.balkanweb.com/site/prifti-kristo-papa-agresoret-u-prezantuan-si-punonjes-te-antidrogjes-policia-shoqeron-22-persona/>

## **The battery case against an Orthodox priest is closed again (UKRAINE)**

**October 6, 2015.** On 18th March 2015, the Archpriest Rostislav Sapozhnyka, prior to the Church of Holy Cross in Uhryniv (Ukraine),

was victim of battery as the Information and Analytics website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reports. The Archpriest was injured and for this reason he sued the attackers to the police. The police decided to close the case on 1st October 2015.

The document of the 1st October falsely presents that the mentioned priest wanted to leave the Canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and to enter the Kyiv Patriarchate’s jurisdiction. Moreover, there appeared a new document in the case which refers to new circumstances which are in contradiction to the first document written by the police just after the crime. The initial document presents that the attacker was holding a stick and was shaking it over his head in a threatening way, while the recent document describes that the attacker was only shaking his hand on the level of chest.

**Source:**

<http://pro.church.ua/2015/10/06/spravu-pro-pobittya-svyashhenika-v-ugrinovi-znovu-zakrili-novi-svidki-novi-versiji/#more-3336>

## **Murder of an Orthodox sacristan (UKRAINE)**

**October 7, 2015.** The sacristan of the church of the Three Hierarchs in Lugansk region (Ukraine) Leonid Zheleznyakov was murdered from a Ukrainian military, as the information service of UOC Moscow Partiarcate reports.

The autopsy proved that the body was shot in several parts: head, jaw, neck, hip and arm. There were found signs of struggle and theft. The murderer did not try to extinguish the traces of his crime, which happened outside at the yard of the church.

The rector of the parish, who is also nephew of the sacristan, Archpriest Alexander Strebakov said that the fact that the murderer shot the victim in many parts shows pride and arrogance. Another person who served in the army with the murderer underlined that



the only motive of his crime was the hate for Moscow Patriarchate as he was an adherent of Kyiv Patriarchate.

**Source:**

<http://news.church.ua/2015/10/27/luganska-oblast-skojeno-zuxvale-vbivstvo-oxoroncyia-xramu-sjeverodoneckoji-jeparxiji-upc/>

## **An Orthodox priest stabbed (UKRAINE)**

**October 27, 2015.** In Darnytskyi (Kyiv, Ukraine), Archpriest Dmitriy Plotnikov was the victim of a 40 year-old woman who attacked against him by knife, as the information service of the UOC (Moscow Patriarchate) reports.

In the morning, she went to the chapel. After standing for a while, she suddenly started throwing stones. A priest made remarks to her about her actions and as a reaction, she took a knife and stabbed him on his hand. Taking advantage of the panic audience, she disappeared from the chapel. The police of Darnytsa arrived to make investigations and an ambulance. The doctors provided the necessary medical care to the priest and today Father Dimitri is in satisfactory condition.

The police identified the 40 year-old woman and according to the Criminal Code of Ukraine, she faces up one year of corrective labour.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church expresses its deep concern about the increase of attacks against the priest who are under its jurisdiction.

**Source:**

<http://news.church.ua/2015/10/27/kijiv-zdijsneno-napad-na-svyashhenika-ukrajinskoji-pravoslavnoji-cerkvi/>

## **An Orthodox priest was killed (RUSSIA)**

**October 30, 2015.** The Hieromonk Roman Perov, rector of the Church of Protection of Mother of God in the village Puzevo of

Buturlinovskiy district of Voronezh region (Russia) was killed, as the website pravmir reports.

A young man who came in the church in order to discuss about its renovation killed the priest. The motivation of the crime was the robbery as the murder (25-year-old citizen of Uzbekistan) admitted. He stabbed the priest on the chest with a knife.

He was arrested by the police and he admitted his action. The dead priest was 52 years old.

**Source:**

<http://www.pravmir.ru/nastoyatel-selskogo-hrama-ubit-v-voronezhskoy-oblasti/>

## **Persecution of an Orthodox priest (UKRAINE)**

**December 15, 2015.** In the village Ptichnoye of Rivne region (Ukraine) the supporters of the Kyiv Patriarchate continue to exert pressure on the superior of the local Church of the Dormition of the priest Nicholas Sisonyukn as reports Union or the Orthodox Journalists.

In an interview the priest said that, the persecutors damaged many times his car by using nails and they threw in the yard of his house funeral wreaths. He added that the persecutors often attack by night: on the 11th of December security cameras recorded woman who dispensed feathers of hens all over his place; on the 14th of December, two young men left graffiti on the wall of his house and left when he saw them.

**Source:**

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-sele-ptichya-organizovali-zhestokuyu-travlyu-svyashchennika-upts>

## **Criminal case against a 19-year-old student for inciting hatred for religious reasons (RUSSIA)**

**December 22, 2015.** In Omsk (Russia), it started a criminal case against a 19-year-old

student of the Omsk Transport University, as the website of the Investigation Department of Omsk Region reports. The student is suspected of committing a crime according to the Penal Code (Art. 282, actions aimed at inciting hatred, humiliation of a person or group of persons on the grounds of religion, being member of a particular social group and use information and telecommunication networks, including the "Internet").

According to the investigators, in 2015 the suspected person posted on his account in the social network extremist statements aimed at the humiliation of a group of individuals who selected on religious grounds the option "Orthodox".

The investigations try to examine all the circumstances of the crime. The investigation is going on.

**Source:**

<http://omsk.sledcom.ru/news/item/999521/>

## **Humiliation of the priesthood from homosexual persons and a deputy of the Greek National Assembly (GREECE)**

**December 22, 2015.** A group of organised homosexual persons decided to have a reunion outside of the Cathedral of the diocese of

Athens, as the website newsit reports. They were dressed like priests and they were kissing each other in a provocative way outside of the church. As a result, some faithful reacted but they did not take a persuasive answer for this offensive action.

At the same moment during the session of the National Assembly for the voting of the new law about civil partnership for the same-sex persons the deputy of government (Syriza), Mr Koukoutsis said, "except for a very small minority, all the rest of the bishops of the Church are wearing pink skirts under their cloaks". This provoked the reaction of the President of the National Assembly who asked not to write this phrase in the Acts of the session.

**Sources:**

<http://www.newsit.gr/ellada/Symfono-Symviosis-Mikroentasi-ekso-apo-tin-Mitropoli/480908>

<http://www.newsit.gr/politikh/Symfono-Symviosis-Live-PSifizetai-simera-sti-Voyli/480897>

## **A. Reaction of the Local Orthodox Churches to the humiliation of their members, hate speeches and violence.**

### **Orthodox Metropolitan says that Serbs in Croatia are afraid to declare themselves Orthodox publicly (CROATIA)**

**February 25, 2015.** In Zagreb 30,000 Serbs live, but many of them are afraid to declare

themselves publicly because of the fear that their rights to have normal life would be endangered, Serbian Metropolitan Porfirije of Zagreb-Ljubljana said, as reports the official website of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Metropolitan also noted that the arrival

of Prime Minister of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic in Zagreb, on the feast-day of Meeting of the Lord (February 15, 2015), the state holiday of Serbia, was a great encouragement for the Serbs in Croatia.

Metropolitan Porfirije added as examples that only about two or three hundred Serbs attend church services on Sundays. "The reason is fear. It is particularly precarious in situations when there is a possibility that a camera of some media is present, and consequently even a less number of them go to church, because they fear to be seen. They fear that they could have problems", he said. He also added that these problems were different, but the people fear, in one word, that their rights to have normal life would be compromised...

He added that our people in Croatia rejoiced at the arrival of the Serbian Prime Minister in the capital city of Croatia, "because it is primarily an expression of Serbia's concern for the position and problems of the Serbian people in Croatia". "There are numerous open issues between Croatia and Serbia regarding the status of the Serbian people in Croatia, which cannot be resolved without a dialogue. The lack of communication is of no use for anyone, and the problems deepen. Hence, this visit of Prime Minister Vucic, it seems to me, represents a shift in relations between the two countries", Metropolitan Porfirije concluded.

#### **Source:**

[http://www.spc.rs/eng/metropolitan\\_porfirije\\_serbs\\_croatia\\_are\\_afraid](http://www.spc.rs/eng/metropolitan_porfirije_serbs_croatia_are_afraid)

### **Declaration of the Sumy diocese regarding the provocation that took place near the Orthodox Cathedral in Sumy (UKRAINE)**

**March 3, 2015.** The Sumy diocese (Ukrainian

Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate) issued the Declaration with regard to the provocation that took place near the Transfiguration Cathedral in Sumy on the 1st of March 2015, on Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy.

"As the events that took place on 1 March 2015 near the entrance to the Transfiguration Cathedral of Sumy, got high publicity, the Sumy diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church considers it necessary to make the following official statement.

On 1 March 2015, Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, a group of approximately 20 people, wearing masks and camouflage clothing with the emblems of "the right sector" organized a provocation near the entrance to the Transfiguration Cathedral of Sumy. During the liturgy which was attended by the clergy of the Cathedral Centre, an activist of the election union "Svoboda" ("Freedom") Volodymyr Oleksiyovych Ganzin, holding a poster with an offensive content, first started a verbal fight and then attacked a security guard of the Cathedral, causing him bodily injuries. The security guard requested medical assistance. The attackers organised a video and audio recording inside the Cathedral and in the street.

A group of young men wearing masks gathered near the Cathedral and blocked the entrance threatening to the bishop, clergy and to the faithful. As the bishop was supposed to exit the Cathedral after the end of the liturgy, the members of the parish informed that those aggressive persons could pose a real danger. But the bishop addressed to the faithful saying he would not change his route and would exit through the central entrance, while blessing those who came to pray, as it was common after the Sunday service. In the meantime the youngsters in masks were screaming various

offensive words and threatened with violence. The crowd had pushed the attackers aside – only this made it possible for the bishop to reach his residence. After that the attackers had left shouting out patriotic slogans.

Later on, some of the attackers returned to the Cathedral demanding an urgent meeting with the bishop. They initiated a word-fight with the dean of the Cathedral, archpriest Mykolay Smakouz and demanded to open the doors of the Diocese Administration Office. After they had been informed about the working hours of the Diocese Administration those persons left. They were invited to come on Tuesday, during the working hours, however nobody had come.

Analysing events that had happened, it can be stated that Volodymyr Oleksiyovych Ganzin brought a poster of the colors of the Ukrainian national flag with the text of an offensive content in order to initiate a conflict and to provoke someone of the Orthodox members of the parish to take that poster in hands. Those actions were supposed to become an occasion for accusations of disrespect towards the national flag. As the initial plan didn't work, Mr Ganzin started a word fight with a security guard and caused him bodily injuries. This fact is confirmed by a police protocol and by the results of the medical expertise of the victim.

The provocateurs that acted as hooligans near the central entrance to the Transfiguration Cathedral of Sumy on a very special day for the Orthodox Christians – Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy – acted cynically and aggressively, trying to hurt the religious feelings of the Orthodox faithful.

The provocateurs, in order to draw more attention to their actions, involved minors, which is unacceptable from the ethical point of

view and from the point of view of a common sense. This only confirms the cynicism of the initiators of this provocation.

The non-activity of the State authorities and their inability to stop the unlawful actions that were taking place in front of them in the very center of Sumy shows that the citizens of Sumy are absolutely unprotected from any possible criminal actions. One of the Sumy mayor's deputies, who accidentally witnessed the events, did not make any attempts to intervene and to prevent the rowdiness. Together with the police officers, who finally had arrived at the Cathedral, he only observed the events indifferently.

Disengagement and non-activity of the State representatives created the feeling of impunity of the offenders, who – through their provocative actions – are trying to establish the atmosphere of panic and show their superiority over the rest of the Sumy's inhabitants. Not by an accident one of the local newspapers named one of the main motives of the provocation "to show who the master of the house is".

Any accusations towards Sumy Diocese of bias and prejudice are groundless.

We call the citizens of Sumy to maintain public peace in the region. But also to be aware and sensible: in the event of a real threat to the Orthodox Christians to stand strong for the protection of churches and shrines. God of peace and brotherly-love may bless each Christian soul!"

#### **Source:**

<http://www.portal-pravoslavie.sumy.ua/zayava-sumsko-parx-ukransko-pravoslavno-czerkvi-z-privodu-provokacz-shho-stalasya-blya-spaso-preobrazhenskogo-kafedralnogo-soboru-m.-sumi-1-bereznja-2015-roku-v-nedlyu-torzhestva-pravoslavja.html>



## **Protest of the Holy Synod of Orthodox Church (GREECE)**

**April 7, 2015.** In Greece there were published photos with shoes which have the symbol of the Holy Cross on the under surface of them. The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece reacted to this fact with a Communiqué, according to its official website [ecclesia.gr](http://ecclesia.gr).

The Holy Synod “considers that such a using of the Holy Cross constitutes desecration, abuse, irreverence and insult against the Redemptive Symbol of our Orthodox faith. For this reason the Holy Synod expresses its discontentment, opposition and repugnance against this profane action, which took place during the Holy Week and demands the recall of this specific type of shoes”.

### **Sources:**

[http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/holysynod.asp?id=1994&what\\_sub=d\\_typou](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/holysynod.asp?id=1994&what_sub=d_typou)

<http://www.pravmir.ru/elladskaya-pravoslavnaya-tserkov-osudila-obuv-s-krestom-na-podoshve/>

## **Metropolitan Onufry of Kyiv and All Ukraine has appealed to the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko to protect believers from violence (UKRAINE)**

**September 22, 2015.** Metropolitan Onufry of Kyiv and All Ukraine (Moscow Patriarchate) has appealed to the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko in connection with the violent assault on Orthodox believers in the Katerinovka village of the Kremenets district of the Ternopil region, as reports [pravoslavie.ru](http://pravoslavie.ru).

The hierarch has expressed his serious concern over use of force against the faithful members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC

MP), as a result of which fifteen people were injured, and two of them taken to the hospital.

The archpastor has also stressed the inadmissibility of using coercive methods in the settlement of religious conflicts as well as participation of extremist forces in these conflicts.

Metropolitan Onufry has directed Poroshenko's attention to the regular violation of the religious legislation in the Ternopil region, which led to the religious animosity in the area.

His Beatitude has expressed his wish that the intercession of the Mother of God will save the Ukrainian people from wars and discord and restore the peace and prosperity in the Ukrainian land.

### **Source:**

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/82428.htm>

## **Moscow Patriarchate's statement about hostility of Greek-Catholics (UKRAINE)**

**October 23, 2015.** The Department for External Church Relations (DECR) of the Moscow Patriarchate made the statement as reaction to the Major Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Sviatoslav Shevchuk's interview with Austria's Kathpress agency, as DECR Communication Service reports.

The Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate expresses its strong protest against the claims made by the Major Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Sviatoslav Shevchuk, in an interview with Austria's Kathpress agency. Like many other speeches of the hierarch, this interview

is imbued with aggression against the Russian Orthodox Church and contains attacks on the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, as well as politicized opinions on the tragedy unfolding in Ukraine today and insults to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

In a time when the Orthodox and the Catholics at various levels exert special efforts in order to get the dialogue back on track, the statements by the head of the UGCC bring deplorable dissonance into the process of this joint search, aimed at deepening mutual understanding and overcoming disagreements and bewilderments, accumulated over the past centuries. The unia, in the person of its first hierarch in Ukraine, manifests itself again as a sad survival of the time, when the Catholics and the Orthodox regarded each other not as allies, but as rivals.

As far back as 1990, members of the Joint Commission for the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue made the following statement concerning the Uniatism, "We reject it as a method for the search for unity because it is opposed to the common tradition of our Churches." In 1993, the Commission underscored that the Uniatism "cannot be accepted either as a method to follow or as a model for the unity which is being sought by our Churches." It was noted that the attempts made in the past to restore the unity between the Eastern and the Western Churches by means of the unia had only aggravated the division ("Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion," Balamand, 1993, paragraphs 2,12,9).

Regrettably, the common condemnation of the unia by the Orthodox and the Catholics within the framework of the official theological dialogue has had no effect on the rhetoric of the Uniate leaders, which is as hostile to the

Orthodoxy at present as it was in the past.

It is not the first time that Archbishop Sviatoslav tries to set the two brotherly nations, the Ukrainians and the Russians, against each other. Probably, the ideas of narrow nationalism are dearer to him than the spirit of the Gospel which manifests itself in the words of St Paul who said that in Christ "there is neither Greek nor Jew" (Col 3:11).

Following the schismatics of different hues, the head of the UGCC makes outspoken attacks on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, claiming that "the pain and suffering of the Ukrainian people against the war" are not "the matter of the UOC". He continues, "Therefore, the common people ask the question: if the Church is completely abstracted from its people and acting from a position of outside judge or mediator, then who is it? How can a church that claims to be the only national Orthodox church of the people, separate of the matter of its life or death?"

These lies are directed against the Church, to which the majority of Orthodox Christians in Ukraine belong and which is the only canonical Orthodox Church in Ukraine, as was repeatedly stated, in the past and in recent times, by the primates of the Local Orthodox Churches.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church fully shares the pain and sufferings of her flock both in the East and the West of the country. For her, the flock, entrusted to her by God, is living human beings whom she leads to Christ, regardless of their political views and preferences. She is aware of her duty – to help the afflicted, those who have lost their homes and livelihood, those who have lost their relatives and friends or have been severely injured, no matter on what side of the political conflict they have found themselves. The primary concern of the



Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the current situation is to voice her call to peace and nationwide dialogue and to pray fervently for the suffering homeland, as His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kyiv and All Ukraine has repeatedly demonstrated by his words and deeds.

The head of the UGCC refuses to regard the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as patriotic simply because she remains faithful to His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. Moreover, the Uniate leader goes as far as to make direct attacks on the Patriarch. “Whatever Moscow Patriarch tried to pretend to be “Rus” and not just “Russian,” in contemporary reality it is evidently not possible,” he says. “The moral right to represent “pain and joy” to the people of Ukraine have been questioned even by the believers of the UOC, considering their Patriarch “Patriarch of the aggressor”.”

These words of the Uniate first hierarchy not only run counter to the inter-Church etiquette, established in the past decades, which does not permit such outrageous assaults in the media sphere; they are deeply insulting to millions of Orthodox Christians of various nationalities, united by the Russian Orthodox Church, who commemorate their Patriarch during every Divine Service.

It is the faithfulness to the Patriarch of the Ukrainian Orthodox flock, those “common people” and “the believers of the UOC,” on behalf of which Archbishop Sviatoslav for some reasons considers himself entitled to speak, that is the most convincing argument against the slander coming out of his mouth. This faithfulness is based not on a current state of things in the political sphere, but on the awareness that the spiritual kinship springing from the baptismal font of Prince Vladimir is stronger than any moods of time and unites Orthodox Christians of the Holy

Rus’ regardless of borders and ethnic, racial and other differences. Among those who came out of Vladimir’s font are not only the Slavic peoples, but many other nations as well, among which the Russian Orthodox Church performs her ministry.

The allegation made by the head of the UGCC that the Russian Orthodox Church “is imbued with “pain and joy” of the Russian people” only, is as deceitful and insulting as his attacks on the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. The Moscow Patriarchate is a multiethnic and supranational Church that unites Orthodox Christians living in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the five states of Central Asia, the three Baltic countries, Japan, and China, say nothing of her multimillion and multilingual diaspora on all continents.

Cutting historical ecclesiastical ties between Moscow and ancient Kyiv, “whence the land of the Rus’ came into being,” became the major slogan of the church schism formed in Ukraine in the early 1990s. The arguments used by the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church are in tune with those of the schismatics. While speaking of the necessity to reformat the existing canonical order in the Orthodox world, the leaders of the unia and the schism place the “establishment” of a national Orthodox Church in Ukraine (as if there is no such Church in Ukraine) in direct connection with the separation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Moscow Patriarchate.

At the same time, Archbishop Sviatoslav claims that “the analogy between the unity of the UGCC with the Universal Hierarchy and unity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with Patriarch of Moscow is, put it mildly, the failure.” Indeed, it is difficult to draw a direct analogy, since the dependence of the UGCC on the Roman See is more immediate than the dependence of the UOC on the Moscow

Patriarchate, which is merely of the spiritual nature.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is a self-governing Church, independent of the Moscow Patriarchate in administrative and financial matters. The Holy Synod of this Church elects bishops without seeking Moscow's approval. The only way the spiritual ties of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with the Moscow Patriarchate manifest themselves is that the Patriarch is commemorated at the UOC parishes and approves, according to the UOC Statute, the election of a new Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine.

The Roman Pontiff has the similar right in respect to a newly elected head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. However, the Pope wields much more considerable power over the UGCC than the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia wields over the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. According to the Dogmatic Constitution "Pastor Aeternus" of the First Vatican Council, whose decisions are obligatory for all Catholics, "the Roman Church possesses a pre-eminence of ordinary power over every other Church, and that this jurisdictional power of the Roman Pontiff is both episcopal and immediate. Both clergy and faithful, of whatever rite and dignity, both singly and collectively, are bound to submit to this power by the duty of hierarchical subordination and true obedience, and this not only in matters concerning faith and morals, but also in those which regard the discipline and government of the Church throughout the world."

Following the logic of Archbishop Sviatoslav's statements, in order to become truly national and patriotic, the UGCC would have had, first of all, to secede from the Pope, whose position on the situation in Ukraine the head of the UGCC publicly criticized as,

allegedly, not corresponding to the facts. We clearly see double standard in the words of Archbishop Sviatoslav. From his point of view, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, linked with the Moscow Patriarchate only by spiritual and prayerful bonds, should secede from it in order to get the right to call herself a national and patriotic Church, while there is no need for the UGCC, which is in direct administrative dependence on the Pope, to secede from him.

