

ANNUAL REPORT

**“Violations of the Rights of
Orthodox Christians
in Europe in 2017”**

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Introduction.

The Centre for Monitoring the Rights and Freedom of Orthodox Christians in Europe (CRFO) was established in 2014 in order to monitor violations of the rights and freedoms of Orthodox Christians in Europe. It is supported by the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Council of Europe. This work is the Centre's annual report for the year 2017.

The geographical scope of the monitoring aimed at 47 member states of the Council of Europe. It entails registering violations of freedoms of conscience, expression, assembly and other liberties and rights. Reoccurring infringements include defamation, humiliation, hate speech, discrimination, intolerance, hostility against Orthodox priests and believers, and Church property. The Centre observes only violations, direct or indirect, that are aimed against the Orthodox Christians because of their faith.

The Centre's guiding principle is to ensure that all incidents are presented as objectively and thoroughly as possible. The report is prepared based on open sources accessible online with references and links. The preference, as a rule, is given to primary sources, such as websites of local Orthodox Churches, dioceses, parishes, and Church-linked media.

Specific omissions or inclusions should not be viewed as a sign that a particular issue is of greater or lesser value to the Centre. Rather, this reflects that a lot of information on the violations of the Orthodox Christians in Europe is not accessible in English. Therefore, we welcome any contribution that can be sent to the Centre of Monitoring about the violations of the rights of Orthodox Christians in 2017 in Europe and which can complete the present report.

The collected incidents are distributed among four chapters. Each chapter is devoted to violation of a distinct Orthodox Christians' freedom or right that is insured by the European Convention on Human Rights and other international legal instruments.

Chapter 1 :

Defamation of Orthodox Churches and believers.

Albania

Anti-Orthodox book in Albania calls saints and clergy "Demons in Cassocks"

November 27, 2017 - Orthodox Christians in Albania were shocked and insulted by a presentation that took place during a recent book fair in the capital city of Tirana. The book that was unveiled, *Demons in Cassocks*, depicts Albania's most beloved saint Kosmas of Aetolia, as well as the current primate of the Albanian Orthodox Church Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania, reports AgionOros.

The Greek TV station ANT1 reports that the book is specifically aimed against the Orthodox Church and the Greeks living in Albania.

The author of *Demons in Cassocks* Sejdi Kondi is widely known for his nationalist views. He has repeatedly called for the expulsion of Orthodox Greeks from Albania.

Orthodox Christians and Greeks are no strangers to persecution in Albania. Two churches and four houses were attacked by night in the Greek mountain village of Xirovalto in the Pogoni municipality, near the Greek-Albanian border, 195 miles southwest of Thessaloniki, and other villages, in February. Most recently, the Institute of Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture announced that visitors to several Orthodox churches and monasteries must now pay for entrance. The new rule applies only to Orthodox churches.

In an interview with Greek journalists, Abp. Anastasios described the publication of the controversial book as an attempt "to destroy the harmonious existence of various religions," and stressed that the attack on Orthodoxy "goes beyond the bounds of blasphemy against sacred ideals."

The publication of the book has caused a wave of public outrage in both Greece and Albania.

St. Kosmas of Aetolia (1714-1779) is commemorated as an Equal-to-the-Apostles and a hieromartyr.

Throughout his several missionary journeys, he founded more than 1,000 educational institutions and halted the Islamization of Albania and Northern Greece.

Albanian nationalists believe the activities of St. Kosmas prevent the creation of a "Greater Albania" and have often launched attacks against the Orthodox saint.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/108662.html>

<http://agionoros.ru/docs/2780.htm>

Russia

The diocese of Orel is asking to find the author of the defamatory false claim about the Jeep of the bishop

May 30, 2017 – The diocese of Orel is asking the law enforcement agencies to settle the problem about a claim from the Bishop of Livensk and Maloarchangel Nektariy about his automobile.

"We believe that the law enforcement agencies will be able to locate the author of the 'letter', which was supposedly written from an Archpriest in the diocese, from an anonymous email", states the Informational department of the diocese.

The "Orel News" has previously claimed that Bishop Nektariy has an expensive Jeep, and that afterwards, he supposedly published a letter, accusing journalists of spreading lies, and threatening to involve the law enforcement agencies.

The head of the informational department of the diocese, Evgeny Borisov, has told that the document is a fake, and that the Bishop's Jeep was a gift from an Agronomical holding involved in developing the region of Orel. Furthermore, it was determined that Bishop Nektariy made no statement that the news agency of Orel claimed.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=67283>

Ukraine

Bishop of the Volyn diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church responds to a defamation attempt of a Ukrainian MP

March 13, 2017 – Sergey Sivak, member of the Volyn oblast council, lied about the fact that the bishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) supposedly called the Ukrainian flag a “rag”. This was supposedly said during the ceremony to commemorate victims of the Lutsk jail massacre. The defamation was countered by Metropolitan Nathaniel during the airing of a television program “The opposite view”, on Friday, March 10.

“The supposed recording of the insult does not exist. The video recording, when a priest from the UOC supposedly said it, was watched in its entirety. It never happened and it is a defamation attempt”, said the Metropolitan. “I regret sincerely that people fall to such a level”.

Sources:

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/03/13/jepiskop-volinskoji-jeparxiji-upc-sprostuvav-fejk-svobodivcyia-sergiya-sivaka/>

Parishioners stand up for Ukrainian Orthodox priest hit by provocative video of 1+1 channel aiming at defaming him

March 13, 2017 –The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) parish members began to stand up on behalf of UOC priest Alexander Kanevsky following a defamatory program on the 1+1 TV channel. He is accused of alleged separatist involvement.

Parishioner Elena writes in her comments: “I did not have the slightest doubt the video was framed-up. Thank you for your support of the zealous servant of Christ Church! God is with us!”

Parishioner Yeseniya relay her. “I cannot fancy who needed to defame such a light and pure man!” she says. “I met father Alexander when I was having a hard period in my life: I was about to commit a suicide. He literally returned me from the other world. At the last moment before I could fall into abyss. He took me to God when I was a confirmed atheist and opened a new wonderful world before me! Father

Alexander is a good person and a wise priest!”

“Prayerful support we want to give to highly esteemed father Alexander from Lugansk”, writes Natalia Zaika.

Priest Leonid Korensky says that the parish “has been praying for father Alexander so that God could give him the strength to endure these trials.”

According to the Union of Orthodox Journalists (UOJ), the Kharkov diocese presented a deep concern over the subject matter of the 1+1 channel, which accused the UOC cleric Alexander Kanevsky of separatist activity and misconduct.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/parishioners-stand-up-for-uoc-priest-hit-by-provocative-video-of-1-1-channel>

<http://news.church.ua/2017/03/10/zayavlenie-xarkovskoj-eparxii-upc-v-otnoshenii-nedavnego-syuzheta-telekanala-11-ot-05-marta-2017-g/>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/kharkov-diocese-of-uoc-provocations-of-1-1-channel-are-based-on-lies-and-manipulations>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/1-1-tells-another-lie-the-church-did-not-ask-for-written-proceeding-in-the-case-against-ministry-of->

Ukrainian TV channel defames an Orthodox priest in a knife fight that never took place

March 17, 2017 – “Television news service TSN” of the 1 + 1 channel spread another false story about a drunken fight of “the UOC (Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate) priest” in Dnipro, writes the Information and Education Department of the UOC-MP. The Dnepropetrovsk diocese denied this misinformation. “The “former military chaplain in the Donbass Warzone” detained by the police has nothing to do with the clergy of the Dnepropetrovsk diocese and has never belonged to it,” said the Education and Information Department of the UOC. “TSN”, citing the “Informant”, published the news that in the city of Dnipro the priest of the UOC-MP allegedly “attacked a 15-year-old girl and cut her hand” and drove drunk.

As reported by the UOJ (Union of Orthodox Journalists), earlier the Kharkov diocese expressed the rejection of the recent news story of the 1 + 1 channel, in which the channel accused the priest of the UOC-MP Alexander Kanevsky of separatist activities and immoral behavior.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-drowsy-eye-1-1-confuses-denomination-of-the-priest-who-made-a-knife-fight>

<http://news.church.ua/2017/03/16/oprovergnut-ocherednoj-fejk-ob-upc-na-kanale-1-1/?lang=ru>

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<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-drowsy-eye-1-1-confuses-denomination-of-the-priest-who-made-a-knife-fight>

<http://news.church.ua/2017/03/16/oprovergnut-ocherednoj-fejk-ob-upc-na-kanale-1-1/?lang=ru>

Adamovka parishioners warn about provocation from TSN

March 17, 2017 – The parish members of Ss. Peter and Paul’s Church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP) of Adamovka village in the Rivne region, asked the UOJ (Union of Orthodox Journalists) to prevent a pre-planned provocation. Residents of the village witnessed reporters from the TV channel “1+1” interviewing a woman who, against the background of the church, accused the clergy of the UOC-MP of non-patriotism and told

deliberately false information about the funeral of a Ukrainian soldier who died in the Donbass War. As it became known, the interview with people with TSN and “1 + 1” paraphernalia was given by Larrisa Sirotinskaya, a resident of the village of Adamovka and a parishioner of the church of the Kiev Patriarchate in the village of Sosnovoye. She reported that, allegedly, the priests of the UOC-MP “disrespected the death of a soldier who died in the Donbass War”. The irony of the claim is that the relatives of the deceased soldier themselves turned to the canonical UOC-MP, rejecting the Kiev Patriarchate. Seven priests conducted the funeral service, with the blessing of Metropolitan Anatoly of Sarny, at once.

The parishioners of Ss. Peter and Paul’s Church in the village of Adamovka told the UOJ correspondent that “people with TV cameras asked provocative questions and tried to denigrate the canonical Church.” According to the rector of the church, Archpriest Alexander Lutsishin, “believers reacted very negatively to uninvited guests, and some even rudely kicked them out of the village.”

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/adamovka-parishioners-warn-about-forthcoming-provocation-from-tsn>

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/03/19/prihozhanie-sela-adamivka-poperedzhayut-pro-pidgotovku-chergovoji-provokaciji-vid-tsn/>

<http://sarny.church.ua/2016/11/07/mitropolit-anatolij-znovu-sumna-zvistka-prijshla-na-polissya/>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/prikhozhane-sela-adamovka-preduprezhdayut-o-gotoviyashchey-provokatsii-ot-tsn>

Head of the Kiev Patriarchate slandered Metropolitan Onuphry to Ukrainian parliament

March 21, 2017 – The head of the non-canonical Kiev Patriarchate, Philaret Denisenko, went before the Ukrainian parliament at a ceremonial meeting in honor of the centenary of the 1917-1921 Ukrainian revolution and called the clergy and faithful of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) “fools” for remaining canonical within the Moscow Patriarchate.

Not only did he insult the Orthodox Church, but he took the opportunity to publicly insult His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry of the Ukrainian

Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), considered by many a bulwark of Orthodox spirituality.

According to Mr. Denisenko, Metropolitan Onuphry refused to honor those whom President Poroshenko awarded as Heroes of Ukraine, declining to stand up for them and saying, “We cannot respect killers.” In his view, this means His Beatitude is unworthy to serve the Ukrainian state.

The Information-Education Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has repudiated this accusation today, saying, “It is impossible to find the source that this was quoted from, because it never belonged to His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry.”

Furthermore, the topic of celebrating Ukrainian heroes was never discussed between Philaret and His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry, so he certainly did not hear such a statement in person. Additionally, the Metropolitan has often visited frontline regions to support Ukrainian soldiers and the civilian population and he personally conducted funeral services over departed Ukrainian heroes.

Mr. Denisenko’s insult does not have a source and he has thus publicly defamed a public figure.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/102061.htm>

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/102000.htm>

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/98452.htm>

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/03/20/ochilnik-upc-kp-u-verxovnij-radi-publichno-porushiv-9-tu-zapovid-zakonu-bozhogo/>

<http://news.church.ua/2015/09/23/donecka-oblast-trivaje-arxipastirskij-vizit-blazhennishogo-mitropolita-onufriya-do-sxidnix-jeparxij-upc/>

<http://news.church.ua/tag/dopomoga-vojinam-ato/>

<http://news.church.ua/2014/08/23/kijiv-predstoyatel-upc-zavershiv-vidspivuvannya-sotnika-olega-mixnyuka/>

Kiev Patriarchate members are trying to provoke a priest from the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Dulibah (Ukraine)

March 31, 2017 – In the village of Dulibah, in Rivne oblast, members of the Kiev Patriarchate are provoking Father Sergey Timofeev.

Members of the Kiev Patriarchate signed a petition with four people, that claimed that Father Sergey is adding narcotic substance in his censer during church services. They sent this petition to the local police, who entered the church to investigate this false petition. The police also visited Father Sergey’s home.

His parish suspects that this is a provocation to defame the priest and to provoke a religious conflict.

The ongoing conflict in the village has begun two years ago. It began by Lesya Mironchuk, who is the sister of a Kiev Patriarchate priest. Three attempts to seize their church have been done during this time, but all of them have failed due to the numerical superiority of the canonical UOC members.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/filaretovtsy-pribegli-k-provokatsiyam-protiv-svyashchennika-upts-v-dulibakh>

The Mukachevsky diocese rebutes the disinformation campaign about a fight of priests with veterans of the Donbass War

March 31, 2017 – The Mukachevsky diocese commented on the fictional “fight” between a priest of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) and veterans of the Donbass War.

Certain Sources: of mass information have spread disinformational articles about a supposed fight that took place between members of the Uzhgorod city council and priesthood from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Archpriest Alexander Monich of the Mukachevsky diocese has rebutted this information.

He noted that during the session, many members of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church entered and occupied the hall of the city council. Several unidentified individuals in military uniforms, which some members of the media called “veterans of the

Donbass War”, followed them. It was later discovered that they were parish members of the Carpathian diocese of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church. They were not veterans of the Donbass war upon investigation.