The supreme authority of the Moscow Patriarchate has always believed it important that a full-fledged dialogue between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the UGCC should continue, since the dialogue is necessary, first of all, for restoring peace in the longsuffering Ukrainian land. However, the success in this matter can only be achieved provided that the rhetoric, aimed at stirring up interethnic and interconfessional hatred, is not used any more. The Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate expresses its sincere hope that the Primate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church will not resort to such rhetoric in the future.

We are praying to the All-Merciful Lord that He may grant the long-awaited peace and accord to the longsuffering Ukrainian land in the nearest future.

**Source:**

<https://mospat.ru/en/2015/10/23/news123987/>

### **The Serbian Orthodox Church protests for blasphemous action in the Serbian Parliament (SERBIA)**

**December 2, 2015.** The Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church protested strongly to the Serbian National Assembly, as the website b92 reports.

In the Serbian Parliament, it was used toilette paper, which had the Cross printed on it. The Church considered this to be deeply offensive not only to all Orthodox– Christians but to Catholic and Protestant alike just like “to all people of faith, and of a sound mind”. The Holy Synod asked from the authorities to “find and publicly announce the name of the person who committed this act of blasphemy”, as the official website of the Serbian Orthodox Church reports.

An anonymous MP made a photograph showing the controversial toilet paper, as the website novosti.rs reports.

#### Sources:

[http://www.b92.net/eng/news/society.php?yyyy=2015&mm=12&dd=02&nav\\_id=96239](http://www.b92.net/eng/news/society.php?yyyy=2015&mm=12&dd=02&nav_id=96239)

<http://www.spc.rs/eng/node/37562>

### **The letter of the metropolitan of Rivne and Ostrozhsk Bartholomew to the Ukrainian President to stop the violence against Orthodox believers (UKRAINE)**

**December 20, 2015** the metropolitan of Rivne and Ostrozhsk Bartholomew (Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate) sent the letter to the President of Ukraine Piotr Porashenko to stop the violence against Orthodox believers in the village of Ptycha (Dubno district, Rivne region). Here you can find the full text in English.

“Dear Mr. President! In Rivne region, on St. Nicholas, terrible events occurred. In the village of Ptycha, Dubno district, real pogroms and violence began on the ground of religious enmity and discord. Local authorities, the police, radicals of the Right Sector, incited by the Kyiv Patriarchate representatives, raised persecution and physical violence against

citizens of Ukraine!

On December 18, on the eve of the holiday, the UOC believers were not allowed into the church, which representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate and the Right Sector activists had been illegally holding for some time. The parishioners of the UOC have on hand all the necessary documents and court judgments, proving the ownership of the religious building. However, the local authorities and representatives of the UOC-KP completely ignore the rights of believers of the UOC!

While attempting to get into the church, the UOC parishioners were beaten and used tear gas against. However, they managed to enter their sanctuary. Having served morning and evening liturgy, part of the community locked themselves in the church in protest against the arbitrariness of the local authorities and the UOC-KP.

Now the police and the aggressive-minded representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate keep these people under siege as some criminals. They are not allowed to pass warm clothes, water and food. The church building is cut off from electricity. The temperature indoors is +4. The parishioners' physical state has aggravated. An ambulance doctor was allowed in, but he did a hasty check-up and left insufficient amount of medication.

Tell me, who is a real offender in this situation? How can one do such things during one of the most important and merciful holidays for the Ukrainians?

At night the UOC faithful had the windows of their houses smashed. “Molotov cocktails” were thrown onto the doorsteps. Some families have minors. One child was injured. Those who arrive in Ptycha to support the UOC parishioners are subjected to

harassment as well: their car tyres are made flat, car windows are fired at with air guns. The UOC community of Ptycha village feels scared and shocked.

Today the Right Sector fighters and the most aggressive supporters of UOC-KP are getting ready for a night assault and the seizure of the religious building. The experience of previous conflicts suggests that they act violently, outside the law and Christian morality.

Mr. President, in your eyes, ordinary Ukrainians, as patriotically-minded as you, are deprived of basic human rights. They are treated as second-class beings. Their children are being harassed, their property – damaged. Such an ugly phenomenon as pogroms, which seems to have been defeated forever more than 70 years ago, is coming back to Ukraine.

Our state is pushed into the flame of religious hatred. There are no winners in such conflicts, only losers. Public wounds caused by such conflicts cannot be healed for many generations to come.

Mr. President! I ask you to intervene immediately and protect your fellow citizens! For the sake of Ukraine, for the sake of our common future, for the sake of life and health of ordinary believers. May the Almighty be kind to us all! May He empower us to understand and forgive each other! May He save the Ukrainians, who face off against one another! Some – from evil and violence. Others – from their own blind hatred and the sin of theomachy!”

**Source:**

<http://rivne.church.ua/2015/12/20/zvernennya-do-prezidenta-ukrajini/>

## **Human rights defender from Ukraine calls to stop injustice and violence against Orthodox believers (UKRAINE)**

**December 21, 2015** Oleg Denisov, Human rights activist, legal Adviser of the Kyiv Metropolis of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), made the open statement addressed to the Council of Europe, Council of Europe High Commissioner for Human Rights, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Special Rapporteur of the Human Right Commission on Freedom of Religion and Belief, International human rights organizations and to Mass media, as reports [orthodoxrights.org](http://orthodoxrights.org). Here you can find the full text in English.

“On behalf of the human rights community and the parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church we ask all international organizations, state authorities of Ukraine, representatives of the media and the public to pay attention to the difficult situation in Ptycha village, Rivne region.

In this village, the community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has the right of ownership on the church building. Since the end of 2014 the Kyiv Patriarchate followers, interested in taking the religious building away from the community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, have attempted not once to seize the church. Already three times the conflict has been heard and decided in courts of Ukraine, and in all the cases, it was confirmed that only the owner of the church is a religious organization – the community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. However, despite this the attempts to seize the building have continued up to now.

An unprecedented fact was the pressure



of the head of the Dubno District State Administration Yuri Parfenyuk and the deputy of the Regional State Administration Alexander Savchuk on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church congregation in order to obtain from them the decision to transfer the church to the Kyiv Patriarchate denomination for alternate use. Despite the refusal of the parishioners to allow in the building belonging to them by the ownership right the third party, by the decision of the Ptycha village council was established alternate use of the church premises by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church community and the Kyiv Patriarchate denomination. This resolution is obviously illegal and discriminatory, shows disrespect for the rights of the religious organization – the owner and a complete negation of the fundamentals of public law and order on the part of particular civil servants, permitting this decision. Currently, it is appealed by the community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the administrative court.

As of today, 12/20/2015, the parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the community that owns the church, were forced to lock themselves in the religious building because of the threat of its seizure. Our parishioners were delivered an ultimatum to vacate the church building; otherwise the “Right Sector” representatives will begin its assault tonight or late at night. According to information available, “Molotov cocktails” were thrown at the church building and windows of the parishioners’ households were smashed. The people trapped in the church do not get food, water and suffer from cold in the unheated premises. At the same time the public authorities do not guarantee the security of parishioners and are not ready to protect the parish property.

Given that more than 40 towns in Western

Ukraine are involved in the state of inter-faith confrontation, changes in methods of making conflict by the parties, namely the transition to an open use of force and special weapons such as “Molotov cocktails”, as well as cold arms and firearms, may lead to a radical change in the situation, not only in a particular region but throughout the country and affect the security of the European Union.

This situation requires an immediate response from the law enforcement bodies and the international community. In the present case, on behalf of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and international human rights organizations official statements are sent to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, other officials and organizations responsible for protection and respect for human rights in the world.

“We hope that the quick response of the international community and close attention of the central authorities of Ukraine will avoid tragic consequences”.

#### **Source:**

<http://orthodoxrights.org/human-rights-defender-from-ukraine-to-call-to-stop-injustice-and-violence-against-orthodox-believers.html>

### **Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia disapproves strongly the attacks on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)**

**December 23, 2015.** Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Kirill disapproved the attacks and illegal occupations of churches in Ukraine by ultranationalists and urged for the unifying role of the religious hierarchy towards national unity, as the website prenglish reports.

His Holiness expressed his concern about the incidents in the orthodox church, under the canonical jurisdiction of Moscow Patriarchate, in the Ukrainian village of Ptichiya, where armed extremists from the Right Sector party threw self-made bombs, and a group of Kyiv Patriarchate attacked worshipers with sticks and stones.

Patriarch Kirill said that, with visible social fragmentation and struggle for power, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is the only force that can unite the people, from north to south and from east to west.

The Head of the Russian Orthodox Church warned that this policy of attacks against the Church and the believers, encourages divisions among the Ukrainian people and he regretted that the internal forces are not working to achieve unity and reconciliation.

**Source:**

[http://www.plenglish.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=4461301&Itemid=1](http://www.plenglish.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4461301&Itemid=1)



## Chapter 3 : Violations of the freedom of expression of Orthodox believers.

Orthodox believers as other religious communities cannot enjoy religious freedom unless they have the right to express their beliefs freely without facing violation of the freedom of expression as it is defined from the Articles 9 (*freedom of religion*), 10 (*freedom of expression*) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

### **An NGO's attack against freedom of expression and presence of Orthodox Christianity in public sphere (SERBIA)**

**January 26, 2015.** The Movement for Enlightened Society NGO has declared that the marking of St.Sava's Day as the patron saint day of schools "violates the principle of secularity" in Serbia, reports news agency b92. St.Sava, who was born in 1175, is the patron saint of schools and students and his death on January 27 is officially marked as St. Sava's Day in schools in Serbia.

The NGO also protested over Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) priests taking an active part in school celebrations, "with prayers and inappropriate sermons, and performance of religious rituals," in this way "additionally stressing the religious importance of the holiday." According to the NGO's statement "by celebrating patron saint day of schools as a religious holiday, the Constitution of Serbia is being directly violated in Article 11 that mandates the separation of churches and religious communities and the state".

As known, being the first head of the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church,

and the author of Serbia's first Constitution, as well as a diplomat and writer who had great influence on the medieval Serbian literature, Saint Savva played a great role in the history of Serbia. His religious identity cannot be separated from his personality and his activity.

The NGO reminded headmasters of state schools and "responsible persons in the government" that there are members of other religions, "as well as atheists," among schoolchildren and their parents and teachers. According to the statement, they are denied the right to celebrate St. Sava's Day as "a true school holiday open to everyone, regardless of their religious and ethnic orientation."

Earlier this month the Movement for Enlightened Society criticized President Tomislav Nikolic for sending his Christmas message and taking part in Christmas rituals held at the presidency building as "impermissible abuse of the holiday and violation of the Constitution".

In a multicultural society where citizens have a great appreciation of their religious identity the way to manifest respect to different religious or cultural communities for the state is a very important element of democratic governance. The ignorance of religious heritage of a country or artificial secularizing of religious feasts are regarded as unrespect and discrimination of religious communities. So the State authorities must make the respectful gestures for great feasts of different religions. The scale and their forms should be proportional to the presence and recognition in society of a community.

**Source:**

[http://www.b92.net/eng/news/society.php?yyyy=2015&mm=01&dd=26&nav\\_id=92981](http://www.b92.net/eng/news/society.php?yyyy=2015&mm=01&dd=26&nav_id=92981)

**Verbal attack on a football coach because of his faith in Mother of God (GREECE)**

**February 3, 2015.** An ex-politician in Greece Thanos Tzimeros attacked verbally the coach of the football team of Paok in Greece for his faith in Mother of God as reports Tilegrafima. This attack followed after the words of the coach Mr. Anastasiadis that Mother of God is present in his daily life. The ex-politician Mr. Tzimeros commented in public that “in any serious State they would send this coach to a psychiatrist, if he thinks that God or a saint has the ability to affect his life”. He also mocked the religious blessing during the inauguration of a shop. He said that “maybe the water that we drink or the air that we inhale has something inside otherwise there is no explanation for believing that we have a blessing for the work of a shop”.

**Source:**

<http://tilegrafima.gr/nea/item/1265-o-tzimeros-epitithetai-ston-proponiti-tou-paok-gia-tin-pisti-tou-stin-panagia>

**Russian Orthodox search engine cyber attacked (RUSSIA)**

**March 4, 2015.** Russian filmmaker Yuri Grymov has presented his Rublev.com project, a data base on Orthodoxy and a social network for believers and all those taking an interest in Christianity. But the site was hacked just five hours after it appeared online reports Russian inform agency TASS and RT.

The website remained non-operational all-day long on the 4th of March, with the main page claiming a DDoS-attack. The website returned online on the 5th of March and is running in testing mode. Identity of the attackers remains unknown.

“Yesterday we launched the site in the test run mode. But after just five hours of work it was attacked. I am so surprised and upset that constructive ideas are like burrs in the saddle to some,” Grymov told TASS.

Grymov had been working on the project for two years as he had wanted to make it easier for people in Russia and from around the world to learn more about the faith. The site is said to focus on Orthodox Christian news and interviews with clerics expected to run blogs. The slogan says: “Seek and ye shall find.”

“This will be a convenient guide for worshipers as they will be able to search for everything they need including church calendars, icons and prayers. They will also be able to pose questions to the Russian Orthodox Church,” Grymov, who is also a member of the Culture Panel in the upper chamber of the Russian Parliament, said.

The site rublev.com is not run by the Russian Orthodox Church, though Grymov did consult with representatives from the church to get their ideas surrounding the project.

“Our information desk treats the idea of such a site with benevolence and will read it with interest,” the Synod Information Department of the Church.

**Sources:**

<http://tass.ru/obschestvo/1807630>

<http://rt.com/news/237725-orthodox-internet-site-russia/>

**Local authorities in Sumy banned Orthodox believers to hold a traditional religious procession (UKRAINE)**

**March 20, 2015.** The extraordinary meeting of the executive committee of the city of

Sumy (Ukraine) prohibited the traditional cross procession of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) as reports Topgorod.

The community of St.Sergius made a request for a permission to organize religious activities on the feast of the venerated icon Mother of God Feodorovskaya – on the 27 of March. On this day, from 8:00 to 17:00, the community planned a religious procession in which the faithful would go around the perimeter of Sumy to protect the city. This event passed in the last years with the participation of the clergy and did not lead to any disorders in the city.

A member of the executive committee Maxim Galitsky (representative of the movement “Freedom”) appealed to his colleagues to ban the religious procession taking into consideration the tense socio-political situation in the country. According to him there can be a provocation in Sumy during the procession. Some activists supported him, thinking the procession to be a political event – “pro-Russian action.” The movement “Freedom” reminded that the icon is related to the Russian empire and it is regarded as one of the shrines of the Romanov’s House. There were disputes among the members of the executive committee. As a result, none of its members voted “in favor” of this decision, and the procession was banned.

**Source:**

<http://topgorod.com/news/sumy/obschestvo/17754-ispolkom-zapretit-upts-mp-provodit-masshtabnyj-krestnyj-khod-v-sumakh.html>

## **Interdiction to Orthodox patients of a hospital to venerate the relics of Saint Barbara (GREECE)**

**May 12, 2015.** The relics of Saint Barbara from

the church of Saint Mark in Venice (Italy) arrived in Athens (Greece). It is the first time after 1000 years, due to the 70th anniversary of the Church Foundation “Apostoliki Diakonia”, that the relics of this Saint are in an Orthodox country with the permission of the Roman-Catholic Church. There is the major part of the body of Saint Barbara. The relics will stay in Greece for 14 days and the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece decided that it would be a blessing for the patients of the hospital “Saint Savvas” (a special hospital for patients with cancer) to venerate the relics as romfea reports. This is the only hospital in Greece treating cancer that has both adults and children as patients. The administration of the hospital gave its agreement for this action.

On the 11 of May, in the morning broadcasting on the Greek television, the Parliamentary spokesman of the government party Syriza Mr.Nikolaos Filis said that “this is a practice of the Middle Age and a commercial one”. He also said that if this happened it would be a wrong message for the society and to the patients who will think that medical science is not necessary. He underlined that people should not submit themselves to the logic that the relics can heal the patients. The relics can go to the Church but not to the hospital.

The reaction of the Director of the Press Department of Archbishop Mr.Haris Konidaris was very strong. He said that Mr.Filis is the one who is making a commercial of a left anticlericalism and not the Church and he is trying to limit the freedom of religion which is protected from the Constitution of the country. Mr.Konidaris mentioned that it would be better for Mr.Filis to go himself at the hospital and ask the patients if they want to venerate the holy relics of Saint Barbara. He added that it would be good for him to be taught by the Prime Minister of the country

who respects the religious feeling of the Greek people.

Metropolitan of Sidirokastró Makarios reacted also by saying that if Mr. Filis dared to say the same for the Muslims now he would be killed. He also said that the real problem for Mr. Filis is not the transfer of the relics but the fact that crowds are visiting the church to venerate the relics from the moment of the arrival. He mentioned that saints go where people need them and the hospital is the suitable place because people suffer there.

The other parliamentarians from different political parties (conservatives and socialists) who were also invited in this morning broadcasting said that it is very important to respect the religious feeling of Greeks.

The left political party “To Potami” (The River) published a sarcastic statement by calling as “a great development of the medical system” the transfer of the relics of Saint Barbara.

The Vice-president of the Greek government Mr. Panos Kammenos answered to Mr. Filis that it is better to venerate the relics of Saint Barbara than doing other things.

#### Sources :

<http://www.romfea.gr/epikairoτητα-xronika/590-sidirokastrou-o-n-filis-an-elege-auta-gia-mousoulmanous-tha-ton-eixan-katharisei>

<http://topotami.gr/nea/voithia-mas/>

<http://www.romfea.gr/diafora/593-panos-kammenos-enantion-n-fili-gia-ta-leipsana-tis-agias-barbaras>

### **Instagram deletes account for revealing destroyed Orthodox churches in Kosovo (KOSOVO TERRITORY)**

**November 7, 2015.** Hoping to foil Kosovo's attempt to become a member of UNESCO,

ethnically Serbian student activists in the self-proclaimed state created a page on Instagram called “No to Kosovo's Membership in UNESCO.” There they posted photos of numerous Orthodox Christian places of worship and significance, including monasteries, churches and cemeteries, which were demolished in the years after ethnic Albanian Muslims gained de facto independence with the help of a deadly NATO bombing campaign and EU endorsement. Instagram responded by blocking the account for its “disturbing content”, as the website sputniknews reports.

Nemanja Bisevac, one of the account's administrators, said that: “We have been told that we are posting disturbing images, and we simply posted the truth – the burning of Serb churches and monasteries, the holy places, the destruction of monuments, tombs, and so on”.

Students for Truth have produced videos in Serbian, English and Arabic, showing the almost total annihilation of Kosovo's Serbian religious and cultural heritage.

#### Source:

<http://orthodoxrights.org/instagram-deletes-account-for-revealing-destroyed-orthodox-churches-in-kosovo.html>

### **ISIS promoters broke up website of an Orthodox church in Moscow (RUSSIA)**

**December 2, 2015.** Unidentified malefactors broke up the website of St. Thomas Church in the Kantemirovskaya Street in Moscow (Russia), where renowned priest and missionary Daniil Sysoyev worked and was killed, as the website Interfax-religion reports.

The criminals posted a banner to promote ‘jihad’, the Islamic State terrorist organization



and against Russia at the main page of the church. At the present time, the Internet resource functions as usual.

Father Daniil Sysoyev, Founder of the Orthodox Missionary School was known for his active sermon among Muslims. He was shot on 19th November 2009, in St. Thomas Church where he was the rector. Soon the suspected in the murder Kyrgyz citizen was killed in Makhachkala during his detention. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia said that pseudo-Islamic radicals stood behind the priest's murder.

**Source:**

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12577>

## Chapter 4 : Discrimination of Orthodox Christians.

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms has to be secured without discrimination as it is defined by the Article 14 (*prohibition of discrimination*) of the European Convention of Human Rights. Orthodox Christians become also victims of discrimination and sometimes they don't enjoy an equal treatment from the authorities.

### **The Decision of the Kyiv City Council providing tax exemption to all the churches except the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) entered into force (UKRAINE)**

**January 31, 2015.** According to the information on the official website of the Kyiv City Council and internet portal LIGA: Zakon its resonance Decision dated 28 January 2015 No. 58/923 entered into force on 31 January 2015, as reported by the Institute of the Religious Freedom. In spite of Vitaliy Klychko's (mayor of Kyiv) previous statements, the Decision of the Kyiv City Council on the real estate tax rate, depriving the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) of tax benefits, entered in force. According to the Decision, the tax rate for the real estate is set in the percentage of the minimum wage for 1 sq. meter of the property.

Tax rate for the real estate property which belong to the buildings used for worship or religious activity is set at 0,01%, i.e. UAH 0,1218, for 1 sq. meter per year. This privileged tax rate is not applied to "the buildings, structures and premises which belong to the parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church". For them the tax rate is

set at 1%, i.e. UAH 12, 18, for 1 sq. meter per year. "There can be no privileges on the basis of religious confession. The Decision of the Kyiv City Council to deprive one of the churches from the benefits for the real estate tax contradicts the Constitution and will be revised", – the mayor of Kyiv Vitaliy Klychko said as the Kyiv City Council voted to adopt this Decision.

The executive director of the Institute of the Religious Freedom Maxym Vasin explained the new rule: "As "parish" we usually consider a religious community, because the law does not use this term. Therefore it is more likely that the real estate property that belongs to the Kyiv Metropolia or other legal entities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), with the exception of the communities, will also benefit from the tax exemption set by the Kyiv City Council".

Earlier the expert noted that the city mayor had no power to quash the Decisions of the City Council which is a representative body. However, according to the Reglement of the Kyiv City Council, the mayor can only suspend an adopted decision within the 5 days after adoption and can propose it for the repeated hearing by the City Council.

Thus, most likely, the mayor Klychko did not use his right to suspend the abovementioned Decision of the Kyiv City Council, but instead will seek the modification of the Decision by the Kyiv City Council.

#### **Sources:**

[kmr.ligazakon.ua/SITE2/1\\_docki2.nsf/alldocWWW/10E8146E941D859FC2257DE7006DFD6B?OpenDocument](http://kmr.ligazakon.ua/SITE2/1_docki2.nsf/alldocWWW/10E8146E941D859FC2257DE7006DFD6B?OpenDocument)

[http://www.irs.in.ua/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1527%3A1&catid=34%3Aua&Itemid=61&lang=uk](http://www.irs.in.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1527%3A1&catid=34%3Aua&Itemid=61&lang=uk)

## **The Albanian nationality was accorded to a football coach but not to the Orthodox Archbishop of Albania (ALBANIA)**

**March 28, 2015.** The president of Albania Mr. Bougiar Nisani accorded the Albanian nationality to a football coach in order to honor him for his work and his service to the Albanian football team De Biazi. Contrary, several last years, Archbishop's Anastasios (Giannoulatos) petitions for the Albanian nationality have been rejected by different Albanian government's bodies, as reports himara.gr.

The Albanian authorities still continue to deny the Albanian nationality to the Orthodox Archbishop. On the background of the accordance of the Albanian nationality to the coach the refusal of it to the Orthodox Archbishop, who has been exercising his functions for 22 years since 1992, could be considered as discrimination and humiliation.

### **Source:**

<http://himara.gr/4316-albaniki-ipikootita-ston-propo-nitis-ethnikis-omadas-podoasfairoy-kai-oxi-ston-arxiepiskopo-anastasio>

## **Protest action of Orthodox Christians in Georgia against the promotion of homosexual propaganda (GEORGIA)**

**May 17, 2015.** As was announced at a press conference at the Georgian Patriarchate's office, it was decided to hold a prayer rally on May 16-17 in connection with arrival of the wonder-working Atskursk Icon of the Mother of God to the Georgia's capital, reports Pravoslavie.ru.

A procession of the cross started with a solemn service at Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in the historical town of Mtskheta, then a festal

procession with icons and church banners from Mtskheta to Tbilisi followed. After that a solemn service was performed at the Holy Trinity (Sameba) Cathedral of Tbilisi, reports Blagovest-info.

Simultaneously, a number of parliamentary deputies from the opposition, especially activist of the United National Movement (led by ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili) Chiora Taktakishvili said on TV channels that they were disappointed with the decision of the Georgian Orthodox Church to hold a large-scale prayer rally right on the international day of struggle against homophobia, which virtually drove back those who wished to participate in that day's festivities from the central city streets.

The United States Ambassador to Georgia Richard Norland, speaking on TV channels and news portals at the same time, called upon the residents to celebrate "the day against homophobia". He expressed his opinion that every person has a right to realize his or her full potential. "Tomorrow the international day of struggle against homophobia and transphobia will be celebrated for the eleventh time. On this day we once again express our support to equality and dignity of all people and confirm that human rights are universal. We join everybody who is laboring in Georgia so as to mark this day peacefully," the American diplomat's statement reads.

Nineteen Non-Governmental Organizations and human rights groups called upon the Georgian authorities to ensure safety of the activists who on May 17 were going to celebrate "the day against homophobia".

The information on the venue and other details of the event (that was to be held on May 17) were restricted and the journalists were asked "to obtain accreditation".

Through joint efforts of the aforementioned NGOs an action of solidarity with representatives of the LGBT community was held at "the Round Garden" park, situated in Vake – the most prestigious district of Tbilisi.

Police squads were guarding the rally participants. There were no reports of any incidents involving the defenders of traditional Christian values and the LGBT community representatives.

Also the action, “No gay Europe”, was organized in Tbilisi – with such a slogan people came to the office of Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, reports Geomigrant with the reference to Mir24.

The principal demand of the protesters is to cancel the fines of between 2,000 and 4,000 euros: the European Court of Human Rights imposed these fines on the Georgian government for moral injury to those who suffered during the rally against homophobia. The protest took place in Tbilisi in 2012.

“We have gathered here to fix our attitude towards homosexuality. There should be no place for this phenomenon in our country, and 99% of Georgian citizens agree with this. We are wondering where the European Union was when under Saakashvili demonstrations were broken up, people were murdered, prisoners were raped, and business was suppressed? Why didn't they express their indignation and impose fines on the government then?” said chairman of the Society of Irakli II (an NGO) Archil Chkoidze.

According to activists of these NGOs, their actions will be held regularly and on a larger scale— in order to get rid of the propaganda of homosexuality in the country.

**Source:**

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/79462.htm>

## **The Atheist Union of Greece proposes to eliminate all links of the Greek education with the Orthodox Church (GREECE)**

**August 6, 2015.** On the day when the Church of Greece celebrates the Transfiguration of the Lord the Greek vice-minister of education and

religion Mr.Tasos Kourakis had a meeting with the Atheist union of Greece as the website of the Atheist union reports.

The President of the Atheist union Mr Fotis Fragkopoulos deposed the demands of his Union to the Minister. Mr.Fragkopoulos asked the urgent exemption of the course of religion for every student, the abolition of the mention of the religious conviction of the students on the certificate of secondary education. He also asked the abrogation of the morning prayer at school and the participation of Greek students at Liturgies. He asked the ending of the blessing ceremony at the beginning of the school year, the expulsion of the icons from the rooms of teaching. He also asks the repeal of the exaggerations like miracles from the books of Religion and the re-writing of those books by atheists who can be more objective. He also demands the disestablishment of the celebration of the three Hierarchs as Patrons of the Greek letters and to replace this celebration with a general celebration of the Greek education.

The vice-minister of education promised to cooperate with the Atheist union of Athens in order to make important changes in Greek education according to the statement of the Atheist union of Greece. Until now, there is no statement from the Greek ministry of education to explain the actions of the vice-minister.

**Source:**

<http://union.atheia.gr/συνάντηση-με-αν-υπουργό-παιδείας-06-08-2015/>



## **A. Reaction of the Local Orthodox Churches to the discrimination of their members.**

### **The Kyiv Council's discriminatory decision on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)**

**February 9, 2015.** Representative of the Russian Church in Strasbourg Hegumen Philip (Ryabykh) urges to not allow new persecutions of Orthodox Christians similar to those of the Soviet times, reports Interfax agency. As was reported, late in January the Kyiv Council excluded the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the list of religious organizations that have privileges when paying real estate tax.

Kyiv mayor Vitaly Klichko called the deputies' decision unconstitutional and demanded to cancel it." It causes anxiety that 78 MPs in Kyiv voted for this decision. It shows that authorities are ready to declare a religious organization their political enemy and conduct a course on its discrimination and oppression of its rights," the priest said in his interview with the Ogonyok magazine. The church official pointed out to numerous facts of destroying and setting on fire Orthodox churches, capturing of churches by the groups of self-proclaimed Kyiv Patriarchate, threats to UOC priests and believers. According to him, resolutions similar to the mentioned decision of the Kyiv Council are "only giving fuel to fire of internal civil confrontation in Ukraine". The Representation in Strasbourg also informs the Council of Europe about the facts. I suppose it should be done more intensively, otherwise we should face open persecutions against canonical Church in Ukraine similar to Soviet atheistic persecutions," the priest believes.

#### **Source:**

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=11819>

### **Protest from Orthodox clergymen and monks against the support by the mayor of Thessaloniki to LGBT movement (GREECE)**

**May 13, 2015.** The Convention of Orthodox clergymen and monks (important professors of the faculty of Theology of Athens and of Salonika and significant priests and monks) wrote a letter to Mount Athos asking from the monks to demand from the mayor of Salonika Mr. I. Boutaris not to organise this year the "gay pride" as reports the website [impantokratoros.gr](http://impantokratoros.gr). If they cannot persuade him the authors of the letter propose to the representatives of Mount Athos to condemn the passion of homosexuality or to send to the mayor a document, which will not allow him to enter anymore in Mount Athos. If it is not possible, the monks must find a way to dismiss him from the presidency of the "Mount Athos Centre". The signers of the letter also express their annoyance as they saw that the monks attributed a great honour to the mayor during his recent visit in Mount Athos, while at the same time they know well his activities and his support to the movement of homosexuality. The mayor of Thessaloniki (Greece) Mr. I. Boutaris is the president of the institution "Mount Athos Centre" (Agioritiki Estia).

It is an urban-non-profit organization, founded in 2000 by the Municipality of Thessaloniki in collaboration with the Holy community of Mount Athos and it essentially forms the institutional continuation and the natural "evolution" of the monumental exhibition "Treasures of Mount Athos", held in 1997, within the framework and under the auspices of "Thessaloniki: Cultural Capital of Europe".

It is run by a governing body of seven Legislative council members presided by the mayor of Thessaloniki (ex officio). Also the council has an honorary president–Overseer of Mount Athos in office. As for the other six members of the council, three are appointed by the Council of the municipality of Thessaloniki and three are representatives from the Holy community of Mount Athos. The position of vice-president is held by one of the council members from the Holy Mountain. In the event of the absence of the president, he is represented by one of the appointed members from the city council of Thessaloniki.

Mr. Boutaris organises “gay pride” rallies in Salonika since 2012. His action is coming in contradiction with the administrative duties that he has as President of the “Mount Athos Centre”.

**Source:**

<http://www.impantokratoros.gr/5246A52A.el.aspx>

## **Church insists on adopting the law excluding abortions from the system of compulsory medical insurance (RUSSIA)**

**May 19, 2015.** The deputies of the State Duma introduced the draft law to eliminate state support of abortions as reports the website Interfax.

Members of all State Duma factions have supported a bill allowing only state-run healthcare institutions to perform abortions and cancelling mandatory health insurance coverage for abortions. The press service of head of the State Duma committee for family, women and children Yelena Mizulina, a co-author of this bill, said that, according to the proposed document, performing abortions outside of state-run healthcare institutions should carry a fine of 50,000 rubles to

200,000 rubles for citizens, a fine of 500,000 rubles to 800,000 rubles for officials, and a fine of 500,000 rubles to 800,000 rubles for entrepreneurs who work without establishing a legal entity, if their actions do not have any signs of a criminal offence.

Legal entities may have to pay fines from 500,000 rubles to 2.5 million rubles or may be ordered to suspend their operations for a period of up to 90 days. “The artificial termination of pregnancy funded by mandatory health insurance will be possible only in the presence of certain medical or social reasons,” the press service said.

This initiative was criticized by Vice President Olga Golodets and speaker of the Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko as reports the Interfax-religion.

The state should not finance abortions, the corresponding law should be adopted, the Russian Church officials believe. “Believers and society cannot financially participate in committing abortions and state laws should reflect it, head of the Synodal Information Department Vladimir Legoyda was quoted as saying by his press service.

According to the church official, some people claim that it is better to spend money on abortions than support poor mothers and education for children. “Perhaps, it is cheaper to kill than finance disabled and mentally disturbed people,” he resumed.

Head of the Synodal Department for Church and Society Relations Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin told Interfax-Religion that “Russia will cease to exist with the current level of abortions, destruction of a family, pornography and unquotable words in Internet, perversions, hopes for foreign accounts and houses exchanged for entire control to “outside forces.” He also said that Orthodox churches collected signatures under an address for criminal punishment for abortion and suggestion to entirely exclude it from the country’s life, “thousands of people have already signed the document.”

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia suggested excluding abortions from the system of compulsory medical insurance speaking at the Christmas parliamentary meetings in January 2015.

**Source:**

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12035>

## **The Bulgarian Orthodox Church about the propaganda of Yoga (BULGARIA)**

**June 2, 2015.** The Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church sent a letter to the Bulgarian Minister of Education and Sciences Mr. Todor Tanev, asking him to prevent the propaganda of Yoga in the public schools of Bulgaria as reports the Bulgarian Patriarchate. The Holy Synod considers as unacceptable and unsatisfactory this practice in the Bulgarian system of education.

The Church reminds that the obligation of the authorities and of the educational system is to assure the spiritual and psychological health of teenagers. The efforts to diffuse the practice of Yoga as a mean to fight against stress are an unwelcome way of propaganda. The Holy Synod is referring also to the danger for little children because Yoga is taught even in nursery schools. Children and teenagers have a lack of religious education and it is difficult for them the distinction between lies and truth.

The Holy Synod asked also explanations from the deputies and the Minister of Education about the texts during the exams in Bulgarian schools where the students were obliged to deal with texts, which promoted Yoga. Those texts, according to the Holy Synod, do not give the exact information about Yoga and they have as purpose to convert children, who participate in practical courses without their own will. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church asked once again the teaching of religious course at schools. The Bulgarian system of Education allows Yoga, which is a religious

practice but does not allow the teaching of the Orthodox Christian course.

Except for the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, many Bulgarian parents protested for the same issue, by sending also a letter to the Minister of Education and Science. They say that the course of Yoga is propaganda of an apocryphal movement, which is dangerous for the spiritual health of their children and absolutely far from the educational tradition and the Bulgarian culture.

**Source:**

<http://www.bg-patriarshia.bg/news.php?id=175375>

## **Orthodox bishop: “The Orthodox Church in Montenegro is under persecution” (MONTENEGRO)**

**June 7, 2015.** During the Sunday preaching Archbishop of Cetinje and Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral Amfilohije (Serbian Orthodox Church) made statements about the violations of the freedom of religion in Montenegro in relation to the diocese of Montenegro, the largest and most prominent diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church as reports romfea.gr.

In particular, the metropolitan said that “the Church in Montenegro is under a continuous persecution and the authorities use the excuse of nationality against the Church and the priests”. He continued by affirming that “the authorities support their European ambitions and for this reason they will never return the Church property. Contrary, they steal the churches every day. The authorities in Montenegro destroy the churches as they did with the destruction of the gold Cross of Njegos, by saying that the Church simply doesn't exist for them”.

**Source:**

<http://www.romfea.gr/patriarxeia-ts/patriarxeio-serbias/1145-mitropolitis-amfiloxios-i-ekklisia-sto-maurobounio-dioketai>

## **Protest of the Archbishop of Athens and all Greece against the bill of civil partnership (GREECE)**

**June 16, 2015.** The Archbishop of Athens and all Greece Hieronymus II sent a letter to the Minister of Justice, Mr. Mihalīs Paraskevopoulos, to express his opposition against the bill of civil partnership that the Greek Government prepares. This bill is going to include also the right for registered partnership the persons of the same sex and thus will be applicable to all citizens which do not agree with it as reports [ecclesia.gr](http://ecclesia.gr).

The Archbishop sent the letter on behalf of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece and he expresses his disapproval to this kind of life, which represents an offense to the real meaning of family. He says that Church is against civil marriage and civil partnership because she has a more serious proposition for the life of people, which is the religious marriage. He also mentioned that this short of life, without responsibilities that the Government tries to legalise with the civil partnership is against the Greek Constitution, which demands the protection of family from the Government. He also asks the Minister of Justice if he is ready to create the “homosexual family” after this law because it creates all the conditions to be demanded by activists. This law is not a legal development but it belongs to the ancient roman times where paganism was dominant and for this reason it will confuse the lives of people.

The Archbishop decided to convoke urgently the Members of the Standing Holy Synod of the Church of Greece on Friday 19th June, in order to discuss about the official reaction against this law.

### **Source:**

[http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/epistoles.asp?id=2015&what\\_sub=epistoli](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/epistoles.asp?id=2015&what_sub=epistoli)

## **Circular of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus protects the right of the Orthodox Christians on their conviction about the family (CYPRUS)**

**June 22, 2015.** The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus decided to publish a Circular by taking clear position against the bill of Civil Partnership, which is prepared by the House of Representatives as the website of the Church reports.

According to the Circular, the Church of Cyprus does not want to impose the Teaching of Christ to anyone but she keeps always the right to express her opinion. She mentions that she will not accept as a union anything else except for the religious marriage and that there are no excuses for homosexuality. For this reason, she does not accept the partnership of homosexuals and she invites them to fight against their passion.

The Holy Synod continues by mentioning that the Church cannot accept the bill of the House of Representatives because the partnership between people of the same sex is an absolute aberrance. The Church expresses the opinion that the bills and generally the laws have to educate people and not only to treat social differences, to satisfy people or to transform a deflection to a rule of law. The bishops say that it would be better for the House of Representatives to avoid bills which are strangers to the customs and the moral values of Cyprus. Such bills contribute to the dissipation of the society. They underlined that Cyprus will live the destruction of the family and the corruption with such a bill. At the end of Circular, the bishops call the House of the Representatives to guard the values and the morals of Cypriots. They also call the faithful to remain loyal to the Church and to guard their own religious and human dignity.

### **Source:**

<http://www.churchofcyprus.org.cy/article.php?articleID=5329>



## **Orthodox Patriarchate of Bulgaria pronounced in favour to preserve Saturday and Sunday as days-off (BULGARIA)**

**July 9, 2015.** The Orthodox Patriarchate of Bulgaria during the session of the Holy Synod expressed its disagreement with the gradual abolition of Sunday in Bulgaria as a day-off as the official web-site of the Patriarchate reports.

The Holy Synod says that in Bulgaria it has been established 40 hours of work per week, which means that on Saturday and Sunday people are free to have some rest. Their free time has to be devoted for God and family life in order to have a balance and to have joy in the grace of God.

The Holy Synod underlines that many employers recruit people to work on Saturday and Sunday. They follow the interests of the enterprises by neglecting the family relations and the spiritual needs and this can be harmful for the society. The Bishops underline that for Christians Sunday is a day of rest as it is the day of Christ's Resurrection.

At the end of the document, the Synod calls the authorities to take indispensable measures and to regulate this issue by ensuring the respect of Saturday and Sunday as days-off by avoiding the enforcement to work where it is not really required.

**Source:**

<http://www.bg-patriarshia.bg/news.php?id=178808>

## **Ukrainian Orthodox Bishop objected to the propaganda against traditional family (UKRAINE)**

**August 14, 2015.** Archbishop Luka of Zaporizhia and Melitopol of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) addressed to the Mayor of Zaporizhia because of an outdoor advertising in municipal property. This advertising was about to show

how men “win hatred with love”.

The Archbishop expressed the opposition of the faithful Orthodox residents of Zaporizhia and asked from the Mayor to protect them from moral decay and degradation that leads to sin in the religious sense and to decline of culture and civilization in the secular sense. He continued by underlined that they are against all that destroys family values, against manifestations and propaganda of sin.

The Mayor's office answered to the Archbishop Luka that the municipal authorities have no right to interfere with the form and content of outdoor advertising and this rule is enshrined in Article 16 of the Law of Ukraine on Advertising.

Diocese of Zaporizhia will continue seeking legal ways to remove social advertisings, which make propaganda against the traditional family from the city streets.

**Source:**

[http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/community/religion\\_and\\_society/60831/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/religion_and_society/60831/)

## **The Romanian Orthodox Patriarch: moral and religious education of children and youth confronted with secularized approach (ROMANIA)**

**September 24, 2015.** The 8th National Assembly “Christ conveyed to children”, was organized by the Romanian Patriarchate in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research and World Vision Organization in Romania, at Caraiman Monastery, from 21 to 23 September 2015, as the website of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate reports.

The Romanian Orthodox Patriarch Daniel expressed his concern about the immense responsibility of the Church to transmit religious faith, cultural and national identity, to educate the new generations of children and youth. The purpose of the educational

act in religious school education and in parish catechesis aims towards forming the child and the young man in order to become faithful, loving Christ and the Church, capable of dialogue and cooperation in family and society.

The Patriarch also mentioned that today's Christian population of Romania is confronted with a more and more secularized approach to education, which aims at excluding the Christian contribution in the educational process. This happens in exchange for a system limited only to the knowledge of the material, limited and passing world, without apprehending the work of God's grace over creation and in people's life.

At the end of his message to the Assembly the Patriarch explained that the final target of the religious and moral education must be the spiritual upbringing of children and youth in the love of God and fellow people, by involving them both in the liturgical life of the Church, and in the cultural, social and philanthropic activities of the parish community.

**Source:**

<http://patriarhia.ro/intellectual-information-and-spiritual-formation-in-the-moral-and-religious-education-of-children-and-youth-8243-en.html>

### **Orthodox Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Ieronymos pronounced his position about the religious course in Greek schools (GREECE)**

**September 27, 2015.** Orthodox Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Ieronymos reacted to the statement of The new Greek Deputy Education Minister Sia Anagnostopoulou announcing the simplification of the procedure for opting-out of religious classes for Greek students. According to the present system, a student must sign an official school document declaring his religion or conversely declaring himself as an atheist in order to be released

from religious studies classes. The Deputy Minister has vowed to change this, stating that a signed letter from a parent should be sufficient.

The reaction of the Greek Archbishop was very strong and he reminded to the new Deputy Education Minister that her plan is against the Greek Constitution, which mentions clearly that the education of Greek students must be national and following the Greek Orthodox religion. He added also that if the Government wants to follow her plan it has to change the Constitution but first it must ask Greek people if they want it.

The new Deputy Education Minister expressed the respect of the Greek Government to the Greek Orthodox Church but she insisted that freedom of religion must be respected in the national schools.

**Source:**

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/82510.htm>

### **Head of Polish Orthodox Church accuses Kyiv of being unable to protect the faithful (UKRAINE)**

**October 1, 2015.** 'We are unpleasantly surprised by the fact that Orthodox parishes are captured and the Orthodox are subjected to discrimination in Ukraine. Where is the state power, which does not defend people and fails to ensure their religious rights? Ukraine wants to be a democratic state, but there must be order in a democracy', said the Primate of the Polish Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Metropolitan Savva of Warsaw and All Poland, during his meeting with Archpriest Nikolay Danilevich, vice-chairman of the department for external church relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), who is in Warsaw for an OSCE conference, published DECR Communication Service of the Russian Orthodox Church.