The attackers had the intention of creating an inter-religious conflict with members of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The police was called in to prevent further escalation.

During the session, there were some verbal exchanges between the various parties, but it did not escalate to physical violence.

Sources:

<http://news.church.ua/2017/03/31/oficialno-mukachevskaya-eparxiya-oproverгла-dezinformaciyu-o-drake-duhovenstva-s-voynami-ato/?lang=ru>

<http://news.church.ua/2016/09/06/shaxraj-yakij-nazivaje-sebe-klirikom-uapc-namagajetsya-zavoloditi-zemelnoyu-dilyankoyu-v-centri-uzhgoroda/>

UOC defamation on Ukrainian TV channel

April 19, 2017 – A Ukrainian media personality claimed that services in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) are performed in the “Russian language”. It was claimed on air of Lviv TV channel Zik by political expert Oles Doniy who had apparently mixed it up with the Old-Slavic language.

The political expert told that there is a Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP) on the estate of the President which he “saw with his own eyes,” he affirmed.

Doniy called on Members of Parliament and civil servants to boycott the UOC-MP and thus to show “their own example” to the faithful who are unwilling to make a transition to other confessions. “Currently they have (UOC-MP – Ed.) 50% registered communities out of the total quantity of Orthodox communities. This is a huge number. They are also available in Western Ukraine. Following the aggression over 70% left the UOC-MP denomination. It is about 10 thousand communities,” admitted the expert.

Earlier the UOC-MP Primate His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry of Kiev and all Ukraine explained “we have services both in the Church-Slavic and Ukrainian languages. The vast majority of services are being conducted in Church Slavonic. This is the primary language of prayer. In our state

there are regions where Ukrainian is spoken as native and other regions where Russian is dominated. As for the Old Church-Slavic language, it integrates all parts of our state.”

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/gnobil-upts-ne-otlichat-russkiy-yazyk-ot-tserkovnoslavjanskogo>

<https://www.google.fr/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjLsvv73LLTAhWBMBoKHfsfBWkQFggoMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fuoj.org.ua%2Fen%2Fnovosti%2Fsoybytiya%2Fuoc-hate-monger-cannot-tell-russian-from-old-church-slavic&usq=AFQjCNE5K6Qdu1eAeSOeXtjnWuTCekRaMg&sig2=wwcKdIRUsU0AnVqo7x-NA>

Unjustified claim with the police, in attempt to take away children from Orthodox priest and demolish Orthodox church

April 24, 2017 – Human rights activist Oleg Denisov has called to rally support for a priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP), who is being pursued by the Kiev Patriarchate for having a church in a tent.

Members of the Kiev Patriarchate are accusing him of having “pro-Moscow” views and other “sins”. They have filed complaints to various law enforcement agencies. The priest has been ordered to dismantle his church. Furthermore, the local village council is refusing to accept their previous decision of transferring legal ownership of a piece of land bought by him.

But this was not enough for these individuals. The complaints have led to a Children’s Rights organization to visit him and to oblige him to “show his children”. In the event that he refused, the organization told him that his children could be taken away from him.

The family has five children, one of whom is handicapped. The priest’s family is poor and lives in a house that is in a sorry state.

The priest refused to allow the Children’s service to enter his house. He was worried that his children could be taken away without any proof, as with some previous cases. Lawsuits can then take years to be resolved, and children are kept in unsanitary and unhealthy conditions in children’s homes in the meantime. It was out of this reasoning that the priest has refused for them to enter. And this is now causing a risk of them being removed.

The sorry state of the priest’s house could result in

continued harassment from various organizations in Ukraine, and in the background of the current interreligious conflict, there is a number of potential individuals ready to bear false witness.

The Human Rights activist is calling for people to donate funds to help pay for the rent and the building of a new home for the priest and his family.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/kyevskiy-patriarkhat-nazhalovalsya-svyashchenniku-upts-grozyat-otobrat-detey-i-snesti-khram>

Ukrainian media to defame UOC – reaction of the Head of the UOC (Moscow Patriarchate's) Legal Department

May 23, 2017 – The prayer service under the walls of the Verkhovna Rada caused a flood of fakes, as reports UOJ. The Ukrayinska Pravda published one of them, reports Archpriest Alexander Bakhov, the Head of the Legal Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP).

“After the prayer service under the Verkhovna Rada, various “sensations” or fakes appeared on social media. And here you are! The Ukrayinska Pravda received a video from an eyewitness. “The clip shows a father, holding a bundle of money, speaking with a young man with an open backpack in his hands.” Everything looks as if the priest had prepared cash for paying off young men for attending the rally.

The witness of this scene asserts that the cleric supposedly paid wages to people for attending the meeting. Upon further investigation, it turned out that it was simply a pizza delivery. Archpriest Alexander Bakhov expressed his concern on his Facebook account, and raised the possibility that the journalists from the Ukrainian Pravda, who published the fake story, had never taken the time to analyze the video. It looks as if they did not follow the professional standards of verifying their information prior to presenting it to the public.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/sensation-lovers-try-to-disinform-ukrainians-about-the-moleben-at-the-rada-head-of-uoc-legal-departm>

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=470398486629567&id=100009782594644&pnref=story

News channel «1+1» confused the main protagonists of their defamatory program about the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church

May 29, 2017 – The news channel has once again made an error when filming a defamatory program about the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP). They mixed up the photos of the clergy in the video clip.

During the May 27 video clip entitled “Ukrainian sensations. Behind God’s bosom”, the news channel claimed that the wife of Vitaly Kosovksy, the Rector of Svyato-Ilyinsk Church in Kiev, supposedly owns a “luxurious auto park”.

“His god-sent wife is named ‘Mother Tatiana’”. However, when showing the wife of Archpriest Vitaly Kosovsky, they showed the photo of Abbess Seraphima (Shevchik), the Rector of the Saint-Archangel-Michael monastery in Odessa. This is despite the photo of the Hegumeness Seraphima being shown several times.

Abbess Seraphima is the Rector of the Odessa Archangel-Michael monastery, the Chairwoman of the Synod Commission “Church and Culture” of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. At 17, she joined the Pokrovsky Monastery in Kiev. Four years later, she became an inokiness, and in 1994, she became a nun.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/p-professionalny-1-1-pereputal-kyevskuyu-matushku-avtoledi-s-nastoyatelnitsey-odesskogo-monastyrnya>

Priest from the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church is falsely accused of assault

June 14, 2017 – The Rector of the Saint-Peter and Paul Church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) has been falsely accused of having assaulted with a member of the Kiev Patriarchate. This information was presented to him at the police station where he was detained.

The incident circles around a conflict with the Kiev Patriarchate. The case was opened against Father Vitaliy Gurev, the Rector of the church, using Article 126 of the Criminal Code. When the church was being seized on May 15, 2017, he was pushed out of the premises down the church’s stairs. His clothes

have also been ripped as a result of the clash.

The church was then re-registered under the Kiev Patriarchate by the local authorities. The parish members of the canonical church were pushed out, and the priest was initially blocked inside. Father Vitaly Gurev then launched a criminal pursuit under articles 126 (“Inflicting Severe Bodily Injuries”) and article 179 (“the capture of religious property”). The results of the conflict will be decided in court. At the current time, the parish members of the canonical Church use a private home for their church services.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/svyashchennik-upts-selakinakhovtsy-uznal-chno-izbil-opponenta-pri-zakhvate-khrama>

“Peacemaker” website under investigation for publishing personal data and threaten of clerics of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

July 9, 2017 – Kyiv Police Department is investigating the case against the “Peacemaker” site, which publishes contact information of the so-called “traitors to the motherland”, including clerics of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church who are then threatened.

The police started the case on the fact of publishing personal data on the website “Peacemaker” of more than four and a half thousand journalists, reports the website of the National Police. Investigators of the capital’s headquarter on behalf of the Prosecutor’s Office in Kiev started criminal proceedings under Part 1 of Art. 171 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (obstruction of the lawful professional activity of journalists).

In order to take urgent measures to respond to the last year’s publication, the police ask representatives of the media whose names and contact details were posted on the Peacemaker website, to contact them with a passport and a journalist’s certificate. The fact of disclosure of personal data, the police believe, served as an obstacle to the performance of lawful activity by media employees.

Earlier the name of father superior of the Holy Dormiton Pochayiv Lavra, Metropolitan Volodymyr, got into the “Purgatory” section for his appeals to believers “to persuade not by force of arms but by force of words”.

On May 11, 2016 on the “Peacemaker” there were

published full personal data, addresses and phone numbers of several thousand journalists from around the world. The day before, Anton Gerashchenko, who is associated with the activities of an odious resource, announced the publication of personal data of journalists on his Facebook page.

In the open access appeared the data of more than 4,500 journalists from Ukraine, Russia, the United States, Europe, Asia and South America: correspondents of CNN, AFP, Bloomberg, Mashable, Reuters, BBC, Radio “Svoboda”, Novaya Gazeta, Kommersant, TV channels “Dozhd”, “112”, STB, ICTV, “Inter”, and many others.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/police-opens-a-case-against-scandalous-peacemaker-site>

In Rovno region non-canonical church adherents start manhunt of the beaten UOC priest

August 30, 2017 – A scandal involving a fight between a priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and a representative of the Kyiv Patriarchate broke out in the village of Povcha in Dubno district of Rivne region (Ukraine). After the incident, the priest of the UOC appealed to the police and verified battery-induced injuries, yet the KP representatives accused him of initiating the fight.

“Russian world” in action: Today, on the day of the great feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, the priest of the Moscow Patriarchate in the village of Dubno district Povcha beat the priest of our eparchy Archpriest Alexander Timoshchuk,” wrote in Facebook Vasily Rudnitsky, spokesman for the Rivne eparchy of the UOC-KP. “Father Alexander came to Povcha to take his wife from school, where she works. The local priest of the Moscow Patriarchate showed his “brotherly love”, leaving father Alexander without his tooth!”

According to representatives of the UOC-KP, the “victim” wrote a statement to the police, had the beatings verified and gathered a press conference. The cleric of Rovno Eparchy of the UOC, Archpriest Vitaly Buga, does not deny his participation in a sudden fight, but he is amazed at the cynicism and outright lies of the UOC-KP representatives who want to justify their fellow believer by blackening the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

“The events that took place on August 28 at about 11 am had a very different chronology than the

one presented by the representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate,” says father Vitaly. “After serving, I waited for the car to go to a neighboring village for celebrating the holiday, so when the car started to buzz around me, I turned and waved my hand. In response, from the slightly opened window, I saw the middle finger, which was shown to me by the priest of the UOC-KP, Alexander Timoshchuk. I went on foot and caught up with the car near the school, the father came out of it, so I asked him what signs he showed me through the window. Alexander Timoschuk began to speak rudely, pushed me, tore off the sleeve from the cassock, and a fight broke out

between us, its result being reflected on my body, although I did not organize a press conference on this matter.”

On the morning of August 29, after the lies and distortions that the representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate used to discredit the UOC, Archpriest Vitaly Buga also appealed to the police for the verification of beatings and agreed to tell his version of the conflict to the media.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-rovno-region-filaret-adherents-start-manhunt-of-the-beaten-uoc-priest>

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

Croatia

Fascist graffiti painted on a Serbian Orthodox Church

March 7, 2017 – A graffiti in Croatian reading “For home ready” along with pro-Ustasha emblems has been painted on a Serbian Orthodox church in the Croatian town of Sinj.

The Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) announced this on Tuesday.

The fascist greeting “For home ready” was used by the Ustasha regime of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) – a Nazi-allied WW2 entity that operated death camps for Serbs, Jews, and Roma.

The graffiti appeared on Monday on the southern wall of the temple that is dedicated to apostles Peter and Paul. The case has been reported to the authorities and an investigation is under way.

This is not the first time that graffiti with similar content have appeared on the building – the last such incident happened in 2010.

The SPC Eparchy of Dalmatia said that this type of offensive graffiti sends a negative message to Serbs in Sinj and beyond, but also speaks to the real situation in society and the position of minority communities in Croatia.

Sources:

<https://inserbia.info/today/2017/03/croatia-fascist-graffiti-painted-on-serbian-church/>

Greece

Orthodox churches and homes attacked in remote Greek villages near Albanian border

February 6, 2017 – Two churches and four houses were recently attacked by night in the Greek mountain village of Xirovalto in the Pogoni municipality, near the Greek-Albanian border, 195 miles southwest of Thessaloniki, and other villages as reports pravoslavie.ru website.

“We will not become slaves in our homes,” is the cry of despair of the few guards living on the border,

living in fear of the Albanian thugs who easily pass into Greek territory.

Police were called late in the afternoon on Sunday when local farmer Sophia Demetriou and another villager noticed that the Church of St. Parasceva had been attacked, reports Romfea. They then locked themselves in their houses, afraid to come out until the police arrived.

“We saw that the church’s windows had been broken and were opened... Although we have a key to the church we didn’t open it until the police came, because we were afraid to find someone inside. We wanted to go to the other houses in the village to see what was happening, but we were afraid... A month ago a pair of breeders in the next village over, Pontikates, found some Albanians outside their home with Kalashnikov machine guns. We are in a panic,” Demetriou said.

“We don’t want to leave our homes that we built with our own blood,” she exclaimed.

When police arrived it was discovered that two icons had been stolen from the church. The same parish of St. Parasceva was also attacked a year earlier, when thieves removed icons from the iconostasis and stole the epitaphios.

It was also reported that on the night of Friday to Saturday houses were burglarized in Ioannina. An icon, embroidered epitaphios and two metal candlesticks were also stole from the Church of St. Nicholas in Xirovalto. Similar cases have been reported just over the border, in small Greek villages in Albania.