During the meeting at the metropolitan's residence, Archpriest Nikolay informed

His Beatitude about the present situation concerning the rights of the UOC faithful as some local councils have adopted discriminative decisions with regard to the UOC and its churches have been captured. Metropolitan Savva, on his part, spoke about the status and rights of the Orthodox Church in Poland, regulated by a special state law adopted in 1992 whereby the Orthodox minority in this Catholic country enjoys all the necessary rights.

His Beatitude also spoke about the situation concerning the Ss Cyril and Methodius Monastery in Ujkovice, which was closed by the decision of the Holy Synod of the Polish Orthodox Church for various canonical violations. Among them are cases in which the monastery clergy concelebrated with representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC KP), which is not recognized by the world Orthodoxy. It was noted that the number of Ukrainians has noticeably increased in the Polish Orthodox churches today, and the local clergy give them the proper pastoral care.

Metropolitan Savva said he prayed for Ukraine in this crucial time for the Ukrainian state and conveyed words of fraternal support to the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kyiv and All Ukraine.

#### **Source:**

<https://mospat.ru/en/2015/10/02/news123291/>

### **Reaction of the Orthodox Metropolitan of Montenegro and Littoral on the Montenegrin new draft law on freedom of religion (MONTENEGRO)**

**October 16, 2015.** On 28th August 2015, the Government of Montenegro deposed on the European Commission for Democracy through law the draft law on freedom of religion. This draft law has the intention to

restore the public property of all religious objects that were built prior to 1918. According to it: “Goods representing the cultural heritage of Montenegro, and on which the right of ownership or right to use is owned by a religious community shall not be sold or taken out of the state without the consent of the Government”.

The Government of Montenegro planned a public discussion on the draft until 14th September but it extended the deadline until 30th September in order to leave enough time for submitting suggestions, objections or proposals of all interested parties regarding the text of this regulation so it is in accordance with European standards and Montenegrin specifics, as the website cdm reports.

This draft caused the strong reaction of Metropolitan Amfilohije (Radović) and of the Serbian Patriarchate. As the official website of the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and Littoral reports, Bishop Amfilohije opposes to this draft because the Church is going to lose a great part of its property and it will be weakened. He also thinks that it will provoke many problems to other religions for the same reasons and he underlines that this practice belongs to totalitarian periods.

The Minister for Human and Minority Rights, Mr. Suad Numanović, said that the draft law on freedom of religion will not be withdrawn from procedure, just because the most influential religious community in Montenegro is not satisfied with it. He also said that Religious communities and the Church should not have a say in law-making, as the website cdm reports.

Minister of culture Mr. Pavle Goranovic said that the new law for freedom of religion will create an additional monitoring system of the country over the property that wasn't sufficiently protected so far, as cdm reports.

#### **Sources:**

<http://www.cdm.me/english/ministry-we-wont-allow-discussion-to-be-diverted-to-politics-and-ideology>

<http://www.cdm.me/english/video-public-hearing-on-draft-law-on-freedom-of-religion-extended>

<http://www.mitropolija.com/intervju-mitropolita-amfilohija-beogradskoj-politici/>

## **The Ukrainian Orthodox Church urges to stop discrimination of Orthodox believers in the country (UKRAINE)**

**October 28, 2015.** The Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate is concerned with kindling religious hostility in the country, as the information service of the UOC Moscow Patriarchate reports.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church published a statement, which mentions that: “Cases of violating civil peace on religious motives are fixed in certain regions of our country. There were attempts to capture churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, cases of violations against believers and even attacks against their lives”. Participants in the session held in Kyiv say some local authorities admit violations of the law, and law-enforcement agencies do not always stand to protect legal rights of the communities, clergy and UOC believers.

The Statement of the Holy Synod underlines that: “All these facts not only stand in the way of realizing constitutional right of Ukrainian citizens for free confession, but also provoke social tensions in our state. In the time, when extremely difficult peace-making process is underway in Donbass, we face the danger of destabilization social situation in other Ukrainian regions”.

### **Source:**

<http://news.church.ua/2015/10/27/zvernennya-svyashhennogo-sinodu-ukrajinskoji-pravoslavnoji-cerkvi-do-virnix-chad-ukrajinskoji-pravoslavnoji-cerkvi/>

## **The Ukrainian Orthodox Church against homosexual propaganda (UKRAINE)**

**November 19, 2015.** The deputy chairman of the Department for external Church relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Archpriest Mykolay Danylevych said that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church does not support discriminations against homosexual people but she is against the homosexual propaganda, as the official website of the UOC MP reports.

During the press conference after the meeting of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations on Thursday 19 November, archpriest Mykolay underlined that the new bill on Labour permits propaganda of gay lifestyle.

At a press conference held in Kyiv in the premises of the news agency “Interfax-Ukraine”, the representatives of Ukrainian faiths presented their official position in public regarding the recently voted draft law by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Parliament) on the amendments to the Labour law. The press conference was also attended by the head of the association “Novomedia” Ruslan Kukharchuk, archbishop of the Kivien Patriarchate Yevstratii (Zorya), deputy chief rabbi of Kyiv David Milman, the head of external relations of Ukrainian greek-catholic church archpriest Alexei Petrov, senior bishop of the Ukrainian Christian Evangelical Church Igor Lukyanov.

The representatives of the Council underscored that the bill was not adopted democratically, and the provision banning discrimination to “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” was not exposed to extensive discussion but it was voted in violation of the procedural norms. They also noted that homosexuality is stranger to the Ukrainian culture, and if Ukraine expressed its desire to enter the EU, it should give back to people a higher level of morality and not the immorality that they try to impose and promote.

The draft law included the legislation terms



“gender identity” and “sexual orientation”, which are new for the Ukrainian legislation. According to the members of the Council, making such amendments to the current legislation of Ukraine could lead in the near future to discrimination against people who practice traditional family values, the Christian view of marriage, as well as allegations of so-called homophobia. In the future, this will open the way for the introduction of other, now common in some European countries, standards, and legalization of gay marriage, the introduction of quotas for homosexuals in employment, the possibility of adoption of children by homosexual couples and the banning of criticism of the homosexual lifestyle.

The representatives of doctrines recalled that in the early stages of the bill, the Council submitted a proposal, which would allow avoiding discrimination on any grounds, but the Parliament did not consider it.

Archpriest Nikolai Danylevych noted that the main motive for the adoption of this draft law was the implementation by Ukraine of the requirements for visa liberalization. However, there are countries in the world, including some Latin American and Arab states, which have criminal penalties for homosexuality, and in fact these countries have a visa-free regime with the European Union. “So, you can get visa-free travel without the legalization of gay marriage”, said the representative of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

**Source:**

<http://vzcz.church.ua/2015/11/20/protoijerej-mikolaj-danilevich-mi-ne-vistupajemo-za-diskriminaciyu-gomoseksualistiv-mi-vistupajemo-proti-propagandi-gomoseksualizmu/>

## **The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Greece about the civil partnership of people of the same sex (GREECE)**

**December 9, 2015.** The Standing Holy Synod

expressed its position during its month regular session concerning the bill about the civil partnership for people of the same sex, as the official website of the Church of Greece reports.

The Standing Holy Synod reminds the decision of the Holy Hierarchy on 17th October 2013 and it insists on it. It ratified again this decision on 19th June 2015. According to this decision, it is mentioned that the Church of Greece cannot accept this new type of family and life as it is against the theology of marriage and family and it consists aberration from the institution of family as it has functioned during the centuries in the life of believers.

This decision is characterised from the Standing Holy Synod as stable and non-changeable. It is clarified that the positions of the Church are based to the respect of the human dignity, which is the centre of the Orthodox Theology, and to the Greek Constitution. For this reason, the Church of Greece cannot accept civil partnership, civil marriage, single parenthood or cohabitation. With civil partnership and all those new types of family, it will be a degradation of the family life.

**Source:**

[http://ecclesia.gr/epikairotita/main\\_epikairotita\\_next.asp?id=1659](http://ecclesia.gr/epikairotita/main_epikairotita_next.asp?id=1659)

## **Representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church visited Strasbourg and had several meetings in the Council of Europe (UKRAINE)**

**December 14, 2015.** The representative of Ternopil and Kremenets diocese, hegumen Gerontius, rector of St. John Merciful Monastery, and the legal adviser of the Kyiv Metropolis and also chief of the human rights organization “Public Advocacy” Mr. O.Denisov had a meeting at the Council of Europe with the Commissioner of Human

Rights Mr. Nils Muiznieks. The representative of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Council of Europe hegumen Philip (Ryabykh) accompanied them at the meeting, as reports website of the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Strasbourg (REOR).

On December 15th, the same Church representatives had a meeting with the Council of Europe's Director General of Democracy, Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković.

At the meetings there were discussed the situation of human rights in the Western Ukraine due to the increasing number of seizures of the temples of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Special attention was paid to the consecutive statements of the Ternopil regional council, which contain conflictual language against Pochayiv Lavra. Members of the local government bodies are involved in its application and they claim that Laura is a "anti-Ukrainian centre", which supports the separatism and the "russifying" the Ukrainian people. Such statements are examples of hate speech and, according to human rights defender, promote the religious hatred, and therefore inadmissible.

The attention of the Council of Europe was drawn to the egregious violations of human rights that occur in the village Katerinovka Ternopil region. The authorities used force unnecessarily and the police beat more than 13 parishioners of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church near the temple, which belongs to them. Another issue of discussion was the conflict in the village of Rivne region in which the UOC, cannot use the church building as the legal owner, despite the positive court's decision because it is captured by the supporters of the so-called "Kyiv Patriarchate".

Mr Oleg Denisov mentioned that, "in all cases of violations of human rights the UOC addressed to the police, as well as to public authorities, to the Commissioner of Human Rights of the Supreme Council of Ukraine, sent applications to the President of Ukraine

and to the governors of the respective areas and turned to the courts. However, if the courts considered the applications of believers quite objectively and if they defended justice, the executive and the law enforcement system which would have taken effective measures to bring to the justice the perpetrators responsible for the seizure of power, did nothing to prevent conflicts.

A human rights activist said: "It seems that in some cases the central government and regional administrations consciously support the Kyiv Patriarchate in their initiatives to bring the communities of the UOC into their jurisdiction, even when the faithful claim that they did not take a decision on the transition to the Kyiv Patriarchate and the local authorities surely know about the existence of the communities of the UOC. Some government representatives forced the parishioners of the UOC to transfer their property into the possession of the supporters of the Kyiv Patriarchate, covering the so-called "alternate" use of the temple and ignoring the fact that the property owner is not required to "share" it with others, especially under the threat of violence. For this reason, there is a law enforcement system to protect citizens from such unlawful attacks".

To summarize his words, Mr. O.Denisov said: "Due to the fact that conflicts become widespread, we addressed to the international human rights organisations, specially designed to deal with such cases. Such appeals are the undisputed right of believers and should be considered as part of the normal activity of any human rights group, which claims that its rights are systematically violated. In particular, we have already prepared and submitted an application to the European Court of Human Rights, as well as in other international institutions".

Following the meeting, an agreement was reached with representatives of the Council of Europe on future cooperation in the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Ukraine.

**Source:**

<http://strasbourg-reor.org/?topicid=1198>

**Bulgarian Patriarch asks President of Ukraine Poroshenko to protect Ukrainian Orthodox believers from persecutions (UKRAINE)**

**December 16, 2015.** Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria expressed his concerns with violations of Orthodox believers' rights in Ukraine, as the website Interfax-religion reports.

The Patriarch addressed to the Ukrainian President Pyotr Poroshenko and said that he is concern about the numerous registered facts of violating rights of the believers belonging to the only canonical Church in Ukraine. He underlined the issue of the seizures of the UOC churches by force.

The Bulgarian Church's primate stressed the attempts to take the Pochayev Lavra and the Kyiv Lavra of the Caves from the canonical Church and to give them to the self-proclaimed Kyiv Patriarchate.

"Realization of such scenario will not only destabilize the social situation in Ukraine, but also will make it impossible for Orthodox hierarchs, clerics and believers from other countries to visit the mentioned Lavras as we do not have Eucharist and prayerful communication with schismatic structures," the letter reads.

Patriarch Neophyte asks Poroshenko to take all necessary measures to protect rights of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, securing its churches from being captured, and other forms of forceful, information and other pressure.

**Source:**

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12611>

**Greek hierarchs about the new law of civil partnership for same-sex persons (GREECE)**

**December 20, 2015.** The adoption of the new law about civil partnership for same-sex persons provoked the reaction of the Greek Hierarchs, as the website pravoslavie.ru reports.

Metropolitan of Piraeus Seraphim talked about the state persecutions against Christian faith: "The politicians shamelessly refer to the European consensus concerning legalization of sodomy, but they conceal the fact that post-Christian Europe has become Sodom and Gomorrah. The persecutions are approaching. We will be threatened, we will be reviled, we will probably be imprisoned and murdered. However, we must remain faithful even unto death".

Metropolitan of Larisa and Tyrnavos, Ignatios underlined that for the Church "Homosexuality is an abominable sin which leads people to inevitable spiritual death... The politicians are following the stench coming from the "civilized" countries, which before us recognized that black is white, that bitter is sweet, and that unlawful is lawful..."

Metropolitan of Sisanion and Siatista, Pavlos made some very interesting questions to the politicians: "Does someone sincerely believe that the Church can betray its eternal values and adapt itself to the momentary needs of each historical epoch? The undeniable right of the Church is to bear witness to the truth. Homosexuality is inconsistent with Church life. Gentlemen of the government! Perhaps tomorrow you are going to demand that the Church accepts bestiality and paedophilia. Some expect that as soon as 'the Free Cohabitation Law' is adopted, you will be forced to legalize paedophilia. Europe will put pressure upon you and you are ready to do anything. Do you really think that we will ever agree with this?"

As the website romfea reports Metropolitan

Pavlos warned that soon it will start in Greece a pogrom against free citizens who dare to disagree with homosexuality as option of life. He also said that government cultivates the fear in order to scare people to express their opinion. He mentioned that the majority of people in Greece respect the right of the others to live, as they want. It is a chance for the government to prepare a new law about the adoption of children from homosexuals because soon Greece is going to be condemned by the European Court of Human Rights for discrimination and then the government will use again this excuse to prepare a new law.

Metropolitan of Fthiotida, Nikolaos said that “the Prime Minister threw the Gospel in the garbage, he presents the unusual things as great virtues and he offends the majority of decent Greek people”. He also said, “The Greek deputies to dared to vote this new law must not come again to the Church”, as the website romfea reports.

#### Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/88986.htm>

<http://www.romfea.gr/epikairotita-xronika/5275-siatistis-paulos-etoimazetai-progkrom-enantion-kathe-eleutherou-politi-pou-exei-apopsi>

<http://www.romfea.gr/epikairotita-xronika/5332-labros-o-mitropolitis-fthiotidos-kata-prothupourgou>

### **Intervention of Mount Athos about the new law on civil partnership for same-sex persons (GREECE)**

**December 22, 2015.** The Representatives and the Abbots of the twenty monasteries of Mount Athos addressed a letter to the Greek Minister of Justice Mr. Paraskevopoulos, as the website romfea.gr reports.

The letter says that “this new law is an aberration from the principles and the values of the Orthodox Tradition, which consists the root and the identity of the Greek culture. As orthodox Christians, we absolutely respect the personal options of everyone and his right

to be inside or to stay out of the church life, because we believe that no one has the right to violate human freedom, which is a gift from God. On the other side, it is completely far from the ethics of our people and it is very provocative to consider the same-sex couple as family, by recognising for it social and legal consequences as “adoption of children” etc.

For this reason, we please you wholehearted not to adopt this new law especially before Christmas. Our voice is coming from sincere interest for the progress of this country, which Greek people trusted to your government.

Maybe the temporary withdrawal of this bill would provide the necessary time for open discussion and would give the right to Greek people to express their opinion about such a serious issue, as it is the institution of family.

This solicitation of the Fathers from Mount Athos is conveyed to all political parties and to all deputies of the Greek National Assembly with hope that they will contribute as they can to avoid the urgent adoption of this law”.

#### Source:

<http://www.romfea.gr/agioritika-nea/5286-parembasi-agiou-orous-gia-sumfono-sumbiosis>

### **Patriarch of Serbia expresses concern for discrimination against canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)**

**December 23, 2015.** In his message to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the Primate of the Serbian Orthodox Church expresses concern for the new facts of violations of the human rights of the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Below is the text of the message published on the website of the Department for External Church Relations (DECR) Communication Service of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Your Holiness,

Dear and Beloved Brother and Concelebrant



in the Lord:

With profound concern and sincere distress we learn again and again about violations of the rights and discrimination of the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

Special concern is caused by continued violent captures of Orthodox churches by local pseudo-Orthodox schismatics and radical nationalists.

With compassion and prayer the Serbian Orthodox Church is following the development of the conflict in the Ptichya village in the Rovno Region, where our fellow faithful have become victims of pogroms and violence; where the Orthodox clergy are beaten up by unbridled fascist militants; where the weak elderly people and women have been locked up in their own church for several days now without water and food, even without being provided with the necessary medical aid.

No less concern is also caused by the recent attempt to take away the Kyiv Laura of the Caves from the canonical Church, as we have learnt from the press. The Kyiv Laura of the Caves and the Pochayev Laura are great shrines for the whole Orthodox world, and we have learnt with indignation about the intention to hand them over to the schismatics who are not recognized by any of the Holy Orthodox Churches.

By their fruit you will recognize them, says Holy Scriptures (Mt. 7:16). Evil can dress itself up in the clothes of faith, light and truth but its fruits – falsehood, division and hate of the neighbour – will invariably expose it. Schismatics from the so-called ‘Patriarchate of Kyiv’ have long been renounced by Orthodox Churches and refer to Orthodoxy only by name. And their disdain for the norms of Christian morality and readiness to hate, to lie and to spill blood is living proof of it.

We pray that the Lord may strengthen Your Beatitude and the Holy Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the feat of confessing Christ and give you strength to oppose the violence and

hatred with love and patience in Christ!

Invoking God’s blessing upon you,

Irinej, Patriarch of Serbia

Patriarch Irinej of Serbia has also sent a message concerning the present situation to His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kyiv and All Ukraine.

‘The Serbian Orthodox Church has heard the call of Your Beatitude to pray for the clergy and the suffering parishioners of the church of the Dormition at the Ptichya village in the Rovno Region’, the message states. ‘We are lifting up prayers for those who have become victims of pogroms and glaring violence in the village, for the clergy who have been beaten up for the name of Christ, and for our miserable fellow faithful who have been starved in their own church for several days now, denied even necessary medical aid. May the Lord give them strength to confess Christ and go through all the hardships for Him with courage!’

**Source:**

<https://mospat.ru/en/2015/12/23/news126272/>

## **Protest of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church about the abolition of religious course (SERBIA)**

**December 25, 2015.** The Holy Synod of the Church of Serbia expressed its protest for the sudden decision of the Minister of Education of Serbia Mr Srdjan Verbić to abolish the religious course from the elementary and secondary school, as the official website of the Serbian Orthodox Church reports.

The Holy Synod reminds to the Minister of Education that he has to serve Serbian people and to take into account that the majority of Serbians 95% are Orthodox Christians. The religious education is very important and Serbians were deprived of it during the totalitarian regime.

The Serbian hierarchs underlined that Mr. Verbić, as well as his ideological predecessors of fifteen years ago, explained only ideological reasons and motivations for the abolition of religious education from schools. Apparently, he does not belong to the majority of Serbia, who broke the bond with the totalitarian legacy.

The Holy Synod considers that Mr. Verbić can provoke great damage to the civic education because the students who attend religious course learn to apply human values, human solidarity and respect for human rights and freedoms. Religious course and civic education differ in terminology, but their contents are related.

**Source:**

<http://www.spc.rs/eng/node/38075>

## Chapter 5: The Right of Freedom of Assembly for Orthodox Christians.

In this chapter the Center presents the facts when Orthodox Christians are deprived of their right to freedom of peaceful assembly (*Art. 11, ECHR*) to exercise their religious prescriptions.

### **The ‘Right Sector’ captured an Orthodox church in the Cherkassk region (UKRAINE)**

**February 12, 2015.** The Right Sector captured a church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) in the Cherkassk region (Ukraine). The clergy of the church was forced to change their jurisdiction from the Moscow Patriarchate to the Kyiv Patriarchate as reports the UOC MP website.

The church was surrounded and anyone from the parish was not. ‘After the liturgy, a group of men in camouflage uniform with arm-signs of the “Right Sector” surrounded the church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in the village of Bolshaya Sevastyanovka (Khristinovsky district, Cherkassk Region) and did not allow to anyone to enter in it.

According to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the illegal capture was anticipated by a so-called popular assembly “veche” (traditional democratic meeting in Slavic tribes), where people who have nothing in common with the parish directly insulted believers of the UOC MP. Moreover, the combatants of the “Right Sector” kicked out archpriest Vasily Mikhanchuk from the meeting and did not let him express his view of the situation.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate also mentions that organizers of

the ‘veche’ also threatened the local priest and forced him to change the jurisdiction.

The local authorities pretend that everything is going on legally. The village council did not do anything to prevent the illegal actions of the non-resident radicals and so let create one more place of a religious tension.

**Source:**

<http://news.church.ua/2015/02/12/cherkaska-oblast-v-umanskij-jeparxiji-predstavniki-radikalnix-ugrupuvan-pereshkodzhayut-viruyuchim-potrapiti-do-xramu/>

### **The Kyiv Patriarchate took over one more church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine (UKRAINE)**

**March 18, 2015.** The church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God in Milcha village of Dubensky district (Rivne region, Ukraine) was taken over by the Kyiv Patriarchate as reports UNIAN. The secretary of Rivne diocese Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) archpriest Vitaliy Guerlinskiy mentioned that “the church was captured by numerous group of unknown people. A group of people came to the village at 8 a.m. There were also 5 representatives of clergy of the Kyiv Patriarchate. The total number was about 100 people, most of them were non-residents of the village. A group of people broke a door of the church that belongs to the UOC MP. They occupied the building and held a worship service. The members of UOC MP community from the village gathered around the church, people from the district and region also came there.”

The representatives of the local authorities sealed the church of the Nativity of the Most

Holy Mother of God at about 3 p.m., till court decision. The secretary of the diocese adds: "It would be more reasonable if both religious communities had come to the agreement to solve the problem in the juridical way. However it seems that the occupiers do not rush to the court. They used raider methods as grinders and crowbars. As far as the church is sealed the worships of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church will be held outside the church or in the parish building."

The secretary of the Kyiv Patriarchate archbishop Evstratiy Zorya made comments on this occasion at his page in Facebook as reports UNIAN. He wrote that enquiry of residents on ownership of the church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God was initiated by local community of UOC MP. Evstratiy Zorya considers: "By free vote 90% of the community voted in favor of the Kyiv Patriarchate. The church belongs to local community on the right of ownership. So on the basis of community's decision the executive committee of local council made a decision to allocate the church on community of the Kyiv Patriarchate. The community addressed the archbishop Hillarion to appoint a priest. The priest arrived today, the community was waiting in the church, and the Christ's passions were celebrated. There was no conflict or violation."

In his turn the secretary of Rivne diocese of the OUC MP archpriest Vitaliy Guerlinskiy doesn't agree with words of Evstratiy Zorya. Father Vitaliy Guerlinskiy emphasizes: "The statement of Evstratiy Zorya about the ownership of the church by the local community on the right of ownership is very strange. Once again the representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate equate religious community to a local one, disorienting common people. So called referendums initiated by representatives

of the Kyiv Patriarchate are nothing but public opinion poll that has no legal force. On the basis of these referendums representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate "transfer" the churches under its jurisdiction. The truth is that the Kyiv Patriarchate keeps silence on how they do it. Methods are always the same – grinders in hands of people. For me as for most of orthodox people today's event is nothing but force takeover."

The secretary of Rivne diocese believes that the conflict is provoked by the local authorities in Milcha which support representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate preaching "national church". He also emphasized that there was no answer to the complaints made by UOC MP to the state and law enforcement authorities. Father Vitaliy confirms: "Precisely this indifference from the side of the authorities is the reason of these unpunished raider takeovers of UOC churches."

#### **Source:**

<http://religions.unian.net/orthodoxy/1057140-rovenskaya-eparhiya-upts-zayavila-o-zahvate-hrama-v-sele-milcha-dubenskogo-rayona-pomeschenie-opechatano-do-resheniya-suda.html>

### **Greek-Catholics tried to capture an Orthodox church (UKRAINE)**

**March 22, 2015.** An attempt at seizure of an Orthodox church was made by representatives of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) as report the official website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the mospat.ru.

The rector of the church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God at the Stenka village, Buchatsk district, Ternopol region, Father Vasily Moisiyuk, has reported that at about 15:00 a group of UGCC clergy clad in



vestments committed an act of provocation near this church. These actions of the Uniates were supported by the Buchatsk district council deputy Andrey Buchinsky (All-Ukraine Association 'Svoboda'). Taking part in the action were also over 50 young people in balaklavas and fatigues, who impersonated the Right Sector representatives. They tried to get into the church allegedly for prayer. The faithful of the local Orthodox community refused to let them in, explaining that anyone can come into a church during the liturgy, but one can only come into a house of God without weapons and with one's face open.

According to the chief of the Ternopol regional police Alexander Bogomol, reinforced law-enforcement units were used to prevent a violent conflict on the religious ground at the village. During a press conference he said that the Right Sector activists had come to support the UGCC representatives. The conflict itself, he said, was that 'the UGCC sought after a possibility for holding celebrations in the church that is used by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The Right Sector representatives tried to stand up for the position taken by the UGCC community'.

Alexander Bogomol noted that representatives of the local authorities promised to take actions to ensure a possibility for the both communities to worship in peace.

At 17:30 on the same day, the Greek Catholic priests and the Right Sector representatives gathered together near the UGCC chapel located in the same village. During that gathering, radicals yelled insults at the Orthodox faithful and assurances that Uniate priests will enter the Orthodox church of the Nativity of Our Lady by all means in a matter of days.

## Sources:

<http://news.church.ua/2015/03/24/ternopilska-oblast-uniati-pid-prikrittyam-bojovikiv-namagayutsya-zaxopiti-pravoslavnij-xram-na-ternopilshhini-video/>

<https://mospat.ru/ru/2015/04/01/news117317/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= lEWYs9HnfE>

## **The Ukrainian court recognized illegal actions against the Orthodox in Sumy (UKRAINE)**

**March 27, 2015.** Zarechniy District Court of Sumy (Ukraine) recognized illegal actions of Vladimir Hanzina who on the first of March 2015 committed hooliganism at the entrance to the Holy Transfiguration Cathedral of the Orthodox diocese. Having found the guilt of Mr.Hanzina proven, the court sentenced him to a fine as reports Sumy Orthodox diocese.

## Source:

<http://portal-pravoslavie.sumy.ua/sud-zarchnogo-rajonu-m.-sumi-vins-rshennya-shhodo-protipravnix-dj-1-bereznnya.html>

## **Appeal of Ternopil regional Council to the expropriation of Pochayiv Lavra from the Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)**

**April 28, 2015.** The deputies of the Ternopil regional council (Ukraine) voted for taking away the Holy Monastery of Pochayiv Lavra from its canonical Ukrainian Church, as reports the website pravoslavie.ru.

This vote is the reaction to the petition of Ternopil regional Rada (legislative body in the Ukraine), which on 3rd July, 2014 initiated an appeal to the Prime Minister with the request to rescind the agreement between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the state and to give the monastery buildings back to the state as it was in the Soviet time.

The reaction of Metropolitan Vladimir of Pochayiv, abbot of the Holy Dormition

Pochayiv Lavra, was very intense. In his interview to the Ukrainian newspaper “Segodnya”, Metropolitan condemns the intention to transform the Pochayiv Lavra into a museum of history, as a non-Christian action which is coming from Christian deputies. He underlined that by this action the monastery (founded it in 1240) might be governed not by the abbot and the brethren but by a museum director and tour guides. Metropolitan Vladimir analysed in his interview the relation of the Pochayiv Lavra with the State since Ukraine has become independent.

**Source:**

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/79008.htm>

### **Interruption of divine celebration and capture of an Orthodox church (UKRAINE)**

**August 24, 2015.** Unidentified persons entered in St. Vladimir’s church in the village of Malye Dmitrovichi, the Obukhov District (the Kyiv Region, Ukraine). They interrupted the Divine Liturgy, which was taking place. They called themselves representatives of the local self-defence and they started swearing. Under those circumstances, the rector stopped the celebration and the parishioners left from the church and the church was closed. According to press service of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, priests of the self-proclaimed Kyiv Patriarchate later joined the invaders.

Militia arrived on parishioners’ call, but kept away from the incident and did not interfere when the celebration was disrupted. The local community turned to the prosecutor’s office complaining on the intruders and law-enforcement officers.

**Source:**

<http://news.church.ua/2015/08/23/kijivska-oblast-rozkolniki-z-upc-kp-zirvali-bozhestvennu-liturgiyu-na-kijivshhini/>

### **Ukrainian Orthodox nuns request president Poroshenko to delimit their monastery from neighbouring prison (UKRAINE)**

**August 18, 2015.** The Orthodox nuns of St. Haralampus Convent in Hamaliyivka are collecting signatures to petition Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko to demarcate between the convent and the Shostka Correctional Facility № 66 for men, as reports pravoslavie.ru.

St. Haralampus Convent, which is situated near the village of Hamaliyivka in the Shostka district during the years 1713-1924 could have been an important centre of pilgrimage today if it had not become part of the prison. The monastery complex is an architectural monument of national importance and historic value—there is the family tomb of the Skoropadskys, including one of the last Hetmans Ivan Skoropadsky and his wife Anastasia.

Nowadays the Cathedral of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a prison church where a priest comes to officiate on a regular basis. Next to the Cathedral, there are former monastery cells, and now there are bathhouses for prisoners, workshops and administrative offices.

During his presidency, Viktor Yushchenko signed decree №4/2010, which states that the men’s correctional facility should vacate the premises and buildings of the former monastery. This decree required considerable funds to transfer the facility to another space.

**Source:**

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/81497.htm>

## **The Right Sector and police help members of Kyiv Patriarchate to seize an Orthodox church (UKRAINE)**

**September 22, 2015.** The incident happened on the eve when believers of the canonical Church celebrated the Nativity of the Mother of God near St. George Church in the village of Katerinovka in the Ternopol Region. The Liturgy was celebrated in the open air as followers of the self-proclaimed “Kyiv Patriarchate” had barricaded the church earlier, as reports UOC press service.

The members of the self-proclaimed Kyiv Patriarchate seized the church under jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate with the support of The Right Sector militants. They tried to chase away old people and children who prayed at the churchyard. Later, about 3 p.m., unidentified people penetrated into the church through the side door and broke open the central doors, and then representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate came into the church. The believers of the canonical church (UOC) could not enter the church as fellows with stripes of the Right Sector blocked their way.

According to the report of the UOC, when representatives of the community asked to give them way to the church in order to take holy things from it, militants of the Ternopol-2 battalion of the Interior Ministry of Ukraine started beating believers of the Moscow Patriarchate severely. The result of the militants’ condescending action was 15 people to be traumatized, one person to be hospitalized with severe injuries and some others to have their limbs broken.

The Head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church metropolitan of Kyiv and all Ukraine Onuphry sent a letter to the President of Ukraine

P.Poroshenko in connection with these events.

**Source:**

<http://news.church.ua/2015/09/22/pravij-sektor-kijkami-dopomig-rozkolnikam-zaxopiti-xram-miliciya-ne-vtruchajetsya-15-cholovik-travmovano-poranenix-gospitalizovano-video/>

## **Village in Dnepropetrovsk Region defends its canonical Orthodox jurisdiction (UKRAINE)**

**September 15, 2015.** A meeting was organised by a local farmer in the village of Chumaki, Dnepropetrovsk Region (Ukraine) as reports Interfax-Religion. He tried to cause a division in the community by preventing people going to the canonical Church under Moscow Patriarchate according to the testimony of Aleksandr Ponomarenko, the head of the Zheltovodsk Deanery. The Orthodox Christians of the village united to support a priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church by refusing to go over to the self-proclaimed “Kyiv Patriarchate.”

The looming schism resulted in the reconciliation of the Orthodox Christians, who were united by father Ioann, the senior priest of a local church, who has a spotless reputation among his flock. That decision played the important role and members of the village community decided to reconcile in church during a divine service.

It is known that the local administration and an influential businessman began the process of transferring the community to the “*Kyiv Patriarchate*.”

**Source:**

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12303>

## **Orthodox faithful struggled hard to exercise their rights to pray together (UKRAINE)**

**October 9, 2015.** In the village of Chudnytsya in Goshcha area (Ukraine), the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) cut the road to prevent attackers of Kyiv Patriarchate to arrive and interrupt their liturgical life as the website prochurch reports.

For more than a year, the believers of this area were victims of the aggression of Kyiv Patriarchate. The first aggression took place in March 2015. Attackers arrived during one of the church liturgies, they threw icons and the Gospel; they displaced people and seized the church. All this happened in the presence of the police officers who did not prevent them from doing it. Since then they continued the violations in many ways.

On the 4th of October, before Sunday liturgy an inscription was found on the wall of the church, which informed that the church belongs from now to Kyiv Patriarchate. The faithful of the UOC then blocked the highway road to their village to protest against such provocation. The police reacted this time and forced the supporters of Kyiv Patriarchate to stop the provocations and the aggressions in this village.

**Source:**

<http://pro.church.ua/2015/10/09/viryani-upc-sela-chudnycia-perekryli-mizhnarodnu-trasu-kijiv-chop-cherez-svavillya-rejderiv-z-upc-kp/>

## **Attempt to seizure an Orthodox church (UKRAINE)**

**November 1, 2015.** The representatives of the non-canonical Patriarchate of Kyiv tried to take the church of the Assumption of Virgin Mary, which is under the jurisdiction

of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, in the district of Dubno (Ukraine), as the information service of UOC Moscow Patriarchate reports.

On 8th April 2015, the Economic Court had recognised the rights of the Ukrainian Canonical Orthodox Church to this building. On the 2nd September of 2015, the Economic Court confirmed the rights of the canonical Church on the church of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary in this area.

Employees of the district department of the Interior Ministry arrived on the scene, after being informed by faithful. They could not interfere to the case. The believers protested on the road Kyiv-Chop to express their discomfort with the practice of the Kyivian Patriarchate. Due to the decisive action of parishioners, the regional police intervened in the situation and solved the conflict peacefully.

On 2nd November, 2015 in Dubno district the council held a round table with the participation of deputy chairman of the area A. Kozak, the members of the Holy Dormition community and representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate in order to discuss peacefully the issue.

**Source:**

<http://news.church.ua/2015/11/02/rivnenska-oblast-kijivskij-patriarhat-ne-viznaje-rishennya-ukrajinskogo-sudu/>

## **Ukrainian Court held the violation of rights of the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)**

**December 8, 2015.** The court found violation of the rights of believers who are under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the case of the seizure of the church in Rivne region (Ukraine), as the official website of the UOC



MP reports.

On March 1st, 2015 in the village, Chudnytsya Goshcha district of Rivne region radical people entered into the church of Saint Paraskevi and removed from the walls the icons, they pushed the lectern and toppled from the Gospel. Following these events, the UOC community was not able to have its church.

Believers have applied to the police. The police did not bring it to the register of pre-trial investigations. In June 2015 the UOC community representatives filed a complaint with the Goshchansky District Court, which ordered an investigator. However, the investigating police station Goshcha V. Kralkovskyy illegally closed the case again, as the interviewed representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate were involved in the capture of this Orthodox Church.

The court recognized the illegal actions of the investigator and ordered him again to resume the investigation.

According to the Department of Information of the UOC, on 19th October, the decision of the Economic Court of Rivne region was declared invalid the certificate of ownership and the decision of state registration issued by the religious community “Kyiv Patriarchate” in the village Chudnytsya Goshcha district concerning St. Paraskevi temple. The faithful of Chudnytsi had to make protest actions and to block the road Kyiv – Chop in order to be able to pray in thier church.

**Source:**

<http://news.church.ua/2015/12/11/sud-viznav-porushennya-prav-viruyuchix-upc-u-chergovij-spravi-pro-zaxoplennya-xramu-na-rivnenshhini/>

## **Attempt to seize an Orthodox church (UKRAINE)**

**December 15, 2015.** Representatives of the self-proclaimed Kyiv Patriarchate tried to seize the Orthodox Church of St. Anna in the village of Kuta in Ternopil region (Ukraine), as reports information service of the UOC MP.

They gathered in front of the church door, demanding to give them the right to alternate services to the community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Shouting requirements, after a while they attempted to enter the church.

The law enforcement officers intervened to prevent the seizure of the building. The rector of the Church agreed to negotiations on the possibility of alternating the divine services, to prevent the conflicts.

**Sources:**

<http://news.church.ua/2015/12/15/rozkolniki-zalyakuyut-viruyuchix-silovim-zaxoplenniam-xramu/>

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=61313>

## **Albanians protested claiming the ownership of a Serbian monastery (KOSOVO TERRITORY)**

**December 17, 2015.** Hundreds of Albanians have protested against a court ruling to suspend the decision on the confiscation of land of the Visoki Decani monastery, as the website inserbia reports.

The half-hour protest went without incidents on Thursday afternoon, and saw participants chant “UCK” (“Kosovo Liberation Army”; KLA), “Constitutional Court violates the Constitution,” “Hands off from the land,” “No to new demarcation,” “International factor, don’t put pressure.”

The protesters, organized by the Albanian Alliance of Historians of Kosovo, accused Visoki Decani hegumen Sava Janjic of “conducting propaganda.” The protesters said the Serbian Orthodox Church monastery, a UNESCO site, is a part of “cultural and historic heritage of Kosovo Albanians.”

A member of the Albanian Alliance of Historians of Kosovo, Shkodran Imeraj, said that the ruling was contrary to the Kosovo Constitution and called on the government and the assembly to declare the property of two companies, Apiko and Ilirija, as the property of the Decani municipality.

He wants the Constitutional Court to withdraw the decision and its president to resign “for legalizing decisions from the times of violent measures made during the 90s that were discriminatory and anti-national for Albanians from Kosovo.”

He said that hegumen Sava’s statements and stances were of a “highly warring” nature, representing “an announcement of his plan to destabilize general circumstances in Decani.”

Imeraj also claimed that the monastery was “not attacked by Albanians because it is a structure of cultural and historic heritage of Albanians.”

“The malicious propaganda of Sava Janjic is evident not only in this case... the whole time he has been calling on Serbian nationalist against the Albanian people in Decani and Kosovo. He and his friends should know that the monastery of Decani was built by Albanians themselves.”

Hegumen Janjic on Thursday recommended that Serbs delay their travel to Decani, due to the announced protest by “the historians of Kosovo.” He also published a video from the protest”.

**Source:**

<http://inserbia.info/today/2015/12/kosovo-albanian-protesters-claim-serb-monastery-as-their-heritage/>

## **Seizure of a church in Ukraine (UKRAINE)**

**December 27, 2015.** Priests of the so-called “Kyiv Patriarchate” and a group of radicals of the “Right Sector” took by force the church of Saint Nicholas in the village Zhytomyr Kolodyanka (Ukraine), as the official website of Moscow Patriarchate reports.

Archpriest Stefan Markiewicz, dean of Novograd Volyn district of Zhytomyr diocese of the Transfiguration, told about it to the Union of Orthodox Journalists.

According to the priest, the representatives of the “Right Sector” were waiting in several cars at the entrance of the village on Sunday morning on 27th December. Father Stefan says, “As soon as they saw our car they followed us to the church. Then, about 50 representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate went to the temple and took it. A few dozen of radicals from the Right Sector watched their actions”.

The believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church built the Church of St. Nicholas in the village Kolodenka 20 years ago. The religious community was registered in 1992. Supporters of the so-called “Kyiv Patriarchate” started agitating the village when the construction of the new church was completed and the dissenters came from Novograd Volyn and neighbouring areas, as father Stephen says. In their speeches, they used standard arguments that sound almost every day on television. Because of those speeches they managed to have several supporters who applied for registration of their community.

The priest said that the action of the “Kyiv Patriarchate” urged the Head of the Sector for religions and nationalities of Zhytomyr State Administration Alexander Pivovarsky to visit them on 25th December. He said to the conflicting parties that the legal resolution of the conflict can take a long time.

Now, the activists of “Kyiv Patriarchate” set the locks on the gates of the church fence and of the gate of the temple, and put their own protection.

On 28th December in Novograd Volyn district, the local council attempted to discuss the situation that has developed around the new church. According to archpriest Stefan Markiewicz, the chairman of the local council Mr Rudnicki, responded to the representatives of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church who suggested to solve the dispute according to the law: “Why do we need this law, let’s vote and that’s all.”

The representatives of the community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were pushed to depose the issue through a referendum but they did not accept it. Church dean of Novograd Volyn Preobrazhensky District says that “in

the village there are about 300 households, but only 25 believers attend the church regularly, all the others, in their own words, come to the church once or twice a year.” “Today we were pushed to allow the dissenters to legitimize their illegal actions, said the dean. – And all this in the presence of representatives of the Security Service, the police, inside of a public institution. We refused strongly and we will apply to the court. We sent a statement to the Ministry of Interior of the violation of our rights under Article 161 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine.”

On 18th December, the dissenters and the radicals of the “Right Sector” had gathered at the temple with the requirement to transfer the church building to the Kyiv Patriarchate. In order to avoid a large conflict, the representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church agreed to close the church and to address the problem in a legal process. However, a week later, the “Kyiv Patriarchate” violated the agreement.

#### Source

<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4311369.html>

## A. Reaction of the Local Orthodox Churches and the State authorities to the violation of the freedom of assembly of the Orthodox Christians.

**The Diocese of Ras and Prizren (Kosovo) published the communiqué on statements of the Albanian press concerning the church of Christ the Savior in Pristina (KOSOVO TERRITORY)**

**February 6, 2015.** The Diocese of Ras and Prizren (Kosovo) published the Communiqué regarding statements of the Albanian press

concerning the construction of the church of Christ the Savior in Pristina.

Some texts published in certain media of Kosovo in Albanian language claim for the innumerable time that the cathedral of Christ the Savior in the center of Pristina is built illegally and, therefore, must be destroyed. The Diocese of Ras and Prizren of the Serbian Orthodox Church, on this occasion, stresses

again that the construction of the mentioned church began on the land that is the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church, according to the existing legal procedures at that time. The diocese has detailed documentation with permissions and extracts of the cadasters proving that any statement about an alleged illegal construction is unfounded. The construction of the church began in the full agreement with the institutions of the state and of the regional authorities, as well as with the direction of the University of Pristina, located in the proximal distance. No complaints were expressed in relation to the construction under question. If it is claimed that this construction must be again legalized, it must be valid for all buildings built at that time in accordance with legal standards then in effect. The selective interpretation of the law to the detriment of the Serbian Orthodox Church is more a matter of discrimination on ethnic or religious basis than of any legislation.

The construction of the church of Christ the Savior began in 1992, while approximately 40,000 Serbs lived in Pristina. Since the Serbian Orthodox Church had only a small church, insufficient to cover the needs of the faithful, the construction of a larger church was needed. The claim that the construction of this church was politically motivated is a provocation. Indeed, the idea of building a church was promoted by bishop of Ras and Prizren Paul, future Patriarch of Serbia, which received the approval of the institutions, competent then for this project. In addition, the land on which is located the unfinished church of Christ the Savior in central Pristina is still in cadastral possession of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which proves the last extract from the cadaster of Kosovo got in 2012. So all the speculation about an alleged illegal construction of this church is unfounded and constitutes an

attempt to undue political exploitation of this issue.