Pogoni mayor Kostas Kapsalis believes it is likely the same group looting on both sides of the border. “The villages are at the mercy of Albanian criminals,” he said. “Despite the commitments repeatedly made by those responsible to reopen military posts and that police presence would be strengthened at the border, with thermal cameras, we have as yet seen nothing.” The lack of security has the villagers sleeping with guns and afraid to leave their homes, the mayor lamented.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/100804.html>

Orthodox priest brutally murdered in Greece

March 16, 2017 – Archimandrite Hierotheos (Kamitsis) was brutally murdered in his home in Gerakas, Greece on Friday, February 13. The rector of the Church of St. Gerge in Penteli, Greece was found tied to his bed, presumably suffocated by a pillow. As there were no signs of breaking and entering, the police initially hypothesized that Fr. Hierotheos knew the perpetrator.

Police later established that the perpetrators were two Pakistani men, aged 33 and 28, who have since fled back to Pakistan. They believe that robbery was the motive, although the investigation is ongoing. The two men had met on Facebook. Police were able to trace the crime back to them through online conversations that Ali, the younger murderer, had with Fr. Hierotheos online.

Police then learned that they had flown back to Pakistan just a few hours after the murder, and so far, attempts to find them have been unsuccessful.

The two men had been working in a farm on the island of Crete and took a ferry to the mainland on February 13 to meet Fr. Hierotheos, supposedly for him to help them apply for residency permits. There were no signs of breaking and entering because the Archimandrite had been expecting the men and warmly opened his house to them. After learning that they had been working on the farm, police were able to match DNA found at the crime scene with clothes they had left behind at the farm.

Police are awaiting the public prosecutor's order to publicize the two men's identities and release photographs.

The perpetrators are alleged to have stolen 4,000-5,000 euros (\$4,290-\$5,360), as well as jewelry and some of Fr. Hierotheos' vestments.

A friend of Fr. Hierotheos was looking for him on the evening of Friday, February 13, and became very worried when she could not find him. After several hours of distress, she called the police who arrived to his apartment just after midnight to find the priest dead, hog-tied to his bed.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/101904.htm>

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/101111.htm>

<http://www.romfea.gr/diafora/13537-ejixniastike-i-dolofonia-tou-ierea-sto-geraka>

Muslim refugees on island of Lesbos terrifying and driving out Orthodox Christians

July 22, 2017 – Several clashes have broken out in recent days at Lesbos Island's Moria Camp for refugees, with Greek authorities arresting 35 Muslim rioters who threw large rocks at police officers and set fire to tents both inside and outside the bounds of the camp. A disabled Christian was nearly burnt alive while sleeping in one of the shelters, reports Pakistan Christian Post.

Rioters were protesting another asylum seeker's recent deportation back to Turkey, according to Greek Reporter.

Very few Christians are currently taking refuge at Moria Camp, as most flee the island after experiencing persecution at the hands of Muslims. Moreover, Greek government policy prevents homeless Christian refugees fleeing persecution at Moria from applying for asylum and getting help from the United Nations. A "geographical restriction" essentially blocks asylum seekers from applying with authorities on the mainland without returning to the camps where they were persecuted, excepting only those with a severe health condition. According to the Pakistan Christian Post, the policy is meant to facilitate refugee tracking by limiting their movement.

"Christians are being prevented from holding church services, worshiping and praying by their Muslim neighbors. Moreover, reports of tents being burned down, violence, bullying, harassment and severe threats paint a very bleak picture of the quality of life for Christians caught up within the camp," reads a plea from the British Pakistani Christian Association to the Greek ambassador to the United Kingdom. "We are seeking your help in obtaining a change in the current Greek policy in which the risk of proven re-persecution of Christians counts as a mitigating factor for asylum assessment for escapees of Moria Camp," the message continues.

Some Greek hierarchs have spoken out against the influx of refugees and the damage it is causing to Greece and Greek culture. In March 2016, Metropolitan Ambrose of Kalavryta stated "No! We cannot shelter so many Islamists who are forcibly being sent to our country in order to seize it and change its identity! We sympathize with the refugees and accommodate them, feed and clothe them,

protect them and so on. But we cannot allow them to stay in Greece forever!"

Having fled their homelands to escape such persecutions, Christians are again faced with attempts at forced conversion and bans on their worship. Such problems exist not only at Moria Camp, but in camps on the mainland as well. In addition to persecution, the camps are also kept in poor condition and many women complain of sexual harassment.

Such conditions also exist throughout Europe. In January 2016, Igumen Daniil (Irbits), abbot of the St. George the Victorious Monastery in Gotschendorf, Germany, wrote in a letter to the Federal Minister for Special Affairs and Head of the German Federal Chancellery Peter Altmaier that, "Christian refugees from Syria, Eritrea and other countries are exposed to humiliation, manhunts and brutal harassment in the camps for refugees by Muslim neighbors. This also relates to the Yazidi religious minority. There are frequent cases where humiliation comes to injuries and death threats."

"Many Christians who came from the Middle East are suffering from such strong harassment that they want to go back home, because their situation there seems a lesser evil as compared to the circumstances at the German refugee accommodation centers," the priest said.

On Saturday, April 15, 2016, Pope Francis, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens visited Lesbos, including the Moria camp. The three religious leaders signed a joint declaration that calls on the international community to "respond with courage in facing this massive humanitarian crisis and its underlying causes through diplomatic, political and charitable initiatives."

More than 14,000 migrants are currently stranded on Lesbos and other Greek islands near Turkey, as a European Union-Turkey agreement last year bans their travel to the Greek mainland to limit migration to Europe.

Sources:

<http://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/detail.php?hnewsid=6560>

<http://greece.greekreporter.com/2017/07/18/migrants-set-fires-at-lesvos-camp-clash-with-police/>

<http://orthochristian.com/105284.html>

Kosovo (territory)

Bishop Theodosius – Kosovo Serbs fear new attacks from Albanians

February 2, 2017 – In the event of new attacks, the Kosovo police will not be able to assure adequate protection for the Orthodox Christian sites in Kosovo and Metohija. The region is experiencing a "huge potential" for new unrest from the local Albanian population, stated the bishop of the Razka-Metojiha diocese Theodosius (Sibalic).

In March 2004, Kosovo Albanians have arranged massive pogroms, which led to a massive exodus of Serbs from the country as well as the destruction of the many monuments of their history and culture.

"The current situation is better for us than before. There aren't as many attacks and acts of violence, and one can freely move. Nevertheless, the general atmosphere remains tense, especially currently, and there is a potential for new unrest", said bishop Theodosius.

According to him, the relationship between Albanians and Serbs "are not the same in the different parts of Kosovo and Metohija": "there is some general tolerance, for example in Prizren, but in Diakovica, Decani, Klin – the situation is a lot more serious".

"We would like to see more reassuring examples, but in reality, it is rare to hear something positive about our Church or about Serbs in general. Local newspapers regularly publish material that heightens ethnic strife", declared the member of the diocese.

The Kosovo police of mixed ethnic origin is currently handling the safety of Serbian churches and monasteries in majority-Albanian settlements. Only the monastery of Vysoki Decani is protected by the international peacekeeping force of KFOR, due to the "grave safety context in the municipality of Decani", says the Bishop. "Up until now, we didn't have serious problems with the Kosovo police, even though we believe that in the event of serious unrest, they will not be able to assure the safety of our holy sites".

He clarified that attacks on Orthodox churches has in general decreased in Kosovo, with the notable exception of the Church of Christ the Savior in Pristina, where "in the last few years, different provocations and acts of vandalism continue on a regular basis". The diocese of Razka-Prizren has 160 churches and 14 monasteries.

The relations between Serbia and the auto-proclaimed

authorities of Kosovo have experienced tensions on January 14, when Kosovo Albanians refused to let through a train from Belgrade heading to Kosovo Mitrovica, threatening to use their Special Forces. President Tomislav Nikolic declared, that he will “personally protect Serbs, if someone attacks them in Kosovo”. He justified his readiness to use armed forces that he is constitutionally obliged to protect his residents, despite not seeking to involve Serbia in any conflicts.

Kosovo-Albanian authorities have declared independence on February 17, 2009 in Pristina in a unilateral manner from Serbia. The self-proclaimed republic is not recognized by Serbia, Syria, Russia, China, Israel, Iran, Spain and numerous other states.

The Bishop expressed particular gratitude to the people of Russia.

“We would like to express a special gratitude to the Russian people for their spiritual, moral and material support. The awareness that Russia shows towards the situation of Kosovo and Metohija is very important for us, and we hope that Russia will do everything possible to assure a life of dignity for the remaining Kosovo Serbs. We pray to God for the restoration of all Orthodox churches, and that our banished people return”.

When describing the scale of Russia’s help, he stated that Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church were providing assistance through the Sreten monastery in Moscow in the restoration of the Prizren seminary, and that “Russia disbursed \$2,5 million dollars for the restoration of destroyed Orthodox churches after the 2004 riots”.

“The brotherly Orthodox solidarity, given to us by the Moscow Patriarchate, means a lot to us, as well as the readiness of Russia to protect the remaining Kosovo Serbs and our holy sites in Kosovo and Metohija”.

When asked to provide a possible projection of the future destiny of Orthodoxy in Kosovo and Metohija, the bishop Theodosius noted, that Serbs are “going through Golgopha over a course of decennials”, but the people are “always finding the strength for a spiritual renewal. We hope that something similar will continue this time as well, and that Serbs will never completely leave Kosovo, because the cultural center of our spirituality and history is here”.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/100716.html>

<https://ria.ru/religion/20170202/1487033804.html>

Diocese of Raška and Prizren strongly condemns anti-Serb graffiti with Nazi symbols in Gnjilane

February 15, 2017 – Serbian Orthodox Bishop in Kosovo-Metohija strongly condemned anti-Serb graffiti which appeared on several locations in the vicinity of the Serbian Orthodox church in Gnjilane, as well as on the road to the Serbian village of Donja Budriga, as reports press-service of Raška and Prizren Diocese.

“These graffiti demonstrate the atmosphere of hatred in which since 1999. y. 8000 Serbs were expelled from Gnjilane where only 20 persons of Serb ethnicity live now. This is a sad but truthful picture of many majority Kosovo Albanian cities and villages in Kosovo-Metohija where the ethnic cleansing continues for almost 18 years after the conflict either by direct violence and threats or various forms of intimidation and discrimination”, said Bishop Teodosije.

“We expect a thorough investigation, not only promises but concrete results because all investigations of similar ethnically-motivated incidents against Serbs since 1999 have been terminated without bringing the perpetrators to the face of the justice”, said the Bishop making an appeal on international representatives in Kosovo to finally start calling things by right names and face themselves the fact that possible attempts to marginalize or tolerate religious and ethnic discrimination in Kosovo and Metohija, all in the name of non-existent multiethnicity, represents a direct act of complicity and will be recorded in history and eventually will be a subject of God’s justice.

Sources:

<http://www.eparhija-prizren.com/en/news/diocese-raska-and-prizren-strongly-condemns-anti-serb-graffiti-nazi-symbols-gnjilane>

<http://www.eparhija-prizren.com/en/news/diocese-raska-and-prizren-strongly-condemns-anti-serb-graffiti-nazi-symbols-gnjilane>

Poland

Polish nationalists stage provocative march on Forgiveness Sunday in Hajnówka beside an Orthodox church

February 28, 2017 – Unfortunately, this year’s Forgiveness Sunday in the Polish town of Hajnówka in the Podlasie Province was a restless one. For the first time in the history of the famous Holy Trinity Cathedral, the Rite of Forgiveness had to be served immediately after the morning Liturgy rather than in the evening due to a scheduled Polish nationalist march which was to pass under the walls of the cathedral, reports Sobor.by.

The town of Hajnówka is the center of Poland’s Belarusian minority, with the majority of them being Orthodox. The march scheduled that day was in fact to glorify an infamous killer of the Belarusian people of Podlasie, the Polish underground fighter Romuald Rajs, known as “Brown.” In the winter of 1946, Rajs’ group burned Podlasie together with its inhabitants, including the women and children of several Belarusian villages. Three dozen Orthodox peasants were also shot by “Brown’s” order.

Rallies, marches, and other events in honor of Rajs and his “cursed soldiers,” as they are known, are being held this week in Poland, as March 1 is the official commemoration date for these bandits who fought against the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs and the post-war authorities.

“Our community is shocked that at this time, on Forgiveness Sunday before the beginning of Great Lent, a march for the ‘cursed soldiers’ has been organized. We’re not against the ‘cursed soldiers,’ but if the banners in this march bear his face and the symbol of the Institute of National Remembrance which in 2005 officially considered his actions as bearing the signs of genocide, it is the usual provocation,” stated Lyutsina Rushuk, representative of the Hajnówka Division of the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood of Poland.

The majority of Hajnówka Catholics did not support the actions of the Polish nationalists, and several prominent figures came to support the Orthodox whose ancestors had died at “Brown’s” hands.

“First of all, I would like to express my solidarity with the Belarusians of Hajnówka, and with the Orthodox community of Hajnówka against this act of hatred, xenophobia and nationalism being carried out today

in the form of a march in honor of the memory of this criminal, who killed Orthodox Belarusians in the tragic time of the Second World War. At such a time it is necessary to be with the people of Hajnówka and express our solidarity,” said Robert Tyszkiewicz, member of Polish Parliament.