The Bishop of Ras and Prizren in time provided all the documents relating to the construction of that church and the ownership of the land to all international institutions in Kosovo and Metohija, and is ready to defend its rights by all legal means. Any attack against the church will be an attack against the Serbian Orthodox Church itself, whose rights are clearly defined.

**Source:**

[http://www.spc.rs/sr/saopshtenje\\_za\\_javnost\\_eparhije\\_rashkoprizrenske\\_1](http://www.spc.rs/sr/saopshtenje_za_javnost_eparhije_rashkoprizrenske_1)

### **Orthodox believers ask Poroshenko to protect churches from illegal takeovers (UKRAINE)**

**May 25, 2015.** Parishioners of the Rovno Diocese turn to Ukrainian President Pyotr Poroshenko with the request to protect them as Rovno diocese reports.

“Parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the only canonical Orthodox church in the state, have become victims of the disgusting and terrific phenomenon – illegal church takeover,” they say in their open letter addressed to Poroshenko and posted by the Rovno Diocese website.

Over 900 residents living in certain villages of the regions signed the letter, they pointed out to the facts of forceful takeovers of the churches, saying that “representatives of the so-called Kyiv Patriarchate” attacked church communities.

“They spread rumors that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church supports separatism. Though in fact they are separatists as they separate Ukrainians, by deceit force them to change confession, create hostility between



branches of Orthodox faith and call our Orthodox Church hostile to the Ukrainian state,” the letter reads.

“How can we speak about approaching to Europe, when Middle Age savagery and disregard of basic human rights reign in the very heart of Ukraine?” local residents wonder.

They urge Poroshenko “to prove that Ukraine has started living on principles of legality and morals,” and asked “to prevent terrific plague of religious separatism.”

**Source:**

[http://www.rivne-pravoslavne.org.ua/парафіяни-рівненської-єпархії-прося/#.VnA3fb\\_70zt](http://www.rivne-pravoslavne.org.ua/парафіяни-рівненської-єпархії-прося/#.VnA3fb_70zt)

**Russian Foreign Ministry speaks of OSCE's lack of action toward seizure of churches of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)**

**December 29, 2015.** The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia is worried about the situation surrounding the Assumption church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the village of Ptichya in the Rovno region and calls on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to assess appropriately the Kyiv authorities' attitude towards the seizure of churches belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Below we provide the full text “*Comment by the Information and Press Department on a recent attack by Ukrainian radical nationalists on the Dormition Cathedral near Rovno*”

Russia is seriously alarmed by the situation regarding the Dormition Cathedral of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the village of Ptichye near Rovno. The church and its parishioners have been attacked by the followers of the non-

canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate and members of the Right Sector, who demand that the church be turned over to the sectarians.

We are convinced that these events in the Rovno region are the result of consistent attempts to cover up infringements on the freedom of religion and the rights of believers by the Ukrainian authorities. Despite serious tensions, the OSCE leadership and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (OSCE SMM) have not reacted appropriately.

The SMM obviously regarded as sufficient its “vague” account of events presented in the December 24 report for media and the public, according to which they “did not observe significant incidents” and could not “confirm the occurrence of any serious clashes or injuries.” We would like to note that the SMM observers relied on information provided by “an interlocutor from the local police,” which they did not bother verifying. We recommend that the SMM discuss this issue with the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) to get an objective picture of the situation in that and other Orthodox churches in Ukraine.

In our opinion, the OSCE should characterise Kyiv's stance regarding the seizure of the churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) as a violation of Kyiv's international commitments in the sphere of human rights.

**Source:**

[http://www.mid.ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2003393?p\\_p\\_id=101\\_INSTANCE\\_cKNonkJE02Bw&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_cKNonkJE02Bw\\_languageId=en\\_GB](http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2003393?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB)

## Chapter 6: Acts of Vandalism and Desecration against Orthodox Worship and Sacred Places.

In 2015 the Center observed incidents of vandalism and desecration in Orthodox churches which hinder to faithful to exercise the right of freedom of worship (*Art.9, ECHR*).

### Vandalism at an Orthodox site (ALBANIA)

**January 3, 2015.** Unknown persons destroyed a cross in a small Orthodox site in Himara (Albania) reports Romfea. This place is dedicated to the dead persons who lost their life in 1990. Vandals destroyed also the religious monument which was dedicated to Saint Kosmas who passed by this place in 18th century. The monuments were made from strong materials but it wasn't enough to protect them. This happened after the decision of the Albanian government to unite two regions – one with Muslim population and the other with Orthodox Christians.

#### Source:

<http://orthodoxrights.org/vandalism-at-an-orthodox-site-in-albania.html>

### Desecration of an Orthodox church (FRANCE)

**January 10, 2015.** The French police started the investigation of the desecration of the main entrance of the former St. Anne Catholic church which since June 2014 became a Romanian Orthodox church (Route de Lorient, Rennes, France) reports Ouest-France. Two large flower pots, posed on the both sides of the main entrance to the church, were deliberately fallen and broken at night. In

front of the door and on the door itself there were drawn inverted crosses, anti-Christian symbols.

#### Source:

<http://www.ouest-france.fr/rennes-des-degradations-cette-nuit-devant-une-eglise-orthodoxe-3105521>

### An Orthodox church in Lipljan vandalized with KLA graffiti (KOSOVO TERRITORY)

**January 10, 2015.** Graffiti of Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) appeared on the walls of the Orthodox church of Saint Flora and Lavre in Lipljan on Saturday morning, and the police and the Diocese of Raska and Prizren have been notified about the incident as reports tanjug.rs.

President of the church municipality of Lipljan Zoran Simijonovic said that citizens notified him about the graffiti at around 8 a.m. that morning, after which the police were called to inspect the area immediately. According to him, citizens are distraught although no inter-ethnic problems in the area have been recorded lately. We did not see something like this coming and we are worried about potential new incidents, Simijonovic said.

Lipljan priest Slavisa Spasic said that the appearance of the graffiti on the church walls was a distressing experience for Lipljan citizens and Serbs. No incidents involving the Orthodox church happened until now and no problems ever occurred here before, Spasic said.

Chief of the Kosovo Administrative District

Srdjan Petkovic noted that Lipljan citizens are frightened and that they did not wish to appear in front of reporters' cameras because they are afraid of potential retaliation.

**Source:**

<http://orthodoxrights.org/an-orthodox-church-in-lipljan-vandalized-with-kla-graffiti.html>

## **Arson attack on an Orthodox church in Kyiv (UKRAINE)**

**January 21, 2015.** An attempt to set fire in the church dedicated to the icon of Mother of God called "Joy of All Who Sorrow" of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) took place in the National historical memorial reserve "Babi Yar" in Shevchenko district of Kyiv, as reports UNIAN-Religion.

The rector of the damaged church archpriest Sergei Temnik said that attackers had thrown six petrol bombs, hopefully only three of them had ignited. The altar side of the church was damaged by fire.

In the morning watchman heard a loud explosion and immediately called the police. He saw three men walking near the church who left the place. The watchman stopped the fire with an extinguisher. 5 minutes later the police arrived and investigation was launched. The attackers were aiming to set the fire to the wooden construction under the roof – said the rector. According to father Sergius, a wall of the refectory of the church was also sprinkled with petrol.

"The attackers left evidence of their criminal actions that was found by the police. The size of the material damage is to be established," – said archpriest S.Temnik.

Previously, the alike incident took place in the same church on the 3rd of December, 2014.

Photo documents from personal archive of archpriest Sergei Temnik

**Sources:**

<http://religions.unian.net/orthodoxy/1036253-v-Kyive-neizvestnyie-brosili-shest-kokteyley-molotova-v-hram-upts-v-babem-yaru-foto.html>

<http://www.babiy-yar.org/#!/sobitiya/cymc>

## **Orthodox Church of St.Procopius attacked and desecrated in Visoko (BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA)**

**January 22, 2015.** The Orthodox Church in Visoko, which was declared a national treasure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, has been vandalized – the outside walls were desecrated by graffiti with anti Serbian and offensive content, as reports klix.ba and There Must be Justice.

Parish priest and elders of the church of St. Procopius, Marko Jakovljevic confirms that the police did an investigation, and that the first information shows that the church was "invaded by children", according to the footprints found on the spot.

Certainly, children could not write the graffiti, and adults did it. There were, obviously more groups according to the signs and symbols of coats of arms more football teams.

The unknown persons, who entered the church through the window, have scattered the items that were in the altar, and Jakovljevic said that nothing was stolen and that their goal was just to inflict damage.

Investigation was performed by Police Department Visoko, police officers came to the conclusion that the two underage boys, born in 2000, may be related to these crimes, civil protection service cleaned the graffiti and repaired the damage.

Church of Saint Procopius in Visoko was declared a National monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the decision of the Commission to preserve national monuments on March 8, 2004.

Inscriptions in Bosnian “You should all be castrated (in order) not to reproduce”, “Dead chetnik (Serb) is good chetnik”.

#### Sources:

<http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/visoko-policija-pronasla-djecake-koji-su-provalili-u-crkvu-i-ispisali-uvredljive-grafite/150123073>

<https://theremustbejustice.wordpress.com/2015/01/22/the-orthodox-church-of-st-procopius-in-visoko-bosnia-and-herzegovina-attacked-and-desecrated/>

### **Inscriptions on Orthodox churches (GREECE)**

**February 5, 2015.** The diocese of Arta (Greece), expresses its strong protest to the authorities of the region for the sacrilege action against the church of Saint George of Arta says Romfea. Unknown persons wrote slogans on the wall of the church. The diocese expressed also the objections and the resentment of the Church council and all the parishioners. The council called the authorities: (the major and the police) to take measures so as to stop desecrations of Orthodox churches which happens often in Arta.

#### Source :

<http://orthodoxrights.org/inscriptions-on-orthodox-churches-in-greece.html>

### **Chapel at Orthodox cemetery destroyed, graves desecrated, busts stolen in Northern Kosovska Mitrovica (KOSOVO TERRITORY)**

**February 14, 2015.** On the eve of the great

feast of the Presentation of Jesus Christ at the Temple, several hundreds of Serbs from northern Kosovska Mitrovica visited an Orthodox cemetery in the southern part of the city. They arrived by buses and by cars with the police escort, as reports inserbia.info.

Archpriest Milija Arsovic said: “You can see that there is absolutely nothing good here. People came here today in large numbers, to this sacred cemetery, because many pious people are buried here, and they did not deserve this to be done to them. Simply, I have been coming here for 15 years with these people and I can say that every time we come we find the situation worse”.

The chapel at the cemetery was also destroyed. More than 70 percent of gravestones at the cemetery was destroyed or desecrated after the conflict ended in 1999.

#### Source:

<http://inserbia.info/today/2015/02/kosovo-chapel-at-orthodox-cemetery-destroyed-graves-desecrated-busts-stolen/>

### **The desecration of an Orthodox Church (CROATIA)**

**February 16, 2015.** In the night from the 14th to 15th of February, on the eve of the great feast of the Presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Temple, unknown persons violated the Serbian Orthodox cathedral of Saint Nikolas in Carlovac in Croatia, as The Information Service of the Serbian Orthodox Church reports. They caused damages in the altar, stole all crosses and broke all the worship objects related to the sacrament of baptism.

According to the Serbian Orthodox Church, such attacks took place previously several times. For example, in 2014 the attackers wrote on the walls of the church threats and



offensive words. The representatives of the Serbian Church complained to the Croatian authorities but the perpetrators are not still found.

**Source:**

[http://www.spc.rs/sr/napad\\_na\\_saborni\\_hram\\_u\\_karlovcu](http://www.spc.rs/sr/napad_na_saborni_hram_u_karlovcu)

## **Two Serbian Orthodox cemeteries desecrated (KOSOVO TERRITORY)**

**February 20, 2015.** The incidents happened in the villages of Krusevac near Obilic and of Donji Livoc near Gnjilane, as report b92 and the Serbian Orthodox Church's Raska-Prizren Diocese.

In Krusevac, tombstones were torn down, covered with garbage, plastic and rubber, and then set on fire. The diocese said that the photographs taken by its priests show that the tombstones were completely destroyed.

The diocese condemned the incidents in the strongest terms, expressing deep regret that the practice of desecration of Serb graves in Kosovo and Metohija continues.

RTV puls is reporting that in Donji Livoc, the grave of Gradimir Milosavljevic, buried in 1998, was desecrated and exhumated.

Speaking about the cemetery desecration, Kosovo police spokesperson Ismet Hasani said that they were "aware of the case" and had launched an investigation in cooperation with the public prosecutor.

He added that a pathologist from Pristina would examine the crime scene, "after which it will be known what was taken from the tomb."

The Serbian government's Office for Kosovo-Metohija (KiM) condemned the desecration of cemeteries in the Serb villages of Krusevac

and Donji Livoc and urged the competent authorities in the southern Serbian province to find and punish those responsible in order to finally put an end to such vandalism.

It is with great regret that we have to acknowledge the fact that a decade and a half since the incident in Krusevac, the authorities in Pristina and the international community have still not found a way to put an end to this vandalism which is unlike anything else in the civilized world, the Office for KiM said in a release.

"Such failure to act is an indirect message to that small number of people who hold nothing sacred that attacks on Serb cemeteries, Serb churches and monasteries, such as last week's robbery of the Temple of Saint Demetrius in Susica, are welcome," the statement said.

The Office for KiM called on the international community and authorities in Pristina to find and punish the perpetrators and not to allow a small group of individuals to cause damage to their reputation, because all these incidents not only undermine the spirit of multiculturalism in Kosovo-Metohija but also compromise all efforts to normalize relations and make normal coexistence in the province possible.

**Sources:**

<http://www.eparhija-prizren.com/sr/vesti/oskrnavljeno-srpsko-pravoslavno-groblje-u-selu-krusevac>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wi7bukOc7Vs>

## **Destruction of Church equipment (ALBANIA)**

**March 2, 2015.** In Tirana (Albania), the authorities decided to violate the territory of the Orthodox Cathedral destroying the iron railings and uprooting the trees and

the plants of the north side of the building, reports Romfea and Himara. This arbitrary intervention took place without any formal and preliminary announcement from the Albanian authorities.

With this action the Cathedral is becoming a public place by putting in danger the safety of the building and the propriety of the Church. The land where the Cathedral is built doesn't belong to the State but it's a private propriety which is registered according to Albanian legislation.

The spokesman of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania Mr Thomas Demas said that the Cathedral is in danger after this violation of the building. He claimed that the argument of the Albanian Ministry of Culture that they interfered only for the renovation of the Monuments in Tirana is not serious but an excuse as the Church is the owner of the specific land. He added also that in the basement of the building there is very expensive equipment which is now without protection and can be stolen. Mr Demas finally mentioned that this action is against the law 10057/22.1.2009 (Agreement between the Cabinet and the Church) which guarantees the respect and the protection of the worship places of the Orthodox Church in Albania.

**Source:**

<http://himara.gr/4209-diamartyria-tis-orthodoksi-aftokefalis-ekklisias-tis-alvanias>

### **An ancient Orthodox church of Luhansk region damaged by shelling (UKRAINE)**

**March 6, 2015.** The Orthodox Trinity Church, located in the village of Troitskoye in the Popasnaya District of Ukraine's Luhansk Region, was seriously damaged as a result of

shelling, report the Severodonetsk Diocese and Interfax.

The shells hit the church roof, causing major damage to the altar, icons and walls, according to a report posted on the website of the Severodonetsk Diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate's Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The Trinity Church, built in 1840, is one of the largest and oldest Orthodox churches in the Luhansk Region.

All in all, 12 churches of the Severodonetsk Diocese have been damaged since the conflict erupted in the south-east of Ukraine in April 2014.

**Sources:**

<http://sed-eparhia.com/78-novosti/980-vsledstvie-boevykh-dejstvij-postradal-svyato-troitskij-khram-s-troitskoe.html>

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=11883>

### **Orthodox memorial crosses desecrated in the Nikolayev region (UKRAINE)**

**March 7, 2015.** During the night, unidentified persons desecrated Orthodox memorial crosses in the Pervomaisk and Arbuzynka administrative districts of the Ukraine's Nikolayev region, reports the Moscow Patriarchate Voznesensk Diocese's press service.

Thus, a memorial cross at the border between the Pervomaisk and Arbuzynka districts was cut down by the vandals who poured flammable liquid on it and set it on fire. The cross, glory be to God, has escaped damage.

The culprits also felled another memorial cross that stood on the highway near the Semenivka village of the Arbuzynka district, poured the flammable liquid on it and set it alight. Nearby they dropped leaflets calling "to

free the country from spiritual slavery”.

The ruling bishop already not for the first time appealed to the law-enforcement agencies in order to identify the circumstances of commission of the crime, reports the diocese's website.

On December 30, 2014, similar acts of vandalism were committed: unidentified people felled two memorial crosses that stood at the road near the villages Mygiya and Semenivka.

**Source:**

<http://voznensky-church.in.ua/arkhierejskoe-sluzhenie/ocherednye-akty-vandalizma-na-territorii-voznenskoy-eparkhii>

## **8 Damaged Orthodox Churches in the Lugansk region (UKRAINE)**

**March 8, 2015.** According to the information available on the official web site of the Head of the Lugansk Regional Military and Civil Administration Gennadiy Moskal, for the period of military actions in the eastern part of Ukraine eight churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) were damaged on the territory of Lugansk Region controlled by the Ukrainian army. Most of the churches have broken windows, damaged facades and roofs. Some of the churches were damaged seriously after the direct shelling of the artillery and missiles.

List of the damaged churches:

1. Saint Elijah Church in Lysychansks (damaged roof, crack in a wall);
2. Church in honour of Three Holy Hierarchs in Popasna (numerous damages from shelling of the walls and the dome, the roof of the parish house is holed);

3. Saint Nicholas church in Popasna (broken windows);

4. Saint Nicholas church in the village of Gubovske Popasniansky District (numerous wall damages caused by shelling);

5. Holy Trinity church in the village of Troyitske Popasniansky District (holed roof, destroyed altar and icons);

6. Saint Nicholas church and Seraphim of Sarov chapel in the village of Novotoshivka Popasniansky District (numerous wall damages caused by shelling);

7. Saint Pantaleon chapel in the village of Toshivka Popasniansky District (numerous wall damages caused by shelling);

8. The Intercession of the Theotokos (Pokrov) church in the village of Triokhizbenka (broken windows, damaged walls after the direct hit of a missile).

**Source:**

[http://www.moskal.in.ua/?category=news&news\\_id=1550](http://www.moskal.in.ua/?category=news&news_id=1550)

## **Vandalism against the historical church of Mother of God (Kapnikarea) in Athens (GREECE)**

**March 14, 2015.** An act of vandalism against the historical church of Mother of God (Kapnikarea) was committed in Athens as reports protothema.gr. A group of 200 people was going to the ancient center of Athens, Monastiraki, demonstrating for the rights of migrants. The group consisted of 30 Greeks and 170 migrants. The crowd stopped outside of the church of Mother of God and of Saint Barbara and one of the Greeks jumped in the yard and wrote with a spray on the wall of the church: “We are breaking silence; we are getting out in the streets”.

The people who saw his action negatively reacted to it, trying to stop the young man. But he continued to write on the wall and then answered aggressively that “he will do whatever he wants”. People were afraid and didn’t continue any conversation with him.

The church of Mother of God and of Saint Barbara, known as “Holy Church of the University”, was built in the 11th century and belongs to the University of Athens. The archaeological service of Athens was informed and the experts will clean its wall from the colors.

#### Source:

<http://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/460163/vandalisan-kai-tin-istoriki-ekklisia-tis-panagias-kapnikarea-stin-ermou/>

### Desecration of a historical church in Athens (GREECE)

**March 16, 2015.** The desecration of the historical church of Saint Anargyri, which is located near to the Faculty of Law in Athens (in Solonos Street), happened early in the morning as reports Kathimerini.gr. The Faculty has been illegally taken over by 200 anarchists who burnt cars and desecrated the church. The Church is a metochi (representation) of the famous Petraki Monastery which has existed for more than 1000 years, and is located next to the building of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece in Athens. The public prosecutor’s office of district and judges of the court of first instance of Athens (Greece) started the prosecution against persons, who made this desecration. The public prosecutor’s office called this action as unprecedented.

The head of the prosecuting department Mr. Elias Zagoraios asked directly the communication of the files and the criminal prosecution against unknown persons for:

1) theft of items which are dedicated to the religious worship from a specific religious place, 2) damages, 3) arson, 4) disrupting of the operation of Law school, 5) illegal carrying and usage of weapons (misdemeanor).

The files were divided in two parts. Those, which concern the criminal action, were sent to the Interrogation, while the others about the misdemeanors were sent to the Hellenic police in order to find and arrest the perpetrators. The police officers are called to act according to the law about the “flagrant torts” so as to prevent any other similar crime.

#### Sources:

<http://www.kathimerini.gr/807523/article/epikairothta/ellada/mhnysh-gia-thn-katalhyh-ths-nomikhs-kate8ese-o-prytanhs>

<http://www.vimaorthodoxias.gr/eipan/item/55881-ανήμερα-της-σταυροπροσκυνήσεως-πρωτόγνωροι-βανδαλισμοί-στους-αγ-αναργύρους-σόλωνος-και-μασσαλίας-φωτο>

### An Orthodox cemetery destroyed by heavy shelling near Donetsk (UKRAINE)

**March 20, 2015.** Ukraine president Poroshenko’s assistant Yury Biryukov has published on his Facebook page a video of heavy shelling of the Orthodox cemetery in the Monastery of Mother of God Iverskaya that took place in fall 2014 near Donetsk (eastern Ukraine), as reports Zvezda.