The Belarusian Orthodox simply wanted to peacefully pray on Forgiveness Sunday, while what occurred is being considered basically a violation of the constitution right to worship. The route the organizers chose is not random, Tyszkiewicz explains. Last year one of the marchers was photographed with a smile on his face on the ashes of the homes of one of “Brown’s” victims. “This is not accidental. This is a vile, disgusting act, full of hatred, aimed at intimidating and dividing the people,” he concluded.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/101485.htm>

http://sobor.by/videonews/Polskie_natsionalisti_ustroili_provokativnoe_shestvie_na_Proshchenoe_voskresenie_v_Gaynovke_2017_Feb_28_00_12_21

Russia

Ministry of Internal Affairs has noticed a “campaign of intolerance towards Orthodox Christians” in the post of MDK

January 13, 2017 – Experts from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) of the Russian Federation have observed a campaign of intolerance aimed at Orthodox Christianity. A message was posted on the social media site “VKontakte” with the aim of insulting the feelings of believers. This situation is described in the reply report of the claim of the “Orthodox Christian Rapid Response Legal Centre”, with a demand to conduct an investigation based on the infringement of the sentiments of believers (article 148 Criminal Code) and about incitement of discord (article 282 Criminal Code). The activists posted a response screenshot on their “VKontakte” group.

The MIA is demanding the identification of the author. The investigation material is “redirected to its territorial jurisdiction”.

The post in the MDK social network group was published on October 14, when Orthodox Christians celebrate the Feast of the Holy Virgin. The post stated that on this day, unmarried women would go to church to pray for a husband.

It was suggested for men to pretend to be “sent from Heaven” in order to “seduce any one of them”. The post in the group MDK was not deleted at the time of writing of this article.

In response to the “Mediazona” inquiry, the coordinator Georgy Soldatov has observed that, as it was stated previously, the activists are in support of a criminal case under Article 282 (Criminal Code), entitled “incitement of discord”, and article 148 Criminal Code “violation of the freedom of worship”. “Of course, hypothetically, if a person, be he married or not, repents. We don’t even have to go so far as to say “repents”, but at least acknowledged their insult, than I would of course support a fine or an administrative punishment. Reconciliation is impossible under such articles. But if there is no repentance and the accused is ready to leave the court and to continue writing such posts, in my opinion, it’s an opportune time to reflect on life in such a moment and to come to deeper things”, he commented on possible criminal charges for the authors of the post.

Sources:

<https://zona.media/news/2017/13/01/mdk>

https://vk.com/wall-129954978_98

https://vk.com/mudakoff?w=wall-57846937_6660690

Court in Tver (Russia) defends an assailant, who stabbed an Orthodox priest with scissors

April 21, 2017 – Two courts in the Tver oblast have defended a self-proclaimed “Metropolitan” Oleg Zimayev of a breakaway religious group called “The Apostolic Orthodox Church”. The assailant; Oleg Zimayev, stabbed a priest from the Russian Orthodox Church in the head and arms with scissors in front of two witnesses.

The court documents report that the assailant has conducted two hits, aiming at the top of the head, causing an injury there as well as on the left wrist of the victim, Father Oleg Phillipov.

Father Oleg Phillipov has stated that the conflict between him and O. Zimayev has a long story, stemming from a long-standing disagreement between the Moscow Patriarchate and the “Apostolic Church”. The disagreement sharpened after a dispute in the cemetery near the Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (MP), where a funeral service was conducted for one of the leaders of the unrecognized “Apostolic Church”.

A few days after the dispute, Oleg Zimayev entered directly into the Orthodox Church (MP), where the Rector is Father Oleg Phillipov. That is where the crime was committed.

According to Oleg Zimayev, his goal was to cut the hair of Father Phillipov. This explanation was accepted by two courts in the Tver region. They considered that the attack was done by accident without predetermined motive. As a result, Oleg Zimayev cannot be legally pursued.

The courts also refused to consider religious intolerance as a motive in the court case. They explained that the attack was done as a result of the dispute at the cemetery. They did not consider the long history of the dispute.

Oleg Zimayev argued that he could not have physically harmed a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, considering that they are a unified whole with the Apostolic Church. To back up his claim, he came to court dressed in the dress of a Metropolitan. The court accepted this argument as well.

At the moment, Oleg Zimayev is fully acquitted. The victim, Father Oleg Phillpov, is looking to appeal the case.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=66886>

Director of St. Petersburg Orthodox pilgrimage center attacked by unknown assailants

August 29, 2017–Director General of St. Petersburg’s St. Athanasius the Athonite Pilgrimage Center Evgeny Vorontsov and his assistant were injured in a recent attack by unknown assailants with rubber-bullet pistols. The occurred on Nevsky Prospekt, one of the main roads in St. Petersburg, a source within law enforcement reported to RIA-Novosti.

“On August 28, three unknown men entered the premises of the St. Athanasius the Athonite Pilgrimage Center on Nevsky Prospekt, where they opened fire with rubber-bullet pistols at the General Director of the center and his assistant. The victims were hospitalized in satisfactory condition,” the source stated.

A criminal investigation under article 213 on hooliganism has been opened. The maximum penalty is five years imprisonment.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/106036.html>

<https://ria.ru/incidents/20170829/1501283618.html>

Ukraine

Radicals attack Orthodox shrine in Ternopol at night

January 3, 2017 – Nearly at 3 a.m., activists of the “Right Sector” showed off at the background of the only canonical Cathedral in the city and banners calling to “drive away Moscow priests”. The pictures were posted by radicals on their page in Facebook. This was the first night picket of nationalists, as reports UOJ.

Radicals might have been scared away by the church guard who had come outside, according to the UOJ source in Ternopol eparchy. One of the posters was left by the “Right Sector” on the iron gates at the entrance to the churchyard, the other – on the tree.

Before the night occurrence nationalists placed themselves not far from the Cathedral and distributed leaflets, urging to “drive off Moscow priests”. In such cases the police squad secured public order.

Sources:

<http://spzh.news/en/news/38009-right-sector-attacks-the-uoc-shrine-in-ternopol-at-night>

<http://news.church.ua/2017/01/04/u-ternopoli-pravij-sektor-vlashtovuje-svoji-provokaciya-bilya-soboru-upc-teper-i-vnochi/>

Senior priest of Saint Michael Orthodox church in Katerinopol beaten

January 29, 2017 – Three UAOC clergymen beat up senior priest of Saint Michael UOC church in Katerinopol. UAOC representatives thought the priest of the canonical Church “does not love Ukraine strong enough”, as reports UOJ.

According to the aggrieved father, UAOC priests would like to occupy Saint Michael church. This fact triggered the conflict.

One of the abusers, Pavel Dobriansky, is famous for calling himself a “spiritual commandant of Maidan”, as well as for having been excluded from the Kiev Patriarchate for his improper and defying behavior. Dobriansky joined the autocephalous then.

A criminal proceeding is open upon the fact on the grounds of Part 1 Article 125 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (intentional trivial injury).

The UAOC priests insist on their being the aggrieved party. Herewith they continue their

regular life, while father Victor is on a drip in hospital.

UOC parishioners in Katerinopol have written several hundred letters to the administration chief and the prosecutor asking them “to secure them from the improper behavior of UAOC representatives.” The letters, signed by over 200 persons, are going to be handed in on 30 January at 9 a.m.

A priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was physically assaulted in the Odessa oblast

February 20, 2017 – Unknown individuals have committed an attack on the Parish house at the Petropavlovsk cathedral of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) in the village of Vasilievka, Odessa oblast.

The evildoers have committed serious physical assault against the Archpriest Alexei Glushko. The priest heard noises at around 3:00 A.M. outside of his home, where he lived with his family. He noticed a man, who then immediately attacked him. The priest was able to stop the first attacker, but a second felon appeared. He began beating the priest with a metal object. After that, the criminals disappeared.

First aid was given to Father Alexei in the local medical center, and his health is judged to be of moderate gravity: he has numerous fractures and bruises on his face, shoulders and neck, as well as splintered hemorrhages. A criminal investigation is currently being conducted. The identities of the criminals are not yet determined.

According to an early February report, the Odessa oblast has faced a wave of violence on its churches, which suffered desecration and burglary.

Sources:

<http://www.sedmitza.ru/text/6987906.html>

<http://eparhiya.od.ua/sobyitiya/sobyitiya/3715-soversheno-razboynoe-napadenie-na-prihodskoy-dom-petro-pavlovskogo-hrama-s-vasilevka-belyaevskogo-rayona-odesskoy-oblasti>

“Svoboda” political party called to prohibit Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in Ukraine

March 22, 2017 – In the city of Khmelnytsky, the deputies rejected the provocation of the “Svoboda” party – its representatives tried to vote in the “package” for “the cancellation of registration of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in Ukraine,” reports the Information and Education Department

of the UOC (Ukrainian Orthodox Church) citing the YouTube channel of the Khmelnytsky City Council. As reported, the information about the proposal was not even mentioned on the official website of the City Council.

The “Svoboda” deputy, Leonid Grach, put this idea forward with the support of his fellow party members.

Only 10 out of 39 deputies voted for the proposal.

Initially, at an extraordinary session of the Khmelnytsky City Council on March 15, it was about accepting an appeal to the leadership of the State for the peaceful settlement of the socio-political situation in Ukraine.

However, at the last moment the people’s deputy from “Svoboda” proposed to vote together with other points of the appeal for the “prohibition of the ROC in Ukraine” – most likely he meant the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the resource says. The initiative did not find support among the deputies of the City Council.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/khmelnytsky-deputies-do-not-fall-for-the-provocation-of-svoboda-to-ban-the-uoc>

During a meeting of the Uzhgorod city council, members of the non-canonical Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox church start a fight with canonical Orthodox believers

March 30, 2017 – A fight was provoked between members of the non-canonical Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) and the canonical Orthodox believers of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP). The dispute arose over the question dividing land between the two respective communities.

Members of the UAOC claim that the land belongs to them, without presenting any proper ownership documents. Some members of the UAOC claim that they were brought to the session under false pretexts. The Union of Orthodox Journalists is monitoring the situation.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/na-sessii-gorsoveta-v-uzhgorode-storonniki-uapts-ustroili-potasovku>

Odessa “Svoboda” party member blames Ukrainian Orthodox Church for war

June 4, 2017 – The head of the Odessa city organization of the “Svoboda” party Sergei Soltasiuk said that the war will last as long as the country has the Russian language and the “Moscow church” exist (that is, the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate). He posted this on his Facebook page.

“Millions of Ukrainian citizens are indignant every day with the criminal actions of the aggressor-state, in words they seem to mourn the dead and mutilated Ukrainian soldiers. But in fact, they preserve the conditions for further maintaining this hybrid war – first of all, the Russian language and the Moscow church,” writes Soltasiuk.

“In a word, blasphemy and grovelling,” he concluded.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/odessa-svoboda-member-calls-ukrainians-grovellers-and-blames-church-for-war>

Orthodox seminarian is beaten to death in Dnepr

July 14, 2017 – In Dnepr there was found a body of a murdered student of Odessa Seminary. His disappearance was reported to the police on July 6. The corpse of the young man was found in one of the abandoned garages along Listopadnaya Street in Dnepr.

According to preliminary data, the seminarian came home from Odessa to the funeral of his grandfather. On the day of his disappearance, he met local residents aged 20 and 21, who had not been previously convicted.

“When the investigative and operational group of Samara police department of Dnepr came to the site, under the pile of household garbage they found a body of the man,” the law enforcers said. “Even with a superficial examination, traces of violent death were found: all the bones of the skull were damaged.” Investigator Yuri Shcherbinin told about the alleged method of killing the seminarian: “One of the attackers started to strike the man’s stomach, and then two of them went on beating him. After the victim lost consciousness, the malefactors continued to strike his head with a brick. Afterwards they took 25 UAH and an old mobile phone from the guy. The body of the young man was hidden in one of

the abandoned garages and covered with household garbage.”

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/seminarian-is-beaten-to-death-in-dnepr>

Mayor of Ivano-Frankivsk to ban the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

August 15, 2017 – Mayor of Ivano-Frankivsk Ruslan Martsinkiv on his Facebook page called the Ukrainian Orthodox Church “the church of the occupant”, while stating that he does not care about the opinion on this issue of the Commissioner for Human Rights.

Martsinkiv cites scans from the brochure of the UOC, where the position of the canonical Church regarding military operations in the east of Ukraine is explained.

“This is distributed to the believers of the UOC-MP!” Martsinkiv was outraged. “In a country where a constant war with Moscow is going on! The war is not going on in the East, the war is going on inside! And let the Commissioner for Human Rights accuse me, but I believe that this is the church of the occupant! If there were “Svoboda” in the Verkhovna Rada, this church would be banned.”

At the same time, the mayor of Ivano-Frankivsk does not care that the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Pope take a similar position on the conflict in the east of Ukraine.

Sources:

<http://www.uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/mayor-of-ivano-frankivsk-said-that-svoboda-would-ban-the-uoc>

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1314721141987122&id=100003477463628

Nationalists issue threats against the priest who installed a monument to Prince Vladimir

September 30, 2017 – Threatening inscriptions of unknown hooligans with the symbols of the “National Corps” appeared at night on the house of the UOC priest, Father Pavel Linnik in the village of Slobodka, who was one of the main initiators of the installation of the monument to Holy Prince Vladimir in Malin, writes “Orthodox Ukraine on Guard of the Constitution”.

It is reported that the inscriptions and stickers “greetings from Givi” and “get away Moscow priest

from Zhitomir” were found in the morning. The priest’s children are frightened.

Similar inscriptions and damages of the name-bearing plate of the temple were also found on the church of the icon of the Mother of God of Kazan, the rector of which is Father Pavel.

The day before, the director of Malin Forestry College informed the priest that he had received threats in connection with the monument.

The monument to Vladimir the Great in the city of Malin, Zhytomir region, was opened on September 25. The monument was installed on the territory of Malin Forestry College on the site of the former monument to Lenin. Hundreds of Malin citizens and residents of nearby villages participated in the celebrations.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/nationalists-issue-threats-against-the-priest-who-installed-a-monument-to-prince-vladimir>

<https://www.facebook.com/PravoslavnaVartaUkrainy/posts/475226809518396>

Ukrainian nationalist Facebook group begins collecting data on Orthodox priests

October 5, 2017 – A new Facebook group “Get Moscow Priests Out of Galicia” appeared last month, aiming to collect information on all parishes and priests of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC) in the western Ukrainian border province of Lviv, with calls to oppose the Church.