The publishing of this recording caused an outrage among Internet users. Most of all, because of the cynical comments about explosions. After a wave of angry comments Biryukov deleted video from his page.

#### Source:

[http://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane\\_i\\_mire/content/201503200912-eo8j.htm](http://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201503200912-eo8j.htm)



## **People in masks desecrate an Orthodox church in the Kyiv Region (UKRAINE)**

**April 4, 2015.** Unidentified people in military uniform raided the Transfiguration Church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the village of Gusintsy, the Kyiv Region, Ukraine as reports the website “The Orthodox life”.

“Group of armed men in masks introduced themselves as officials of the Ukrainian Security Service and performed a search, desecrating church shrines. For instance, they disassembled the holy altar,” the UOC reports at its website.

The raiders did not provide any documents or orders allowing them to perform a search. They explained their actions saying they were searching for weapon allegedly hidden in the church.

### **Sources:**

<http://pravlife.org/content/4-aprelya-v-lazarevu-subbotu-byl-oskvernyon-svyato-preobrazhenskiy-hram-v-s-gusincy-chto-na>

<http://news.church.ua/2015/04/06/pid-privodom-poshuku-zbroji-nevidomimi-u-vijskovij-formi-skojeno-narugu-nad-prestolom-starovinnogo-xramu-u-kijivskij-oblasti/>

## **Orthodox church set on fire in Volyn region (UKRAINE)**

**May 25, 2015.** Unknown individuals have set fire to a hospital church built in honor of holy martyr Panteleimon in the city of Kovel, Volyn Region of Ukraine. The incident occurred in the early hours of May 24. Fire was set to the building on two sides. The firefighters, who were called by an eyewitness, managed to extinguish the fire, the press service for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has reported.

The church was not damaged, but the fire damaged the Sunday school building located in the basement.

The diocese says a local paper had published an article calling for one of Koval’s hospital churches to be given to the self-proclaimed Kyiv Patriarchate the week before the incident.

### **Source:**

<http://news.church.ua/2015/05/24/volinska-oblast-u-koveli-nevidomimi-bulo-pidpaleno-likarnyanij-xram/>

## **Vandals smashed an Orthodox worship cross near Sochi (RUSSIA)**

**May 28, 2015.** The big crucifix situated between Dagomys and Uch-Dere (Sochi region), is found broken down.

It seems that the cross was hit with a sledgehammer. Furthermore, the vandals painted on the pedestal of the cross in red color the hammer and sickle, soviet symbols.

“The Lord protects the people who live in Dagomys, who could make it, I have no idea. It was the Day of Slavic Literature and Culture, perhaps this vandalism was timed on this occasion” - says rector of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God church of Dagomys archpriest Alexander.

The motives for the crimes are not clear. A criminal investigation has already been opened.

### **Source :**

<http://orthodoxrights.org/vandals-smashed-an-orthodox-worship-cross-near-sochi.html>

## **Desecration of an Orthodox church in Cormeilles-en-Parisis (FRANCE)**

**June 1, 2015.** The Orthodox church of Saint Nikolas, which is located in the retirement home in Cormeilles-en-Parisis (commune Val-d'Oise, department Ile-de-France, Northern France), was desecrated by perpetrators who stole liturgical items and icons as reports the website [exarchat.eu](http://exarchat.eu). The unknown persons made damages to the church.

The police was informed by inhabitants of the retirement home about the incident and started investigation. The police officers took the fingerprints of the unknown persons and examined the situation with the rest liturgical equipment.

The reaction of His Eminence Archbishop of Telmesos Job (Patriarchate of Constantinople) was immediate. He condemned the desecration and asked from the rectors of all churches and chapels, which is under his spiritual jurisdiction to take measures in order to protect the churches and the liturgical equipment. For this reason, he asked from the rectors to write down in a catalogue every liturgical item and all the icons that belong to their churches.

**Source:**

<http://www.exarchat.eu/spip.php?article1691>

## **Two Orthodox churches vandalized in Kyiv region (UKRAINE)**

**June 9, 2015.** Vandals have attacked two churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the town of Vasilkov outside Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital.

The incidents occurred in the early hours. Vandals tried to break the door of the St.

Nicholas Church and smashed windows in its alter section, the UOC said on its website.

At the Church in honor of St. Antonius and St. Theodosius of the Caves, the miscreants again smashed windows in the alter section and caused significant damage to a stained-glass window with the image of Christ.

“It is obvious that this is yet another provocation aimed against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church,” Bishop Nikolay of Vasilkov wrote on his Facebook page.

The photo documents from the mitropolia. Kyiv.ua website

**Source:**

<http://mitropolia.Kyiv.ua/skoyeni-akti-vandalizmu-shhodo-dvox-xramiv-u-misti-vasilkiv/>

## **Attack on an Orthodox Church building in Istanbul (TURKEY)**

**June 9, 2015.** In the early evening hours of this day, a man, who appeared to be in his 20s, threw a lit Molotov cocktail at a wooden side door of the Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Kadıköy, Istanbul, (Turkey) according to witnesses at the scene as reports Morning Star News. He then stood outside the door screaming “Allah Akbar (God is greater)” as the flames spread upwards.

As police arrived and took the assailant into custody, he screamed out, “Revenge will be taken for Al-Aqsa Mosque,” an apparent reference to one of Sunni Islam’s holiest sites, located in the Old City of Jerusalem. Police have not released the name of the man taken into custody. It is not known if any charges have been filed against him, if he has been released or if he is under medical or psychological care.

No one was injured in the attack on Holy

Trinity and the damage to the building was repaired in two days. The faithful believe that the assailant, who was arrested and declared by the police as a person with psychological disorder, was pressured to commit the attack by a group who wants to provoke religious, ethnic and political problems in Turkey.

Foto and video documents from haberler.com

#### Source:

<http://morningstarnews.org/2015/06/christians-shaken-after-attack-on-their-church-building-in-istanbul-turkey/>

### **Sacrilege in the prison Orthodox Chapel (RUSSIA)**

**June 18, 2015.** The website pravoslavie.ru informed about the violations of the orthodox prisoners' rights at correctional colony no. 3 in Kabardino-Balkaria (Russian Federation). The administration of the prison prevents the orthodox priest from visiting the facility. The monk priest Igor (Vasiliyev) is supervising the prisoners of the colony for more than 10 years now. For his activity he was even awarded with a medal of the Russian Federal Penitentiary Service three years ago.

However, according to father Igor, last year he was not allowed to visit prisoners for Easter. Moreover, he was charged with an offence for the attempted bringing of alcohol in the prison (wine that was supposed to be used at the liturgy). The kulichi (traditional Easter breads) which he brought with him were all destroyed by the staff of the prison. He was not allowed to enter the prison for Epiphany and for the Bright Week either.

In spite of the assurances of the State officials not to allow such situations in the future, the reality looked otherwise: as stated by father Igor, the altar of the prison chapel was

searched without warning by the staff of the colony, so that the altar cloth, the cloth of the prothesis as well as the sacred vessels had been desecrated. Father Igor also reported about a disappearance of the hard disc drive, which contained collection of the religious books, films and preachings.

#### Source:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/80068.html>

### **The third time non-identified persons vandalized the territory of the Orthodox spring in Lipetsk (RUSSIA)**

**July 1, 2015.** Attackers vandalized the territory of the Orthodox spring located close to the Holy Dormition Monastery in the city of Lipetsk (Russia) as the web-site of the Lipetsk metropolia reports.

The attackers burned the wooden dressing room, broke down the cross, established over the font. In addition, the attackers left on the neighbor wall to the spring the inscription, indicating that they belong to a neo-Nazi organization. Around twenty Orthodox icons were burned in the wooden dressing room. According to Andrew, one of the Orthodox donators, in recent months non-identified persons had broken down several icons of the Savior, the Mother of God and the saints at the source. In general, this is the third attack on the spring by the vandals. In 2013, they had already broken the crucifix and damaged icons. In December last year, attackers smashed the iconostasis and dropped it into the water.

Holy spring, named after the Mother of God "Life-giving Spring", located next to the ancient monastery of the Lipetsk Region – Holy Dormition Monastery. This place is venerated and beloved by many Orthodox faithful who

come here to take water and to plunge into the water. The source and the area around have been equipped on the public initiative and on the small private donations of the faithful.

**Source:**

<http://mitropolia-lip.ru/index.php/lipetskaya-mitropoliya.-novosti/v-lipetske-vandaly-vnov-napali-na-istochnik-okolo-svyato-uspenskogo-muzhskogo-monastyrya.html>

## **Desecration of an Orthodox church (KOSOVO TERRITORY)**

**July 4, 2015.** Unknown perpetrators desecrated the Orthodox church of St. Petka in the village of Drsnik in central Kosovo-Metohijam as reports by inserbia.info. The Orthodox Church was broken into, money from it stolen and its icons vandalized.

The Minister for Communities and Return of Kosovo Mr. D. Jevtić, urged the authorities to arrest and to punish the perpetrators. In his written statement, the Minister said that the attack on the Church of St. Petka was an attack on all Serb returnees in the Klinja municipality and called for greater respect and for better protection of all the religious sites. He also underlined that such incidents have happened in the past and he asked from the authorities to prevent any future attacks by giving the names of the vandals in public.

**Source:**

<http://inserbia.info/today/2015/07/kosovo-orthodox-church-in-drsnik-desecrated/>

## **Orthodox cross vandalized again at Russian Royal family memorial (RUSSIA)**

**July 9, 2015.** In Ekaterinburg (Russia), a week before the 97th anniversary of the murders

of Emperor Nicholas II and his family, the memorial cross which marks the spot where the remains of Tsesarevich Alexei and Grand Duchess Maria were discovered has been vandalized for the third time, as reports Royal Russia.

The vandals had ripped the memorial cross from the ground and thrown it into the woods. The damaged memorial cross has been tied and nailed to a nearby tree. The State Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Sverdlovsk regional police have started an investigation. Mr. N. Neuimin, an employee of the Sverdlovsk Regional Historical Museum, verified that it is the third time that the memorial Cross is vandalized.

In June 2014, a resolution was passed by the Sverdlovsk regional government, designated the site where the remains of the family of Russia's last tsar Nicholas II and members of his family were found on the national cultural heritage list, and is now included in the state register of protected sites.

**Source:**

[http://www.angelfire.com/pa/ImperialRussian/blog/index.blog?entry\\_id=1468774](http://www.angelfire.com/pa/ImperialRussian/blog/index.blog?entry_id=1468774)

## **Attempt of destruction of an Orthodox church (ALBANIA)**

**August 21, 2015.** A very serious act of vandalism took place at the holy church of St. Athanasius in the town of Dhërmi. Unidentified persons driving cars without license plates destroyed the cement floor of the church during lunchtime. The moment was witnessed by the church priest, who is also a resident of Dhërmi. His life was put in danger when he was almost crushed to death while the unidentified persons were trying to flee the scene as reports Autocephalous Orthodox



Church of Albania in its press release.

The local ecclesiastical authority released a penal denunciation against this act of destruction of property and intentional attempt to cause an accident and increase social conflict.

The Orthodox faithful of Dhërmi were shocked by this harsh act of violence to their holy place and from its ongoing desecration and destruction. They strongly demand the state authorities to urgently react against the offenders and intervene to stop any other attempts of further destruction. The faithful are especially outraged by the attitude of the media and some individuals who are trying to politicize and legitimize the destruction and violence, and even to create pseudo-national discrepancy.

The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania condemns such acts of vandalism, which affect the property and freedom of religion. It calls the faithful to remain calm in the face of these provocations and to stand firm in defense of the Church. The Church requires the state to act on legal obligations contained within Law no. 10057 / 22.01.2009 / “On Ratification of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Albania and the Orthodox Church of Albania”, which guarantees the inviolability of places of worship and their protection by the state.

The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania will reconstruct the church of St. Athanasius in Dhërmi. According to law and court decisions, the church of St. Athanasius is not a cultural monument, but under the possession of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, and this is recognized by the Ministry of Culture and the Institute of Monuments. Therefore, the Church is the only authority recognized by law that can

undertake the establishment of Orthodox religious buildings.

#### Sources:

<http://orthodoxalbania.org/alb/index.php/en-us/lajme-3/blog/3541-the-church-of-st-athanasius-is-again-violated-and-the-life-of-the-priest-endangered>

<http://www.himara.gr/?view=entry&id=4702>

### **Shelling in Gorlovka caused serious damage to an Orthodox diocesan building (UKRAINE)**

**August 25, 2015.** In the town of Gorlovka in Donetsk region (Ukraine), a building of the Orthodox diocesan administration was damaged during shelling, as reports interfax.

According to the press release of the Gorlovka Orthodox Diocese blast and missile pieces damaged the fence, the glazing, the front doors, and the façade of the building. Several five-storey building and two compulsory schools are among the damaged buildings because of the shelling. Residents from other buildings of the neighbourhood were hospitalized with health problems.

#### Source:

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12266>

### **The Albanian church of Saint Athanasius was destroyed (ALBANIA)**

**August 26, 2015.** At around 4 o'clock in the morning, the Orthodox church of St. Athanasius was secretly and insidiously destroyed by construction inspection forces, which arrived from other areas of the country. The purpose was to avoid any conflicts with the residents of Dhermi in Himara. All the sacred utensils were buried under the rubble,

as reports Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania press service.

According to the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, this incident is a violation of the universal right of belief and secularism and a violation of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Albania and the Orthodox Church of Albania (Law no. 10057, 22.01.2009). Under this Law “Buildings and facilities which serve for religious ceremonies and services are considered sacred by the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania. The intervention of the state authorities is prohibited...” (Article 21 / 1, 2). The intervention was made without prior official or informal notification and the clergy were ignored. The hierarchical representatives, Protopresbyter Fr. Pandeli Mitru, Fr. Efthim Bixhili and Fr. Athanasius Kareem demanded an explanation by local authorities. After the first attempt of destruction of the church on 21st August, the Albanian State affirmed to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs that they would not go further. The Greek Ministry welcomed the commitment to respect for and full protection of the individual, religious and property rights of the minorities in Albania.

The local authorities claimed that the church was an illegal construction recently built. However, the church was erected by the faithful 20 years ago, in the same place where the old church had been destroyed by the Communist Regime. They said that it was not under the possession of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, but documents prove the opposite.

The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 26th August announced that “until now we have seen the destruction of sanctuaries, churches and sacred utensils only in Middle East and North Africa from djihadists. Today we saw it in our neighbour country”.

**Source:**

<http://orthodoxalbania.org/alb/index.php/en-us/lajme-3/blog/3545-press-release-the-orthodox-church-of-st-athanasius-was-destroyed-dhermi-drymades-himara>

## **Desecration of a Serbian Orthodox church (CROATIA)**

**August 27, 2015.** Unidentified person desecrated a Serbian orthodox church of Saint Nikolas in Karlovac (Croatia). According to the President of the Coalition of Refugee Associations Miodrag Linta who condemned strongly this action, it is the fourth break-in into the facility owned by the Serbian Orthodox Church. In his written statement to the media, Mr Linta underlines the indifference of the Croatian police and Prosecutor’s Office, as they do not sanction the anti-Serbian incidents. Mr Linta demanded from the EU to react with determination and invited the Zagreb government to put an end to the intolerance against Serbs as reports inserbia.info.

**Source :**

<http://inserbia.info/today/2015/08/croatia-orthodox-church-in-karlovac-desecrated/>

## **Protesters ruined a temporary chapel of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)**

**September 1, 2015.** A chapel of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was destroyed at the Mariinsky Park near the Supreme Rada in Kyiv. The protesters made vandalism by destroying even a wooden Cross, which was set there, as reports interfax.

Minister of the Interior Affairs Arsen Avakov accused the Svoboda party and its leader Oleg Tyagnibok of organizing clashes and according to unconfirmed info, the Svoboda party stands

behind the incident.

The Protesters demonstrated against the changes of the Constitution about the decentralization of power. Due to the clashes more than 120 law-enforcement officers and civil residents including representatives of mass media were injured and several men were killed.

**Source:**

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12279>

### **Vandals left insulting graffiti on a wall of a Kyiv church (UKRAINE)**

**October 2, 2015.** According to the press service of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), desecrators wrote on a church wall in Kyiv the inscription “Moscow priests go away”, as reports interfax.

It is underlined that it is not the first time that such hostile attitude is expressed by radical groups against the priests and the churches of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Earlier they set on fire the church of the Icon of Joy of All who Sorrow in the Babi Yar.

**Source:**

<http://mitropolia.Kyiv.ua/skoyeno-akt-vandalizmu-shhodo-xramu-u-obolonskomu-blagochinni/>

### **Desecration of the Orthodox worship place (RUSSIA)**

**October 6, 2015.** Police investigation started after the destruction of the worship cross near the construction site of an orthodox church in a village Loparskoye (Mourmansk region, Russia), as reports FlashNord information agency. The wooden cross was cut down with an axe.

The press service of the regional Department of Internal Affairs confirmed that they have already identified the attacker and they will proceed investigation of the motives of vandalism when he will be found” - said police spokesman Alexander Glushkov.

This is a second episode of desecration of orthodox worship place in this village, earlier a smaller cross was torn from its basement and stolen by local malefactor as reports arctic-tv.

**Source:**

<http://flashnord.com/news/v-murmanskoy-oblasti-srubili-poklonnyy-krest>

### **An Orthodox church was stoned (KOSOVO TERRITORY)**

**October 15, 2015.** In Orahovac (Kosovo), unknown persons started to throw stones in the courtyard of the church of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God, as the official website of the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate reports.

The incident took place after the Liturgy, which had been celebrated in this church on the church feast-day of the Protection of the Mother of God and while the children of the parish priest of Orahovac Revd. Velja Stojkovic were playing in the churchyard. According to an eyewitness, who also gave a statement to the police together with the priest, four Albanian young men carried out the attack while they were passing by the church, one of whom all of a sudden threw a stone at the gate of the churchyard. Young men escaped to the area of Orahovac that is inhabited by Kosovo Albanians.

The priest informed the Kosovo police about this incident right away, and the police started conducting an investigation.

Local administration considers such attack as planned and it “continues to create an atmosphere of fear and lawlessness”. Last year on October 14th, the same day of the Great Orthodox feast of Virgin Mary, Albanian extremists stoned the parish hall of the church, where the local parish priest lives with his family, as reports novosti.rs.

**Source:**

[http://www.spc.rs/eng/church\\_stoned\\_orahovac](http://www.spc.rs/eng/church_stoned_orahovac)

### **Arson prevented in an Orthodox monastery (UKRAINE)**

**October 26, 2015.** A church guard found bags for garbage buried in the ground when he was passing near the walls of the Protection Monastery in Kharkov (Ukraine). Those bags had five bottles with flame liquid, which were ‘Molotov cocktails’, as the information service of UOC of Moscow Patriarchate reports.

The priest Dionisy Zaloga, staff member of the Diocesan Administration, underlined that the officers believe that a terrorist act was prevented.

“Flame liquid was found in five-seven meters from the monastery wall, there are diocesan and monastery buildings, and the oldest in Kharkov the Protection Cathedral behind them. It proves that unidentified people are ready to commit an arson of church buildings any time”, he said.

**Source:**

<http://news.church.ua/2015/10/24/poperedzheno-terakt-u-xarkivskomu-pokrovskomu-monastiri/>

### **Desecration of an Orthodox Church in Simferopol (CRIMEA)**

**November 13, 2015.** The church of the Icon of the Mother of God Sovereign in Simferopol (Crimea) is desecrated, as the website Interfax-religion reports.

On 10th November, unidentified persons wrote on the wall of the church the inscription “Heil Hitler,’ SS lightning bolts and a swastika. The believers partially painted over the inscriptions in order to restore the damage of the wall.

The church was built three years ago and the believers cannot afford the construction of a fence, which will protect the church from vandals. This is the second time that the Church of the Icon of the Mother of God Sovereign is desecrated.

**Source:**

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12511>

### **Act of Vandalism against an Orthodox church in Rivne region (UKRAINE)**

**November 19, 2015.** The Church of the Holy Trinity under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) was robbed and desecrated as the official website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) reports. The Church is located in the city Rokitnoe in Rivne region in Western Ukraine.

According to the press service of the local diocese, the criminals took the money kept in the church hand, and put fire on five areas of the building. They burned the sacristy with vestments, the altar Gospel and the floor.



Metropolitan of Sarny and Polissya Anatoly commented that: “Last year, ten churches of the Sarny diocese were vandalized. It’s a shame that the vandals continue to destroy the shrines of the Polesie region, bringing pain in the hearts of the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. By its actions, the criminals inflict a wound that bleeds on the body of the Church”.

**Source:**

<http://pro.church.ua/2015/11/22/na-rivnenshhini-obikrali-ta-pidpalili-pravoslavnij-xram/>

### **Remains of an ancient church under danger of destruction in Voronezh (RUSSIA)**

**November 20, 2015.** In Voronezh (Russia), at the site of the ancient Church of Nativity and of the cemetery, the authorities decided to build a multi-storey building. In this cemetery was buried Archpriest of Ostrogozhsk Andrei Fedorov and elder Abraham, who very well known for his ascetic life as the website pravoslavie reports.

The Church of Nativity was built in 1680. It was rebuilt as wooden church in 1745 and 1773. In 1785, the believers began to build a stone church, which was consecrated on 22nd March 1795. It was badly damaged during the Soviet years. In the 30s, there was a clubhouse and for many years, the existence of the church of Nativity remained unknown even for the inhabitants of nearby houses. The Regional Directorate for the Protection of Monuments did not include it in the list of protected sites. Archpriest Gregory Samoilov managed to stop temporarily the demolition but there is no guarantee that it will not be continued.