The banner for the page features a cartoon of a supposedly Russian priest, with crazed eyes, and the Soviet hammer and sickle on his kamilavka. The word for “priests” in the title, “понаб,” is considered disrespectful. There are a number of other derogatory and blasphemous images posted throughout the group.

The group’s activists ask for information on clergy of the UOC to be sent in, and threaten to develop and implement a plan of opposition to the UOC.

“Our group asks all who are not indifferent to send information here about all activities of the Moscow Patriarchate in the Lviv Province known to you, in particular about individual parishes and their location,” claiming that such parishes lead people astray into the hands of Moscow. “By collecting this information, we here in this group

will develop a plan to counter this anti-Ukrainian organization,” the statement, pinned to the top of the page, continues.

“Putin’s army is not only ‘green men’ with AK-74s on tanks,” another message reads. “They are also men in black robes with crosses and censers in their hands. For decades they have poisoned the minds of their parishioners...” the message continues. Another image in the group refers to priests as “agents in riassas.” The message concludes: “The tumor of the Moscow Orthodox Church has spread throughout Ukraine... It is time to say ‘no’ to Moscow Orthodoxy, and to send their priests to their ‘historical homeland’...”

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/106882.html>

UOC priest’s home hijacked by Kiev Patriarchate followers

October 27, 2017 – Representatives of the schismatic “Kiev Patriarchate” (UOC-KP) have seized the home of canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) cleric Archpriest Igor Margita and his family in the village of Hrybovytsia, in Western Ukraine, reports unian.ua.

The incident was reported yesterday evening by Archpriest Oleg Tochinsky, the press secretary of the Volynhia Diocese.

“Friends, we ask for prayerful support! Right now, at this very minute, in the village of Hrybovytsia in the Ivanychi Region of the Volhynia Province, supporters of the ‘Kiev Patriarchate’ are attempting to capture the home of a priest of the UOC and his family. The schismatics have broken into the home! They’re carrying his stuff out! The police are just watching,” Fr. Oleg wrote on his Facebook page.

Fr. Oleg also wrote that the home is currently the subject of a legal battle between the UOC and the non-canonical UOC-KP. A court session had been held earlier in the same day, although it was postponed when lawyers of the UOC-KP were unable to provide evidence that the building should belong to them. However, as the priest writes, supporters of the schismatic jurisdiction were unwilling to wait for the judicial process to be fully carried out and seized the house illegally.

In a later update post, Fr. Oleg noted that both the invaders and the priest and his matushka are in the home, both sides refusing to leave. Fr.

Igor’s belongings are still sitting on the lawn. “The police, although they are at the scene, have taken a position of non-interference and observation,” he writes.

Fr. Igor’s home has repeatedly been subjected to attacks by intruders. Moreover, his community’s Holy Protection parish was overtaken by schismatics in 2015. The community is currently completing the building of a new church.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/107587.html>

Police investigating violations of believers’ rights during 2016’s All-Ukrainian Orthodox procession

November 14, 2017 – Law enforcement agencies opened criminal proceedings on Thursday for the violations of the rights of believers of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church that took place during the All-Ukrainian Cross Procession which was held in July 2016, reports the Information-Education Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Relevant statements to law enforcement were provided by the NGO “Public Advocacy.”

“Considering that the rhetoric of hatred on religious grounds is a socially dangerous phenomenon,” according to advocates from the NGO. We have sent official statements to law enforcement agencies to provide the state system a reason to begin an official investigation.”

The All-Ukrainian Cross Procession for Peace weaved its way throughout the country from Donetsk to Kiev from July 3 to 27. Tens of thousands joined in the procession at various points, with 30,000 gathering for the ending prayers on St. Vladimir Hill in Kiev.

As repeatedly reported in Ukrainian and international media, believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were blocked by aggressive people in the city of Boryspil during the All-Ukrainian Cross Procession. The thugs shouted and threw various objects at the peaceful believers. These actions were also accompanied by threats against those participating in the march.

The provocateurs even began throwing items at the wonderworking Svyatogorsk Icon of the Mother of God. Archpriest Sergei Taran was later awarded for protecting the icon by removing his vestments and using them to cover the icon.

“How is it possible to throw anything at her? It’s crazy. We had no words when we saw it. We saw

how Batiushka, walking near the icon, removed his phelonion and covered the icon with it. It was his best phelonion... I later said to him on the phone, ‘Batiushka, may God grant that as you covered the Mother of God with your robe, so the Mother of God will cover you during your earthly life and at the Dread Judgment with her pure omophorion,’” Metropolitan Arseny of Svyatogorsk said during the presentation of the award.

“Public Advocacy” notes that such aggressive actions from the opponents of the procession should be qualified as crimes, according to article 161 of the Ukrainian criminal code. Lawyers also note that the investigation will be supervised within international monitoring procedures.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/108094.html>

<http://news.church.ua/2017/11/13/pravooxranitelnye-organy-nachali-rassledovanie-narushenij-prav-veruyushhix-vo-vremya-vseukrainskogo-krestnogo-xoda-2016/?lang=ru>

Ukrainian Orthodox Church spokesman attacked by “Maidan activists”

December 6, 2017 – Deputy Head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s Department for External Church Relations Archpriest Nikolai Danilevich was attacked yesterday by a group of people calling themselves “Maidan activists,” the Union of Orthodox Journalists reports.

The attack came after Fr. Nikolai’s participation in a press conference with the Ukrainian Independent Information Agency (UNIAN) dedicated to the results of the recently-concluded session of the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church which met in Moscow.

Among the decisions of the Council of Bishops, was to amend the statutes of the Russian Orthodox Church to more fully reflect the self-governance of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, noting that the center of its administration is in Kiev, rather than Moscow. This moved angered non-canoncial leader “Patriarch” Philaret (Denisenko) of the so called “Kiev Patriarchate” who called it a deception.

The Council also established a commission for dialoguing with the “Kiev Patriarchate” after they received a letter from Denisenko that expressed a desire to restore Eucharistic communion. Fr. Nikolai was appointed a member of this commission. Denisenko later declared that he was interested only

in receiving autocephaly for his group, rather than returning to the canonical Church.

The five young attackers, who introduced themselves as “Maidan activists,” hearkening to the wave of civil unrest and public protests that swept through Ukraine in 2013-2014, had earlier tried to force their way into the press conference, though the conference security did not permit them, to avoid possible confrontations.

Instead, they waited for Fr. Nikolai after the press conference, trying to attack him and douse him with red paint. The cups full of red paint were left behind by the “activists.”

Union of Orthodox Journalists Sources: reported that Sergei Dimitriev, a former priest of the canonical Ukrainian Church and current head of the social service department of the self-styled “Kiev Patriarchate,” was seen smoking and talking with the men who latter attacked the canonical priest Fr. Nikolai.

Sources: also report that there were police nearby, though they did nothing to help Fr. Nikolai, but only laughed at him. The attack still failed, with most of the red paint spilling at the priest’s feet.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/na-spikera-upts-posle-press-konferentsii-napali-aktivisty-maydana-foto>

<http://orthochristian.com/108952.html>

Ukrainian Regional Council Deputy to ban Ukrainian Orthodox Church

December 22, 2017 – Deputy of Ivano-Frankovsk Regional Council Mikhail Ivanochko seeks the prohibition of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and suggests that its priests be driven out of their temples. This is what the head of the district organization All-Ukrainian Association “Svoboda”, initiator of the address by the regional council urging to check the UOC clergy for their connection with FSB, told the publishers Vgoles.

“This whole Church should be banned immediately. They must all be driven out. If they do not want to leave voluntarily, then the force method should be used. At least “kicks”. This is the only way to act! “, assures “Svoboda” member.

“To be honest, at first I had an idea to write an appeal about a complete ban on the activities of this Church in the Carpathian Mountains. But we thought that nothing would come of it: it is not our authority. Therefore, it was agreed to publicize an

appeal to the authorities so that the Moscow priests would be checked by the National Security Service for their cooperation with the FSB and other punitive agencies of the aggressor country,” the deputy confessed.

Also, the initiator of the appeal to the SBU said, “I would personally put surveillance on each of them ... Certainly, all temples must be inspected, all dark corners searched. They keep there no one knows what – anti-Ukrainian agitprop literature, weapons, hide separatists. In Pochaev slogans are hanging everywhere “God does not understand Ukrainian.” Besides, priests in their sermons forbid believers to

pray in the Ukrainian language, as if “God cannot hear Ukrainian.” Isn’t it the evidence for the Security Service of Ukraine?”

Mikhail Ivanochko is sure that the SBU “runs on the roof with a Georgian (Mikheil Saakashvili – Ed.) instead of ensuring the security of Ukraine.

Sources:

http://vgolos.com.ua/articles/moskovskyh_popiv_na_poligraf_hramy_obshukaty_znayshly_shchos_karaty_294395.html

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/i-would-ban-this-church-a-nationalist-deputy-writes-a-denunciation-on-the-uoc>

Chapter 3: Discrimination of Orthodox Christians and violation of their freedom of expression.

Albania

Destruction of Orthodox holy sites continues in Albania

June 15, 2017 – The Orthodox heritage in Albania has suffered another blow with the decay of the Monastery of St. Athanasius in Kato Lenitsa, founded in 1797. Due to the idleness of authorities, who confiscated the monastic buildings but undertook no measures to restore the landmark, the monastery sustained irreparable damage in the winter of 2017. The monastery currently lies in ruin, reports AgionOros. Attacks on Orthodox churches have become common practice in modern Albania. In a number of cases, the confiscation of valuables and the destruction of holy sites have been carried out by the state itself. In August 2013, hired government thugs attacked an Orthodox Church in the southern Albanian town of Përmet, smashing icons and crosses and beating up worshipers. In early 2015, the government unilaterally decided to destroy the fencing around the Tirana Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ.

Another church of St. Athanasius, in the southern Albanian town of Dhërmi, suffered two incidences of vandalism in late August, 2015, which the local media attempted to justify. A few days later the church was again attacked, this time being completely destroyed. Many holy objects from Orthodox monasteries and churches have been stolen and taken abroad and sold on the black antiques market. Police were able to track down and arrest two members of a band of smugglers in Tiran in 2013, who had over 100 icons and works of art that had been stolen from churches to be sold abroad.

Unique frescoes of the noted 16th century iconographer Onuphrios were destroyed some time ago in central Albania.

A few months ago, unknown assailants stole 18 Byzantine icons from the Church of St. Marina in Lambovo. In the city of Përmet, under the pretext of “collecting old debts,” civil servants stole icons, sacred vessels, and even a bell from the Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple.

Metropolitan Andrei of Konitsa, Greece, near the Albanian border, has underlined that not only the Orthodox Church, but also the Greeks living in Albania experience serious pressure. Their private property is confiscated, and Greek communities are persecuted and closed. “The Albanians make no secret of their plans to create a ‘Greater Albania,’ which, in their plans, will include large areas of neighboring Orthodox states,” the bishop said.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/104394.htm>

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/104392.html>

Albania begins charging for entrance to Orthodox holy sites

November 21, 2017 – Pilgrims and visitors must now purchase tickets for the privilege of entrance into several Orthodox monasteries and churches throughout Albania, according to a recent governmental decision, reports aktines.blogspot.ru. Clergy have already called the decision another in a long line of restrictive measures directed against the Orthodox Church in Albania.

The new paying regime applies to St. Nicholas Monastery in Mesopotam, the Monastery of the Forty Martyrs, the Cathedral of the Blachernae Icon of the Mother of God in Berat, and other Orthodox holy sites. The website of the Institute of Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture announced that special tickets were needed for “monuments and archaeological areas” in the province of Avlona, according to AgionOros.

Note that entrance fees exist only for Orthodox churches in the country. There are no fees to enter mosques or Roman Catholic churches.

Icons and sacred vessels were also earlier removed by governmental decision to be placed in exhibitions in state museums. A clergy-laity assembly in 2016 officially requested the authorities to return the items.

Sources:

<http://agionoros.ru/docs/2775.htm>

<http://orthochristian.com/108385.html>

http://aktines.blogspot.ru/2017/11/blog-post_230.html

Greece

The Greek Orthodox Church continues to protest the compulsory teaching of new approaches to gender in schools

February 10, 2017 – The Greek Orthodox Church continues to protest the teaching of the “Body and identity” week in schools, in which one of the subjects is tolerance to homosexuality and transsexuality.

The “thematic week”, which created numerous protests among teachers, was discussed during a session of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece. The High Priesthood made the decision to send the explanatory letter of Minister of Education Kostas Gavroglu to all dioceses in order to discuss it and to develop an initiative for a unified-church position.

The Minister of Education added some fuel to the protest fire. Kostas Gavroglu stated that “seminars about gender identity” would be compulsory for all Greek schoolchildren. “Parents will not have the right to prevent their children from attending these lessons”.

“The Tolerance Week” caused protests from the Greek clergy and society. Many parents signed a petition to refuse their children from attending the thematic week of the “Body and Identity”. The teachers are called upon to refuse teaching subjects that “go against the Orthodox faith and the dogmas of the Gospels”.

In an open letter to the Minister of Education, Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus called for an immediate stop of the “impeding decadence”.

“The public demonstration and propaganda of homosexuality insults the public morale and religious sentiments. It also calls upon the youth to lead an immoral sexual behavior and is an explosive planted under the seat of the Greek family institution, which is facing a demographic crisis. It will also cause psychological deformities in children, who will be taught by homosexual couples”.

Sources:

<http://agionoros.ru/docs/2626.html>

http://aktines.blogspot.ru/2017/02/blog-post_91.html

We were put in jail like criminals, endured with God’s help—Elder Ephraim of Vatopedi

March 27, 2017 – Archimandrite Ephraim (Kutsu), abbot of Vatopedi Monastery on Mt. Athos, and thirteen other defendants were acquitted last week in a case concerning a land exchange between the Greek government and the monastery. The case dragged on for many years and saw Elder Ephraim spending three months in jail from December 2011 to March 2012.

A few days after the announcement of his acquittal, Tsargrad TV aired his commentary on the matter. In the monastic’s view, the entire case was a spiritual attack: “After taking the Holy Cincture to Russia¹, because the people received such great benefit, as soon as we returned, the devil immediately showed his strength: we were summoned to an interrogation for preliminary questioning—we were put in jail like criminals.”

“We endured this all with the help of God, reconciled ourselves to it and went to jail. We thank all our brothers who prayed with us, and who endured all of this with us. We are grateful to all who helped us bear this heavy cross which the Lord allowed because of our sins,” Archimandrite Ephraim continued, showing the humility that comes from years of ascetic labors.

He also referred to the words of St. Paisios the Athonite on Christ’s help for all who are unjustly condemned. “As Elder Paisios said, ‘The first to be unjustly accused and condemned was Christ. Therefore, He blesses with both hands those who are also treated unfairly.’ We thank Christ. We thank all of you, and pray for you all,” Elder Ephraim assured, concluding, “Blessed Pascha!”

¹ The Cincture of the Most-Holy Theotokos is Vatopedi’s most prized relic. It was taken to Russia in October 2011 for the faithful to venerate.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/102199.htm>

Metropolitan Chrysostom: The authorities of Greece are consciously destroying the Christian faith

May 16, 2017 – Metropolitan Chrysostom of Trikke and Stagonok has commented the decision of the Greek parliament to eliminate Sunday as a non-working day.

The Metropolitan called the bill’s initiative “yet another provocative intervention”, aimed at de-Christianizing Greece. He called that the so-called “cultural revolution” is “a degradation of human identity and the turning of people into soulless machines of production and consumption of material goods”.

“Our Orthodox Church, since its foundation by Our Lord Jesus Christ, is remaining faithful to keeping Sunday as a non-working day... According to ancient testimonies, the early Christians gathered on Sundays to attend the Divine Liturgy, taking Communion of the Body and Blood of the Resurrected Christ”

This custom has stayed with us across the centuries and stayed up until our days, despite various difficulties in the life of the Church, especially during the first centuries of persecutions against Christians and during Turkish occupation.

Thus, Sunday is needed for Christians for two reasons:

1) The non-working status of Sunday is linked to a freedom of religion. In 313, Constantine the Great issued an edict about religious toleration, making Sunday a non-working day. This allowed Christians to worship to worship freely and to practice their faith in the multireligious Roman empire.

2) The Orthodox Christian faith is based on its church. That is, on mutual gathering of the faithful for common prayer and worship to God.

The newly founded attempts of the authorities to abolish Sunday is a testimony of pre-determined and well-thought of attempts from the authorities to destroy the social fabric of Greek society and the destruction of the Christian faith.

Our diocese would support any law bill that would fight the abolishment of Sunday as a holiday. It is time to take responsibility and to fight for our values and faith”.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/103497.html>

Greek parliament adopted blasphemous bill.

October 2, 2017 – Societal and Church leaders, representatives of the intelligentsia, and believers have expressed outraged over the new law “On the Free Change of Sex,” which the Greek parliament adopted in the first reading, reports Russian Athos.

In accordance with the new draft law, it is enough to simply provide a written declaration in order to receive a legal change of gender.

In an open letter to deputies of the Greek parliament, Metropolitan Kosmas of Aetolia indignantly stated, “You are promoting a bill which denies the Triune God and Creator and casts blasphemy upon Him. This new law is unnatural, it encroaches upon the psychosomatic identity of the person, fosters depravity, and aims to thwart a person on his path to sanctification and deification.

“The bones of our saints and heroes are trembling! The great liberator of Greece the equal-to-the-apostles Kosmas of Aetolia and our other saints are weeping.

“We expect that you will raise your voice against this bill. The people are searching for role models, Greek leaders, who will save the Motherland and the people.”

The majority of Greek parliamentary parties have spoken out in favor of the scandalous bill. Only members of the Communist party and the “Golden Dawn” movement have wholly voted against the bill.

“Independent Greeks” Deputy Kostas Katsikis has also opposed the proposed law, in contrast to his fellow party members. He emphasized that “the new law is a threat to the avaton of the Holy Mountain—a ban has been fixed since ancient times on women visiting Athos.” The deputy also demanded a ban on those who have undergone a sex-change adopting children.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/106779.html>

<http://www.agionoros.ru/docs/2748.htm>

Orthodox Greek hierarchy calls religious education program discriminative against Church

November 2, 2017 – Greek hierarchs are continuing their protest against the new religious education textbooks being introduced into the Greek school system. Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Symi of the Ecumenical Patriarchate has termed the new books “illegal and unconstitutional,” reports AgionOros.

According to the bishop, the government’s decision is “a manifestation of injustice to the Orthodox Greeks.” The new textbooks aim to eradicate the Orthodox identity and to turn religion into a syncretistic discipline, which leads to the “formation of an anti-religious consciousness.”

Beginning in third grade, school students will be told about the religious beliefs of Christians, Muslims, and Jews, without even clearly explaining what religion is. Moreover, in contrast to Orthodoxy, other world religions are presented in an ennobled and idealized sense.

The metropolitan stressed that the new religious studies program is designed exclusively for Orthodox Greeks. Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim students will receive confessionally-oriented education.

According to the bishop, “This is nothing other than a manifestation of discrimination against Orthodox Greeks.”

Met. Chrysostomos also urged parents to join the Pan-Hellenic protest and to refuse the new textbooks and to return them to the Ministry of Education.

Hierarchs of the Greek Orthodox Church have been consistently speaking out against the religious reforms, both before and after their official adoption. Metropolitan Theologos of Serres, in an interview with Greek television, noted that “the Education Minister is constantly attacking the Church without cause. For our part, we do not hold a grudge against him, but at the same time we cannot be silent when historical truth is being deliberately distorted.”

Speaking before the passing of the reforms, Metropolitan Georgios of Livadeia demanded that the government stop the one-sided imposition of the new school curriculum without taking into account the position of the Orthodox Church.

In the view of Metropolitan Makarios of Siderokastron, the school reform and changes in teaching Religious Studies are aimed at “the de-Christianization of society. This is a catastrophe and suicide for Greeks.”

Metropolitan Prokopios of Neapolis characterized the current education reform as “a dangerous and useless experiment which is capable of putting an end to the Greek educational tradition and religious identity. The Church cannot remain indifferent and unconcerned about anti-Orthodox experiments like these.”

Metropolitan Amvrosios of Kalavrita stressed that “Greece, Orthodoxy and the Church of Greece are being persecuted!” The metropolitan called for stopping these reforms which are disastrous for Greece.

Sources:

<http://agionoros.ru/docs/2765.htm>

<http://orthochristian.com/107750.html>

Metropolitan Nicholas of Fthiotida: “The government is deliberately reducing the number of parish priests”

December 13, 2017 – A hierarch of the Greek Church, His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas of Fthiotida, has commented on state policies resulting in the sharp decline in the number of parish clergy in Greece, which he argues is deliberate, reports AgionOros.

“When the crisis began, the authorities established that in place of ten retiring state employees (including priests), only one new one could be taken on for work,” His Eminence noted.

The measure seemed partly justified at the time, Met. Nicholas continues, “But today positions are being given to thousands of officials, while the same limitations have remained in relation to the Church. As a result, countless village parishes remain without a priest...”

It is important to remember, the hierarch also notes, that the state has assumed the responsibility of paying parish priest salaries in exchange for Church property being transferred to state ownership. The exact number of parishes and priests is established by law, but the state has been violating the law, according to Met. Nicholas, reducing the number of parish priests.

“Do not deceive yourselves—the reduction of clergy is not due to financial considerations,” Met. Nicholas argues, “There are other motives.”

His Eminence earlier stated that the authorities “are subverting the spiritual foundations of society and trying to transform our eternal institutional values. Their end goal is the imposition of a secular status and godless state upon Orthodox Greece.”

The hierarch states that the law has established 258 priests in 246 parishes in his diocese, although over the past ten years, 100 retiring priests have been replaced by a mere ten priests, creating a lack of 90 priests in his diocese.

Metropolitan Efstathios of Momemvasia and Sparta describes the situation as critical: “Each diocese is lacking at least 20 priests, in our metropolis 70 priests are lacking. It means that the Liturgy is not celebrated at some churches on Sundays. Residents of small villages are abandoned by officials, by teachers, state services.”

Metropolitan Jeremiah of Gortynos shares the same concern: “In my diocese, 50 of 150 churches have no priests. Bells do not ring any more. Once a local resident said to me, ‘We have no teacher, no priest, our bells ring no more... So one day we will become Turks.’”

According to the 2015 data of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, the number of parishes without pastoral care has reached 22%; the Church is now short of 2,300 priests out of the total number of 10,500 necessary priests. It is primarily small villages, located far from the next settlement and lacking funds to support a priest, that are being deprived of spiritual care.

Sources:

<http://agionoros.ru/docs/2795.htm>

<http://orthochristian.com/109149.html>

Kosovo (territory)

Russian permanent envoy to OSCE says Kosovo authorities enables attacks on churches

February 3, 2017 – the Russian Foreign Ministry has criticized the Kosovo authorities over violations of the rights of Orthodox Christians and attacks on their churches, as reports interfax.

“Take, for example, the situations surrounding the [Cathedral] Church of Christ the Savior in Pristina and the Church of St. Nicholas in Prizren. One gets the impression that the obstructing of their operation has been raised to the status of policy by the Kosovo authorities,” Russian envoy to the OSCE Alexander Lukashevich said at a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna, Austria. The text of his speech was posted on the Russian Foreign Ministry website on Friday.

Against this background, Lukashevich went on, “it’s no surprise that many other churches and monasteries of the Serbian Orthodox Church are regularly subjected to attacks or desecrations by Kosovo Albanian radicals.”

“The Kosovo authorities just cannot take control of them. They enable them or even themselves encourage incitement to hatred,” Lukashevich said.

The Most Recent Threats to Visoki Dečani Monastery April 20, 2017 – Dečani Municipality has been deliberately rejecting the implementation of the final ruling by the Constitutional Court of Kosovo which in June last year confirmed the property rights of Visoki Dečani Monastery. Instead of respecting the law a Kosovo-Albanian nationalist group is threatening the Monastery for weeks through the Kosovo press and has announced the blockade of the Monastery. Serbian Orthodox Church welcomes the communique by EU Office in Kosovo issued today requesting the immediate implementation of the Constitutional Court decision and condemning the threats with blockade of this Christian site.

“Every attempt to block the access to the Monastery for pilgrim and tourist groups in the following days will be a blatant example of the law violation and an indicator of religious and ethnic intolerance in this Municipality which remains unchanged for the last 18 years. Deliberate obstruction of the Constitutional Court decision and threats with violence against a world-wide known Christian and UNESCO site is damaging for the future of all citizens of Kosovo and Metohija”, it is said in the statement by the Diocese of Raška and Prizren, Serbian Orthodox Church today.

EU OFFICE COMMUNIQUE

The EU is concerned by a continued lack of implementation of the 20 May 2016 Constitutional Court ruling on the land dispute case in Decan/e. Decisions by Kosovo’s highest legal authority are conclusive and must be implemented. The EU calls on authorities at all levels to demonstrate respect for the rule of law as a fundamental democratic principle. Full implementation of the ruling should take place without delay. The EU further condemns any actions to block access to or otherwise disrupt life at the Visoki Decani monastery.

Sources:

<http://www.eparhija-prizren.com/en/news/regarding-most-recent-threats-visoki-decani-monastery>

https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/24839/eu-concerned-lack-implementation-constitutional-court-ruling-land-dispute-case-decane_en

Russia

Karelia (Russia) politicians considering to reverse the grant of a building to an Orthodox monastery, citing “fake” registration procedures

March 16, 2017 – The parliament members of the Republic of Karelia decided to overlook a previous decision of granting the “Winter Hotel” building to the Valaam Monastery.

The building was granted to the monastery in 2006; however, the deputies put in question that the land transfer is violating the rights of citizens. They claim it is “not valid, false”. Moreover, they are claiming that the technical land registry information for the Winter Hotel has been forged. This supposedly has the effect of making the building not suitable for living.

The Parliament members are convinced that in the event that the land transfer is disputed, or indeed “recognized as being forged”, previous court decisions on the eviction of “Winter Palace” tenants would need to be overlooked.

It is to be reminded that the “Winter Hotel” is one of the two multilayered houses on the island. The building has been acquired by the monastery in order to create a cultural-enlightenment center called “Valaam”. In March 2005, several residents of Valaam were evicted and refused their land ownership according to a court decision. In September 2015, the evicted residents of the building wrote an open letter to Patriarch Kirill. They stated that they do not wish to leave the island, citing that numerous apartments have become available for them because of an exodus of people.

Sources:

<http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/community-media/communities-conflicts/2017/03/d36598/>

<http://7x7-journal.ru/item/92907>

Ukraine

“Bureaucrats have chosen a new pressure tactic on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church” – Human Rights activist

January 13, 2017 – The demands of the Kremens authorities to demolish the cupola above the cathedral of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is signaling a change of tactics in the ongoing discrimination against the church. The Human Rights activist Oleg Denisov described this phenomenon on his Facebook page. He is the head of the NGO “Public Human Rights Advocacy”.

According to him, the persecution motives against the Ukrainian Orthodox Christians of the Moscow Patriarchate has seen some notable changes. “In 2015 and the first half of 2016, they were primarily disputes in property, when assailants wanted to illegally capture chapels. Today’s motives are primarily guided by a desire to harass”, noted Oleg Denisov.

“In the current state of affairs, no one wants (or can) capture the chapel, but is trying to at least cause some material or property damage in the form of fines or provoking disputes with the authorities”, added the Human Rights activist.