**Source:**

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/87986.html>

### **Desecration of an Orthodox Chapel in a hospital (GREECE)**

**November 26, 2015.** The Chapel of Saint George, which is located in the hospital at Chania in Crete (Greece), was desecrated, as the official website of the diocese Kydonia reports.

The attackers tried to rob the chapel and for this reason, they caused damages to it. Bishop Damascene and the president of the Council of the chapel expressed their sadness for this action.

According to the police, the perpetrators entered from the main entrance of the church, which is always open for the believers who need to pray for their beloved persons in the hospital. The police officers took the fingerprints of the perpetrators and they continue the investigation.

**Source:**

<http://www.imka.gr/teleytaia-nea/1887-ιερόσυλοι-εισέβαλαν-στον-νοσοκομειακό-ναό-του-αγίου-γεωργίου.html>

### **An Orthodox Church put on fire in Rivne region (UKRAINE)**

**November 30, 2015.** The Iverskaya Church, which belongs to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and is located in the town of Rokitnoe in Ukraine’s western Rivne region, has been vandalized as the official website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) reports.

The vandals slipped into the church, set fire to its altar, burned the antimins, the altar Gospel and the holy sacraments. They robbed the church donation box and set fire to another three places inside the church, as the press service of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has reported.

**Source:**

<http://pro.church.ua/2015/12/01/na-rivnenshhini-vandali-pograbuvali-ta-pidpalili-chergovij-xram/>

**Attack in a Serbian Orthodox village (KOSOVO TERRITORY)**

**December 7, 2015.** Early in the morning, unknown persons attacked by putting fire to several Serbian houses and demolished the monument of the victims of the war, as the official website of the Serbian Orthodox church reports.

This morning's attack is also the most serious ethnically motivated attack on Serbs in recent months and shows that the security situation in Kosovo and Metohija escapes the control of local institutions that are unable to provide security to citizens, according to the press release of the diocese Raska and Prizren. The reluctance of police and local judiciary to resolve the numerous incidents and attacks on the Serbian returnees in previous years, created an atmosphere of lawlessness that gives space for new attacks and the continuation of terror against the remaining Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija.

Bishop Theodosius has asked from the Kosovo police and KFOR, to do everything in order to prevent new attacks on the Serbs. All the frequent incidents in Kosovo ethnically motivated are threaten the future of the Serbs and of all citizens regardless their origin. It is a proof of the dangerous situation.

Six months ago, this monument was also attacked with Molotov cocktails, but the attackers have not yet been found. A new attack caused great concern to the inhabitants of this village, which is the only Serbian village that had been destroyed and ethnically cleansed by Albanian extremists

after the end of armed conflict in 1999 in this part of Metohija. The village is under the jurisdiction of the diocese Raska and Prizren. In 2003, during an attack from the extremists two Serbian children were killed in the Bistrica River, and several others were injured.

**Source:**

<http://orthodoxrights.org/attack-in-a-serbian-orthodox-village-in-kosovo.html>

**Vandalism of a monument to an Orthodox priest (GREECE)**

**December 8, 2015.** Unknown persons vandalized the bust of the Archimandrite Ierotheos Baziotis in Nafplion (Greece). Malefactors used black colour and they painted it, as the website romfea reports.

The bust of the Archimandrite is located in the yard of the church of Saint Nikolas where he was as a priest. It is a donation from the students of Nafplion to the Church.

Archimandrite Ierotheos Baziotis was a teacher and a priest and he participated as a soldier in the war against Nazism.

**Source:**

<http://www.romfea.gr/diafora/4953-agnostoi-bandalisan-to-agalma-tou-arxim-ierotheou-mpazioti>

**Orthodox sculptures demolished (RUSSIA)**

**December 10, 2015.** In the Central park of Vladimir region (Russia), Orthodox sculptures were demolished, as the website Interfax-religion reports.

According to the national tele and radio company "Russia Vladimir", ten Orthodox

sculptures made of white stone have been destroyed with a bulldozer, under the excuse that they were dirty. Broken into pieces, the sculptures then have thrown to the incinerator under a pile of rebar. The issue was not discussed at the city monumental commission beforehand.

The academician of the Russian Academy of Arts Andrei Balashov expressed his discomfort and he promised that they will discuss this question on the sculptural commission of the Academy of Fine Arts, and sculptural commission of Union of Artists of Russia.

#### Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=61267>

<http://vladtv.ru/culture/75644/>

### **Vandalism of an Orthodox Cathedral (GREECE)**

**December 11, 2015.** In Rethymnon (Crete/ Greece), unknown persons vandalized the cathedral of the diocese of Rethymnon, as the website rethemnosnews.gr reports.

During the night they wrote inscriptions by using black spray all around the outside walls of the Church. The inscriptions were blasphemous against Mother of God.

Bishop of Rethymnon Evgenios said for the incident: “we understand absolutely the reasons that led the young people in such anger. I wish our world was different in order not to push them in such actions”.

#### Source:

<http://rethemnosnews.gr/2015/12/ρῥῑθυμνο-υβριστικὰ-μηνύματα-στο-μῆτρο/>

### **Sacrilege action against an Orthodox Church (GREECE)**

**December 15, 2015.** Eight icons were stolen from the Church of Saint Dimitrios in Pogoni region (Greece), as the website romfea reports. The unknown perpetrators violated the doors of the Church.

The Church of Saint Dimitrios is a historical monument that was built before 1814. It was an important place of prayer for Greeks during the years of Revolution against the Ottoman Empire.

#### Source:

<http://www.romfea.gr/diafora/5092-ierosuloi-xtupisan-akomi-mia-fora-nao-tou-pogoniou>

### **Vandalism and desecration in an Orthodox Chapel (GREECE)**

**December 16, 2015.** Unknown perpetrators vandalized the chapel of Saint Irini in Spilia region in Crete (Greece), as the website neakriti reports.

Unknown perpetrators violated the doors of the church in order to steal money. As they did not found the amount that they expected, they caused serious damages by breaking the icons and destroying the screen, which separates the nave from the sanctuary. They continued by throwing everything on the floor and spreading everywhere human waste.

The priest who arrived in the morning and found the church in a horrible situation called the police.

#### Source:

<http://orthodoxrights.org/vandalism-and-desecration-in-an-orthodox-chapel.html>

## **Criminal prosecution for offence of religious feelings (RUSSIA)**

**December 16, 2015.** The Investigative Committee of Kirov region (Russia) started a criminal prosecution against two inhabitants, as the website of the Investigation Department of Kirov region reports. The prosecution is based on the Criminal Code (public actions, expressing obvious disrespect for society in order to insult religious feelings of believers).

According to the investigators, at the evening of September 22nd the two men agreed to make a scarecrow and place it at the Orthodox worship cross, located at the entrance to the village of Staraya Malinovka Vyatskopolyansky district. Their purpose was to insult the religious feelings of Christian believers.

At night of 22nd to 23rd of September, they took with them pieces of clothes and tools in order to make stuffed pants (jacket, rope, hat, mask and screws). They came to the village of Staraya Malinovka and using these items of clothing and dry grass, they made a scarecrow that placed it at the Orthodox worship crosses, located at the entrance to town.

The criminal proceedings are conducted investigations, which aimed at establishing all the circumstances of what happened. The investigation is continued.

**Source:**

<http://kirov.sledcom.ru/news/item/1000227/>

## **Vandalism in Orthodox Churches in Montenegro (MONTENEGRO)**

**December 22, 2015.** Churches in Danilovgrad in the villages Kujava, Zagorak and Mijokusovici (Montenegro) were violated. The thieves took money from the donations of

the believers, as the website of Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral of Serbian Orthodox Church reports.

Father Slobodan Zekovic, priest in Danilovgrad, said that the thieves violated the door of the church of Saint John the Baptist in Zagorka and St. Athanasius the Great in Mijokusovici, and that in the church of Saint George in Kujawy they broke the window.

“It’s not the first time that the temples of the region became a target by thieves and vandals. The church in Mijokusovici has been already vandalised ten times. He added that according to the information they took more money from Kuiavia church. In this Church they tried to violate both doors, but they failed and they broke a window in order to jump in the church. Police officers started an investigation and I hope they will manage to find the perpetrators, “commented the priest, as the website vijesti reports.

The temples under the jurisdiction of the diocese of Montenegro and Littoral, located in the Municipality of Danilovgrad, have been for years a target of thieves.

On the incidents that occurred in the churches in the villages Danilovgrad Kujava, Zagorak and Mijokusovici, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro react by the following statement to the public:

“The Ministry for Human and Minority Rights firmly condemns the vandalism and the desecration of churches in the villages Danilovgrad Kujava, Zagorak and Mijokusovici. It is not only criminal acts but also shameful and barbaric assault on Orthodox churches and the religious feelings of citizens in those areas. The Ministry urges the responsible state authorities to protect believers and the property of churches, to shed



light on these crimes, arrest the responsible persons for these shameful acts and prosecuted in accordance with the law”, as the website of the Ministry reports.

#### Sources:

<http://www.mitropolija.com/objene-crkve-u-danilovgradskim-selima-kujavi-zagorku-i-mijokusovicima/>

<http://www.mmp.gov.me/vijesti/156241/Saopstenje-za-javnost-povodom-pljackanja-i-skrnavljenja-crkava-u-danilovgradskim-selima-Kujava-Zagorak-i-Mijokusovic.html>

### **Vandalism in an Orthodox church (RUSSIA)**

**December 24, 2015.** The District Court of Meleuzovsky region of the Republic of Mordovia (Russia) condemned two citizens of 20 and 19-years old respectively, for robbery and damages in a church, as the website of the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bashkortostan reports.

The court found that in April 2015, the two citizens and their minor accomplice planned to steal valuable items from the Orthodox Church in Meleuzovsky.

Having waited until the church will remain empty; the one defendant with the teenager stole jewellery from the icons.

Employees of the church tried to stop the attackers, but they managed to run out of the building, to be hidden in the car and to be driven by the other defendant.

Their illegal actions caused damage to religious items, and it is estimated more than 180 thousand rubbles.

Afterwards they went by car in Ufa, where they planned to sell the stolen jewellery, but traffic police detained them.

The defendants partially admitted guilt in committing a crime.

Given that one of them has been previously convicted of theft, the court sentenced him to five years 'imprisonment in a penal colony, while the other to 3 years' imprisonment with a probation period of 3 years. The criminal case against their minor accomplice will be held separately.

#### Source:

<http://bashprok.ru/m/news/35996/>

## **A. Reaction of the Local Orthodox Churches to the vandalism and the desecration of the Orthodox worship and sacred places**

### **Communique of the Raska-Prizren Diocese on the Christmas incidents in Lipljan and Djakovica (KOSOVO TERRITORY)**

**January 12, 2015.** The Raska-Prizren diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church published the official communique on the Christmas incidents in Lipljan and Djakovica (Kosovo-Metohija), as reports the website of the diocese.

“During the Christmas holidays KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) graffiti was written on the walls of the church of Sts Florus and Laurus in Lipljan. Regrettably, writing political graffiti, particularly those which were left on many desecrated and destroyed Serbian Orthodox churches since 1999 it is evident that the religious freedoms of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo are still not respected. As perpetrators of similar incidents before have

not yet been brought to justice, the expectations that the Kosovo police and EULEX will do it this time are quite poor. However, we remain in hope that all reasonable people in Kosovo, regardless of their political, religious or national affiliations will understand that provocations and messages of hatred against others cannot bring any good. In fact such provocations against Christian sites can only mar the image of Kosovo in Europe and the world.

At the same time we express our deepest disappointment because our Christmas pilgrims were not allowed to visit the church of the Holy Virgin in Djakovica this year too. Their bus was attacked with rocks, one windshield was broken and one person injured. On the Christmas day the protest was organized in front of our church in Djakovica which made it impossible to serve the Christmas mass this year too. Similar incidents in Djakovica are becoming a regular practice which only confirms the lack of basic religious rights and freedoms in this city. The Serbs from Djakovica are systematically prevented to access their church and homes, many of which lie in ruins. We can also see the continuation of political manipulations in which all Serbs from Djakovica are blamed collectively for the misfortunes of others. The extremist political groups are continuing to manipulate with the feelings of those who lost their dear ones in the conflict of 1999. It is true that many innocent Albanians died in Djakovica in 1999 but in this city and others in Kosovo many innocent Serbs suffered and were abducted and dozens of Serbian Orthodox holy sites were torched and destroyed after the conflict in summer 1999 and 2004. Instead of inflicting pain to one another we all need more solidarity and forgiveness.

The attacks on holy sites and pilgrims on

major Christian holidays are definitely not a path towards better future in Kosovo and do not contribute to the building of confidence between the communities in this region. That is why the rhetoric must be toned down and we all have to turn towards concrete measures how to provide all citizens with peaceful life, freedom access to their homes and properties and above all full respect of religious and human rights and freedoms for all.

In these blessed days of the Nativity of Christ we wish to all who respect us as well as to all who don't a message of the Christmas peace – Christ is born! We remain in hope that the Godchild Christ will enlighten the hearts of all with sincere desire to live in peace and mutual respect regardless of their differences.”

**Source:**

<http://www.eparhija-prizren.com/en/news/communique-raska-prizren-diocese-christmas-incidents-lipljan-and-djakovica>

### **Metropolitan of Odessa region Agafangel speaks about increase of robberies of Orthodox Churches in Odessa (UKRAINE)**

**December 28, 2015.** Twenty failed attempts of robberies and burglaries of churches occurred during the last month in Odessa and its region (Ukraine). The Orthodox Metropolitan of Odessa region Agafangel announced it in a letter addressed to the clergy and faithful of his diocese, as the website of the diocese reports.

According to the bishop, the thieves carried out of the churches the donations collected for the needs of the temples, for the refugees of Donbass and the displaced people, as well as jewellery from the icons. The behaviour of the thieves shows that they did not make it because of poverty, but they are cold-blooded and cynical robbers who did in conscience,

without any sense of respect for God and the holiness of the place.

Metropolitan Agafangel warned that their sacrilegious actions will be punished by God. The hierarch urged the faithful to strengthen their prayers for the prosperity of the holy churches of God and he reminded to the faithful to keep their churches away of sin.

**Source:**

[http://eparhiya.od.ua/sobyitiya/sobyitiya/2949-obraschenie-vyisokopreosvyaschenneyshego-agafangela -mitropolita-odesskogo-i-izmailskogo-v-svyazi-s-ogrableniyami-hramov-odesskoy-eparhii](http://eparhiya.od.ua/sobyitiya/sobyitiya/2949-obraschenie-vyisokopreosvyaschenneyshego-agafangela-mitropolita-odesskogo-i-izmailskogo-v-svyazi-s-ogrableniyami-hramov-odesskoy-eparhii)

## Conclusions

In 2015 the rights and freedoms of Orthodox Christians in Europe are violated significantly. Especially there are serious and numerous violations in December-January, when the Orthodox believers celebrate Christmas and Epiphany, and in March-April, when they pass through the Great Lent, spiritual preparation for Easter. So the violators chose for their actions the most religiously important for Orthodox Christians period of the year.

1. Last year are registered incidents of inhuman treatment, harassment, intimidation, detentions, beatings of Orthodox priests and believers, which violate the Article 2 (*Right to life*) and 3 (*Prohibition of torture*) of the European Convention on human rights (ECHR). Several priests and Church staff members were killed or injured in Albania, Ukraine and Russia. The hostile attitude to the Orthodox Christians persists in Albania, Kosovo and Croatia. A new country with a growing hostile actions and even violence against Orthodox Christians became Ukraine. In this country the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was a target of many attacks by different radical groups.

2. In 2015 Orthodox Christians faced the discriminatory actions of state authorities (Albania, Ukraine) because of their position about moral values or because of false accusations of some political position.

The most eloquent example of discrimination during the past year was the decision of the Kyiv City Council providing tax exemption to all the churches except for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Also the Government of Montenegro prepared the draft law on freedom of religion which has clauses discriminatory to the present property of the Serbian Patriarchate.

Besides, new legislation concerning moral issues in different countries creates a tool for authorities to violate the right of believers and to provoke tensions and conflicts between the citizens. For example, some groups in societies, demanding the respect for their way of life, launch campaigns of defamation and humiliation against Orthodox Christians, their way of life and their beliefs. There were even demands in some countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Russia, and Ukraine) to deprive Orthodox Churches of their presence in public sphere (mass-media, education, health system).

In 2015 the Orthodox believers protested in some countries (Cyprus, Georgia, Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, Ukraine) against the judicial norms which impose to Orthodox citizens new values – abortions, the same-sex unions, yoga classes and others.

3. In 2015 there is an increase of a well-organized defamation against not only the



Orthodox hierarches or believers personally but against the Orthodox Local Churches in Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Latvia, Montenegro and Ukraine. Usually there are two principle reasons for these campaigns. First, attribution to a Church of some alleged political position, usually in favor of another foreign state (Serbian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches). Second, negative positions of the Orthodox Churches about a legislation which introduces new moral values and contradicts the Christian values (Church of Greece, Russian Orthodox Church).

Usually defamation is realised by several methods. First, a person having some authority in a society (a representative of government, a famous figure, an expert, a journalist or a blogger) presents to public some negative reflections, accusations or comments about an Orthodox Church without any proof (Albania, Latvia, Montenegro, Ukraine). Second, a film or a reportage distorting beliefs of Orthodox Christians or Orthodox Church' life is distributed in the mass-media to discredit Orthodox Christians (Greece, Ukraine). Third, Orthodox symbols or faith motivation are used in order to justify extreme words, actions and performances and to link them in the conscience of people with Orthodox Christians (Russia, Ukraine). By using these methods some society groups want to present that it is the society which rejects the Orthodox Church.

4. To the defamation is very close humiliation

of human dignity and hate speeches. Such cases took place in different European countries with the dominant Orthodox tradition (Greece, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine). Very often humiliation and hate speeches are also related to the Churches' position about moral values or about society problems.

5. Many facts are established when Orthodox Christians are deprived of their freedom of peaceful assembly (*Art. 11, ECHR*) in the temples, which belong to them on the basis of the right of property, to exercise their religious duties (Ukraine, Kosovo, Albania). Some Orthodox communities (Ukraine) cannot use their legal possessions (*Art.1, Protection of Property, Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of HR*) which are captured by radical groups of citizens and the authorities cannot ensure the rule of law.

Last year the nationalist forces demanded to take the Lavra of Potsyaev and the Lavra of Kyiv from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and to concede them to alternative community – Kyiv Patriarchate. The political forces, which initiated these actions, used a shrine of Orthodoxy for their political purposes. In some regions of Ukraine (Volyn, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopoli, Tchernovtsi) there were menaces or cases of captures of temples of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with the tolerance or even participation of the local authorities.

6. In 2015 were observed incidents of vandalism and desecration of Orthodox

churches (Albania, Croatia, France, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro, Turkey, Russia, Ukraine). Such actions do not only humiliate the dignity of the believers and also make obstacles for the religious celebrations in the desecrated churches.

7. Publishing the official reactions of Orthodox hierarches and heads of large communities against some incidents of humiliation, defamation, discrimination and hostility to their congregation shows that Orthodox communities are concerned with the facts of violations of their rights. Respecting the secular character of the States and secular groups of societies the leadership of Orthodox Churches addressed many times to the authorities not asking a special treatment for their believers but in order to ensure properly protection of their rights and freedoms. As rule, defending their rights the Local Orthodox Churches choose the way of dialog with society, mass-media, state and international organisations.



July 31, Ukraine. Fr. Roman Nikolaev priest of UOC MP shot dead near his house



October 7, Ukraine. Sacristan of the church of the Three Hierarchs Leonid Zheleznyakov shot dead for supporting UOC MP



September 10, Albania. Fr. Christos Pappas, a 77 year-old Orthodox priest of SOC assaulted



July 27, Ukraine. 62 years old orthodox nun Alevtina tortured and strangled in Kiev





March 7, Ukraine. Orthodox memorial crosses desecrated in the Nikolayev region



October 6, Russia. Desecration of the Orthodox worship place in Murmansk region



September 1, Ukraine. Protesters ruined a temporary chapel and lifted worship cross





May 28, Russia. Vandals smashed an Orthodox worship cross near Sochi



December 7, Attack on a Serbian Orthodox village in Kosovo



February 14, Kosovo. Southern Kosovska Mitrovica destroyed Orthodox cemetery





March 5, Ukraine. The Orthodox Trinity Church was seriously damaged as a result of shelling



February 15, Croatia. cathedral of Saint Nikolas in Carlovac desecration on the eve of the great feast



March 15, Grece. The desecration of the historical church of Saint Anargyri in Athens





November 19, Ukraine. The Church of the Holy Trinity robbed and burned the sacristy with vestments, the altar Gospel and the floor



June 9, Turkey. Holy Trinity church in Istanbul arson



July 1, Russia. Vandalism and arson on the territory of the Orthodox spring in Lipetsk



December 7, Attack on a Serbian Orthodox village in Kosovo





December 8, Greece. Bust of orthodox priest vandalized



January 21, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Attack and desecration of church of St. Procopius considered as National treasure of BiH



December 11, Greece. Vandalism of cathedral of the diocese of Rethymnon



August 26, Insidious destruction of Saint Athanasius church in Dhërmi





March 22, Ukraine. Over 50 radicals in attempt at seizure of an Orthodox church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God at Stenka village



March 2, Ukraine. Ukrainian nationalists attack Moscow Patriarchate's church in Sumy

**orthodoxrights.org**

The "Centre for Monitoring the Rights and Freedom of Orthodox Christians in Europe" invites the cooperation of everyone. You can communicate to us any mistake or inaccuracy that you find in the information on the website. Any additional and new information, proved by documents, photos or video about violations of the rights of Orthodox Christians in Europe related to their religion, is also welcome.