“The heart of such conflicts, as in Kremens, is blind hatred founded on religion. It is no longer a case of someone’s attempt to fight for the right to own property, or to conduct the right to “freely self-identify” – they are just indiscriminately trying to cause as much damage as possible. If they can’t seize the chapel, they will at least present a fine or get on their nerves”, concluded the lawyer.

As the Union of Orthodox Journalists (UOJ) reported, the authorities of Kremens are demanding the demolition of the cupola of an Orthodox cathedral.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/chinovniki-vybrali-novyy-sposob-davleniya-na-upts-pravozashchitnik>

http://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=653192954859636&id=100005068111035&pnref=story

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/chinovniki-kremensa-trebuyut-demontirovat-kupol-kafedralnogo-sobora-upts>

Police keep back statistics on religious hate crimes in Ukraine

February 9, 2017 – An actual number of offences with regard to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church exceed those offered by the law enforcement, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

At the beginning of February the Central Investigation Department of the National Police of Ukraine published the results of the law enforcement bodies’ activity over the last year. Inter alia, law enforcers announced that 76 proceedings were initiated in 2016 on committing hate crimes.

As the police reported, there were commenced 50 criminal cases under the article “violation of citizens’ equality”, 12 cases under the article “desecration or destruction of religious sanctities”, 8 cases – “obstruction of religious ceremonies”, and 4 cases under the article “damage to religious constructions”.

It is said, however, about 17 facts of desecration of temples of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which involved plundering. This problem is the most acute in Polesye where criminals ransacked 5 village temples from April to August 2016.

There were also cases of intentional arsons of the UOC churches: three arson attempts were made in the capital from January to May 2016 and at least two similar attempts in the regions – in Nikolayev of Lvov region and Pavlograd of Denpropetrovsk region.

Representatives of the National Police have turned a blind eye to a number of acts of vandalism with regard to the places of spiritual significance to Christians from various confessions. In particular, in September and October the unknown poured the paint onto the monument of Saint Prince Vladimir the Great in Kiev. A wide resonance was caused by the facts of cutting roadside memorial crosses in Dnepr, Uman and in Vinnitsa region.

The authors believe the law enforcers failed to mention numerous cases of violation of the article “obstruction of religious ceremonies”: “Not less mistrust is caused by the data of the National Police on 8 facts of infringements under article 180 at the background of large-scale endeavors of right radical activists and representatives of the Kiev Patriarchate to stand in the way of the Cross Procession of peace, love and prayer for Ukraine,

which took place in the summer last year. It cannot be kept back owing to the fact the police themselves informed the public on numerous cases of risks and threats, such as inserting of explosives along the itinerary of the Cross Procession to Kiev, which led to unprecedented safeguards on 27 July in the entire capital.”

Additionally, it is said that in Kutly village of Ternopol region the UOC-KP adherents disrupted Sunday worships for a long while at first and then undertook a church raid, registered in the list of offences at the MIA.

“Taking note of this far incomplete list of resonant religion-based hate crimes, one is alarmed by the attempt of the National Police of Ukraine to conceal an actual state with respect for the constitutional right to freedom of conscience and religious beliefs in our state,” write the authors of the article.

Sources:

<http://spzh.news/en/news/39288-police-keep-back-statistics-on-religious-hate-crime-mass-media>

Metropolitan Amphilochius of Montenegro: will the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture veto me too?

February 22, 2017 – Metropolitan Amphilochius of Montenegro and the Littoral of the Serbian Orthodox Church gave his comments to the UOJ as for the statement of the Ministry of Culture, in which civil servants accuse the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of separatism.

In particular, Metropolitan of Lugansk and Alchevsk Mitrophan was incriminated laying of the stone for the monument to Saint Prince Alexander Nevsky.

«I was building a temple of John Vladimir, a Serbian tsar-martyr. The upper temple is consecrated in his honour. The lower temple is consecrated in the honour of Alexander Nevsky. Are they going to prohibit me too?!» claimed Metropolitan Amphilochius.

«Prince Alexander is a pan-Orthodox Saint. He was Russian by origin, but he is a man of God, truly a man of God. Namely he uttered a famous phrase: «God is in truth rather than in strength!» Well, can this person work as a role model for everybody? If we reject him, it means that we should worship force?», said the hierarch.

«God is in truth rather than in strength! Then officials of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine

must be told I was guilty before His Eminence Mitrophan: except the church of Alexander Nevsky, I constructed another one after St. Sergius of Radonezh», he added.

In the statement of the Ministry of Culture it is said that Saint Alexander Nevsky «heroes Russian invaders and symbolizes wicked aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and occupation of the part of its territories.»

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/metropolitan-amphilochius-of-montenegro-will-the-ukrianian-ministry-of-culture-veto-me-too-video>

The court of Borispol (Ukraine) has prohibited an Orthodox Christian Cross Procession

February 22, 2017 – The municipal court of Borispol in the greater Kiev region has reviewed the administrative lawsuit of the protopriest Georgy Nosach of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), and has ruled in its favour. According to a journalist from the Union of Orthodox Journalists (UOJ), the court case involved the prohibition of an Orthodox Cross procession on July 22, 2016, when the local members of the Borispol City Council refused entry to the processions inside the city. They did it despite a collection of 4000 protest signatures that challenged their decision.

The previous decision to prohibit the Cross procession has been repealed.

“Thus, the court has satisfied the rights of believers to conduct peaceful religious assemblies and peaceful processions”, commented the priest Alexei Nosenko, the Head of the Legal department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s diocese of Borispol.

The ban of the Borispol City Council has violated the law, most importantly article 39 of the Ukrainian Constitution, which states that peaceful assemblies can only be prohibited by a decision from the court.

Sources:

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/02/22/borispijskij-sud-skasuvav-zaboronu-xresnoji-xodi-2016/>

Ukrainian Premier pays a visit to Patriarch Bartholomew to seek “united church”

March 15, 2017 – Ukrainian Premier Vladimir Groysman met with Constantinople Patriarch Bartholomew in Constantinople during his visit to Turkey. It is reported by the Cabinet of Ministers’ press-service.

According to the press-service, Vladimir Groysman declared, “Ukrainians strive for a single church” and expressed gratitude to the Patriarch for his “support of the unity of Ukrainian Orthodoxy”.

“We pray for the Ukrainian nation to be embraced by one Church. The Mother Church of Constantinople will help you get such a united church,” promised His Holiness. “We can be optimists about the future.”

Additionally, Patriarch Bartholomew expressed his support for Ukrainians and declared he believes Ukrainians are not foreigners but “beloved spiritual children of this Mother Church.”

It will be reminded that according to sociological studies held in September 2016 by “Ukrainian Sociology Service” company, 32% Ukrainians stand against an idea of one local church. 36% choose to let this process go without any interference of politicians and the state. The remaining believers have not made up their mind yet whether it is expedient to set it up.

Groysman’s action shows the intervention of the government inside the affairs of the church. It violates the division of the church and state, as well as freedom of religion.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/vladimir-groysman-pays-a-visit-to-patriarch-bartholomew-to-seek-united-church>

The Ukrainian Ministry of Culture did not show up to trial with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)

February 22, 2017 – On February 22, the first trial between the Ministry of Culture and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC-MP) took place. The UOC-MP sued the Ministry of Culture over refusal to accept and register the internal charters of the dioceses and monasteries.

The trial took place because the Ministry refused to register the charters over a course of two years. The representatives of the Ministry of Culture did not show up, despite being duly contacted. They have also not yet appealed the court decisions.

Sources:

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/02/22/minkult-ne-zyavivsyia-do-sudu-po-statutax-upc/>

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=426055904397159&set=a.352252401777510.1073741829.100009782594644&type=3&theater>

The Ukrainian Ministry of Culture is leading an active discrimination campaign against the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, according to a religion expert

March 23, 2017 – The Ministry of Culture is leading an orchestrated and systematic discrimination campaign against the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP). This is the view Yuriy Reshetnikov, the Chairman of the Ukrainian Department for Nationalities and Religion from 2009 to 2010. Mr. Reshetnikov gave an interview to the journal “Phrase”, and he holds a PhD in his field. “One can say that the non-registration of certain documents of the UOC-MP, especially monasteries, is being used as a fiscal pressure point on the Church. The Ministry of Culture is well aware that if religious organizations do not change certain things in their charters, than they will lose the “non-for-profit” status and will obtain financial problems”, considers the expert.

The city council purposely delays the handling of the UOC’s paperwork. Mr. Reshetnikov notes, “If the documents are being handled for 1.5 years instead of three months, than one needs to question the competence of the National Anti-corruption Bureau”. Taking into account all of the above, the expert continues “one gets the impression that there is a systematic campaign against the UOC-MP, even though it is not within the working jurisdiction of the Ministry”.

In the event that the courts in Ukraine cannot satisfy the complaints of the UOC, than the Church will be able to appeal their decision to the European

Court of Human Rights, this time against the government of Ukraine.

Sources:

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/03/17/ministerstvo-kulturi-vede-borotbu-proti-upc-religijeznavec/>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine refuses to inform international organizations on violation of believers’ rights, – UOC

March 28, 2017 – Authorities do not pay enough attention to violation of the believers’ rights in western regions of Ukraine, reports Chairman of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) Law Department protopriest Alexander Bakhov in the interview to “Fabor” Charitable Fund.

“The authorities continually carry out studies of violation of the believers’ rights in Donbass and the Crimea. Certainly, we do not deny these facts and feel concerned about them. However, we also point to the violation of the believers’ rights in western regions – these facts are constantly silenced by the government.

When the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Ukraine was preparing a letter to international organizations on violation of believers’ rights, we proposed them to insert a passage that apart from the Crimea and uncontrolled territories in the east there is evidence of violated rights of the faithful also in Western Ukraine. We cited relevant facts – but the MFA refused to include this information into the letter. For this reason we also refused to sign it,” says father Alexander.

According to the Director of the UOC Law Department, the government always substitutes notions calling temple raids as “transitions”.

“Everybody can go and check what is going on in Ternopol, Rovno, and Volyn regions, which cannot be said about the uncontrolled territories. We have lots of photos and video plots to prove it but the state bodies pretend there aren’t any acts of discrimination of the UOC. The authorities need to do something to regulate this situation,” he added.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/mfa-refuses-to-inform-international-organizations-on-violation-of-believers-rights-uoc>

A picket is organized against the Ministry of Culture in Ukraine due to discrimination against the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church

March 31, 2017 – A picket is taking place outside of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine. 19 people are holding signs with the words, “No to political corruption”.

The current practices of the Ministry is causing an uproar among several groups, including the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP).

The picket is part of an ongoing lawsuit between the Ministry and the UOC-MP over the non-registration of monasteries’ charters, as well as a systematic discrimination against the canonical Orthodox Church.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-kieve-piketiruyut-ministerstvo-kultury>

http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/minkult-vedyet-planomernuyu-i-sistematicheskuyu-borbu-protiv-upts-religioved-?sphrase_id=31051

http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/minkult-na-sud-poneregistratsii-ustavov-eparkhiy-ne-yavilsya-glava-yurotdela-upts?phrase_id=26108

Ukrainian Ministry of Education forces teachers to attend a prayer service by the non-canonical Kiev Patriarchate

April 3, 2017 – On Sunday, April 2, the teachers from Nikolaev schools were forced to attend a prayer for peace, led by the non-canonical Kiev Patriarchate head Filaret. Many have commented that this was humiliating to their dignity. This prayer was also done largely against the will of the teachers.

Some teachers have commented that this was done to give a false impression of a large support for the Kiev Patriarchate. It was seen as a public relations stunt done at their expense. Others felt that sending someone to pray in a secular society is not permissible.

The prayer was enforced under the text entitled by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education entitled “Duty to attend a prayer at 15:00 on the Sobor Place, on

April 2, to conduct a mutual prayer of peace in Ukraine and victory over the ‘aggressor’ “.

Sources:

http://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2017/04/03/minobrazovaniya-ukrainy-nasilno-sgonyaet-uchitelej-v-nikolaev-na-moleben-glavya-raskolnikov-filareta/

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/minobrazovaniya-sgonyaet-uchiteley-v-nikolaev-na-moleben-filareta>

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/102380.html>

Cases of discrimination abound in the Ukrainian Army against clerics of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church

April 12, 2017 – A new pattern has arisen within the Ukrainian Army, where the clerical positions are given to the clergy of the “Kiev Patriarchate” and the Greco-Catholic Churches rather than the majority Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP), despite protests from the soldiers themselves.

According to the Head of Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s collaboration unit with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Metropolitan Augustine Belotserkov and Boguslavsk. There is information about pressure being put on the military personnel responsible for hiring clerics and chaplains.

There are cases where a request to have a priest from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church hired leads to a negative reaction from the Military Chiefs of Staff.

“We have proof that once certain military detachments choose one of our priests, their superiors try to have them change their mind and to hire a more “patriotically” minded denomination – notes Metropolitan Augustine – it would be nice to find out, among other things, how people measure levels of patriotism”.

The Metropolitan underlines that this is a constitutional breach of rights for military personnel who are believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. According to the Minister of Defense, S.T. Poltorak, the military personnel have a right to choose a chaplain for their units. He stated that that is the official position of the Ministry of Defense, and that the Armed Forces have the right to retain priests from the confessions to which they belong.

Against the wishes of military personnel, more than half of chaplain positions were given to the “Kiev Patriarchate”, one third to Greco-Catholics and one third to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox

Church, Protestant denominations and in the last place, the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), which is the majority religion in Ukraine.

Archimandrite Luka cites a clear example. “We have a document called ‘The Decision of appointing a religious organization, which offers a candidate for the military unit A1546’. Here, the officer unit is asking for the chaplain to be from the Kremenchuk diocese of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. But after a phone call with the Military Chief of Staff, we found out that the clergy member selected is from the “Kiev Patriarchate”. When we asked for an explanation as to why this is a case, none was given to us.

He further states that the choice of priests from the canonical Church is also the result of their good pastoral reputation.

“We have cases when a soldier writes in his blank that he is a member of the “Kiev Patriarchate”, but when the time comes for electing a priest, he chooses a candidate for the canonical priest. Moreover, this is not surprising, because the Kiev Patriarchate has only recently appeared within military units. The so-called “Moscow Patriarchate” has a longer history of service within the military ranks, whose priests are often known to the soldiers”.

Currently, research is being done into how many military units wish to see priests from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church within their ranks. After this time, an investigation will be conducted with the Military Chiefs of Staff to find out why they discriminate against the canonical Church.

“Thus, we are attempting to protect the rights of the many faithful and their freedom of religion and spiritual fulfillment”, clarified Archimandrite Luka.

The Synodical department of Military Affairs recalls that this is not the first such discriminatory example against the constitutional religious rights of Ukrainian nationals, as well as such a biased attitude towards the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. There have been previous attempts to close their churches on the territory of the military units. One notable example is the closing of the Church of the Martyr John the Warrior, located within the military unit of Cherkassy.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/102654.html>

<http://news.church.ua/2017/04/11/vyyavleny-fakty-diskriminacii-pravoslavnyx-voennosluzhashchix/?lang=ru>

http://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2017/04/13/na-ukraine-vyyavleny-fakty-diskriminacii-pravoslavnyh-voennosluzhawih/

Human rights defenders discuss facts of violations of Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s rights with OSCE

April 24, 2017 – The delegation of OSCE SMM headed by Mr. Mark Kirschbaum met with the head of NGO “Public Advocacy” Oleg Denisov. The meeting was attended by NGO advisor on media issues, cleric of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP), priest Alexiy Zoshchuk.

The sides discussed issues of interfaith conflicts and legislative regulation of the State-Church relationship. Human rights defenders expressed concern over the continuing violations of the rights of believers and communities of the UOC-MP, the facts of searches of journalists and human rights defenders in the Rivne region, ongoing blocking of UOC-MP services in the church of Ptycha and other previously seized temples, as well as the lack of results of the investigations of criminal proceedings opened earlier on application by the representatives of the UOC-MP communities.

The OSCE representatives were informed of the interaction of the NGO “Public Advocacy” with the United Nations Universal Periodic Review System of the Human Rights Council, which will consider the issue of Ukraine’s compliance with international legal standards in 2017.

The parties also discussed the possibility of holding a dialogue with representatives of various levels of government, public and religious organizations in connection with the problems of blocking registration of changes to the statutes of religious organizations of the UOC-MP, conflict situations on religious ground and aggressive rhetoric against the UOC-MP in the media.

In addition, the participants of the meeting considered aspects of the correlation between state and legal regulation models in various countries of the world in relation to the problems of Ukraine, in particular regarding the issue of observing the right of religious organizations to legally fix their canonical governance structure in statutory documents.

In particular, the experience of the US Orthodox Church was mentioned, whose statute provides for the existence of two categories of community members, one of which has the right to vote at community meetings, and the other one has no voting rights; as

well as the legal practice of the Republic of Lithuania, whose legislation grants the right to the ruling bishop alone to create and liquidate the community, and the general assembly in the Orthodox religious organizations is non-existent as such.

In connection with the above, human rights defenders expressed concern over the imposition on the religious communities of Ukraine of a ban on the formulation in the statutes of restrictions aimed at protecting the community from seizures and legal violations.

Let us recall that earlier the Ministry of Culture sent an informative letter to the regional state administrations, in which it unreasonably forbade the registration of statutes containing any items limiting the right of believers to change the canonical subordination

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/human-rights-defenders-discuss-facts-of-violations-of-uoc-rights-with-osce->

Ukrainian parliament to consider bills that would ban canonical Orthodox Church

May 15, 2017 – The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine will consider two draft laws on the status of religious organizations on May 18, one of which would effectively prohibit the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, the second of which would legalize the seizure of churches.

The first bill, No. 4511, “On the special status of religious organizations with headquarters located in states recognized by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine as aggressor states,” proposes that such religious organizations be able to appoint metropolitans and bishops only in agreement with the governing authorities. The same bill also gives the government the right to forbid a confession if its representatives cooperate with religious centers in “aggressor states.” No specific denominations are mentioned in the bill, but only the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) meets all the criteria listed.

One of the authors of the initiative, Deputy Dimitry Tymchuk, confirmed that the document does indeed deal specifically with the UOC-MP: “Across the whole country their churches remain points of agitation against the Ukrainian state. They sell anti-Ukrainian literature even in the center of the capital at the Kiev Caves Lavra,” he stated.

The main research apparatus of the Verkhovna Rada has criticized the bill and recommended that it reject the bill as violating the constitution and acting laws in the country.

The second bill, No. 4128, practically proposes to legalize raiding churches. The document introduces the term “self-identification” and clarifies the minimum number of representatives of a religious community needed to decide to change membership to an active Ukrainian religious center.

The UOC-MP believes that with this law the schismatic Kiev Patriarchate will begin to take away its parishes by introducing a group of people into a parish who will “self-identify” as members of the parish and vote to change jurisdictions, which has already been attempted many times.

Metropolitan Luke of Zaporizhia sharply criticized the bill and its authors in a letter, calling them the “servants of the devil.” “Using their methods of pressure on the Church, they propose to adopt new legislation aimed at destroying the prayer life of our Mother Church, the established Church-administrative structure for centuries,” he wrote.

In his May 14 homily, Metropolitan Agafangel of Odessa called upon the faithful to strengthen their prayers, that the Verkhovna Rada not accept the “anti-people, ungodly laws, aimed at the destruction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the territory of Ukraine.”

“We always pray for our God-protected country, and for the authorities and we desire that God would enlighten them. Through crisis and catastrophe the Lord calls all to repent and change... Therefore, we need to strengthen our prayer ... that the Lord would give us patience and courage, for he is always with us,” Met. Agafangel preached.

In just one day, with the blessing of His Beatitude Met. Agafangel, more than 52,000 faithful of the Odessa region signed an appeal to the Ukrainian parliament to reject the two bills as dangerous to the Church and discriminatory against the faith of Ukrainian believers.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/103474.htm>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/rada-again-wants-to-push-through-anti-church-bills-media>

<http://theorthodoxchurch.info/blog/news/ukrainian-parliament-to-consider-bills-that-would-ban-canonical-orthodox-church/>

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/103445.html>

Discriminatory laws prepared against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – a report at the world summit in defense of persecuted christians

May 16, 2017 – The World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians took place in Washington from May 10 to 13, 2017. It was attended by some 600 representatives of various Christian confessions from 136 countries.

Along with the problem of oppression and sometimes direct elimination of the Christian population in the Middle East countries, the forum dealt with the situation of Christians in other regions of the world. Reports were made about various forms of persecution, both direct and indirect.

One of the sessions heard a report by the deputy chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Archpriest Nikolay Danilevich. He spoke about the violations of rights of the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Among other things, the priest mentioned discriminatory Bills No. 4511 and 4128 placed on the agenda of the Supreme Rada expected to vote on them on May 18, 2017.

Archpriest Nikolay Danilevich pointed to the paradoxical nature of the Ukrainian situation, as discriminatory actions are carried out in a state with a predominant Christian population and targeted at the largest religious community in the country.

Bill No. 4128 on ‘the change of subordination’ of religious organizations proposes to introduce in the religious legislation the notion of ‘the belonging of a person to a religious community’ to be determined on the basis of ‘self-identification’. As critics of the bill have pointed out, in fact it means that any outsider who claims his or her belonging to a particular religious community will be given the right to vote in making decisions important for the community, such as its move to another jurisdiction. According to experts, the aim of the bill is to legalize the practice of fictitious ‘referendums’ of a settlement people used as a basis for already captured scores of churches belonging to the canonical Church in Ukraine. As His Beatitude Onufry, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine, noted in his report to the Bishops’ Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on January 29, 2016, during the so-called vote of general parish meetings for re-subordination

‘there is a substitution of notions when a territorial community is identified with a religious community’. Bill No. 4511 ‘On the Special Status of Religious Organizations Whose Governing Centers Are Located in the State Recognized by the Supreme Rada as Aggressor-State’, actually proposes to oblige all the UOC religious communities to re-register and conclude a discriminatory agreement with the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture ‘on a special status’ only because ‘its center of canonical subordination’ is located in Russia. Moreover, the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture will be empowered to control the appointment of bishops and clergy, visitations of bishops and clergy from Russia and will be granted the right to abolish religious organizations ‘with a special status’ for a number of reasons.

Sources:

<https://mospat.ru/en/2017/05/16/news145957/>

Ukrainian hierarchs and religious leaders comment on anti-church bills to be considered by Supreme Rada

May 16, 2017 – Bills No. 4128 and 4511 to be considered in the Supreme Rada on May 18, 2017, are viewed by representatives of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church and other religious leaders in Ukraine as well as secular experts as discriminatory and aimed against the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

In various dioceses of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, signatures are being collected under appeals to the Supreme Rada deputies to vote against the proposed bills. Metropolitan Antony of Borispol and Brovary made comments explaining the discriminatory nature of the bills: “These bills have provoked a strong response and assessment among many religious organizations in Ukraine. Indeed, if adopted, any confession in our country will be very easily deprived of any of its property”. He also pointed out that the bills contradict the legislative norms existing in Ukraine and, according to sociological surveys, have scarcely any considerable public support, whereas 52 signatures were collected against the bills for one day in the Odessa dioceses alone. “Ordinary people have clearly shown that they are against the ‘anti-church’, ‘illegitimate’ and ‘anti-popular’ laws. We hope that elected representatives of the people are aware of this and will not go against the will of their constituency”.

Metropolitan Luka of Zaporozhe and Melitipol in his appeal to his flock said that these laws, if adopted, threaten to ruin church life and the age-long church

administrative order. 'Bill 4128 proposes to define one's belonging to a religious community on the basis of one's 'self-identification'. In other words, anyone who once entered your church can claim to be its permanent parishioner. Together with the likes of him, they can without ceremony, on legal grounds drive you out of your church. Such actions represent a raid capture. Who of you will agree to being driven out of the church you have attended all your life?

Bill 4511, in its turn, introduces a special status for Churches whose governing bodies are located in the country recognized by the Rada as 'aggressor-state'. As His Eminence Luka stressed, it 'gives a right not to the Supreme Church Authority but rather to representatives of civic authorities – often non-believers and ones who are hostile to our Church – to appoint clergy'. 'Are you ready to have your priest removed because some bureaucrat does not like him?' he asks the faithful.

Metropolitan Luka asked his flock to hold a fast from May 14 to 18 and assume the devotional feat of reading an agreed special prayer rule.

"Some 'servants of the people' by their actions seek to plunge not only our Church but also our Motherland Ukraine into the abyss of inter-confessional war. Unfortunately, we know from the history of countries in which such a war arose that it is much more terrible than a non-religious war', the ruling bishop of the Zaporozhe diocese stated.

"Those who wish to implement these anti-church bills do not build and did not build churches and monasteries. Their task is to stir up enmity and hatred, to sow seeds of discord, pursuing man-hating policy according to linguistic, religious and cultural affiliation. But we always pray for our God-saved country, for her authorities and wish that the Lord may bring them to reason", stressed Metropolitan Agafangel of Odessa and Izmail on May 14 in his homily after the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral of the Dormition.

Addressing the congregation, the hierarch expressed the opinion that by such actions 'the enemies of the Holy Church seek, in the spirit of past theomachist totalitarianism, to deprive the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, recognized by the Universal Orthodoxy, of her legitimate rights and freedoms by putting under full state control the life of the Church beginning from the appointment of metropolitans and bishops to interfering in the established life of every parish community'.

He stated that these bills grossly violate Article 35 of the Ukrainian Constitution and contradict all the laws on freedom of conscience and religion, thus trumping upon

the fundamental European values, so much spoken about today, and will serve to destroy the civic and inter-confessional peace, accord and stability in Ukrainian society.

"Therefore, I call upon all of you, first of all, to intensify your prayers for the defense of the Holy Church and for bringing the unreasonable to reason – those who intend to pursue their own momentary political ambitions against their own people – which may result in the people's confrontation and, God forbid, the blood of brothers will be shed again. Clueless politicians should remember that the Orthodox would by all means defend their faith despite the forthcoming persecution and terrible trials, because God is with us", the message states.

Over 52 thousand signatures were collected against these bills on May 14 in the Odessa Region alone.

The fact that the present actions of representatives of the state leadership reminds of the atheistic persecution to which the Soviet power subjected the Church in the 20th century is stated by Archbishop Ioasaf of Kirovograd and Novomirgorod. 'Little time has passed since the godless Soviet power with all its might turned against the Church of Christ in an attempt to destroy it and drown her in her own blood, the blood of new martyrs and confessors. It seemed that all this were in the past, that lessons were learnt and conclusions were made... But no. Again, now in the 21st century in an independent law-governed European state, in a situation of declared rights and freedoms and the equality of all before law, the enemy of the human race searches for ways and means to struggle with the Church. Some clueless deputies, who belong to certain confessions, who are hostile to our holy Church, bring in not only confusion and discord between Christians but also encroach upon what is held as the most sacred for our people – the Orthodox Church, in an attempt to enslave her by creating a ground for discord and bloody interreligious wars in the state', the archbishop states in his appeal.

He called all to raise their voices in defense of the Church: 'We will not be afraid as we have the example in the lives of the saints who openly and fearlessly confessed the name of God and stood firmly for the faith of their parents and the historical Church of our people'.

The ruling bishop of the diocese of Voznesensk came out with an appeal to the people's representatives to stand against the anti-church laws to be adopted by the Supreme Rada. Bishop Alexiy of Voznesensk and Pervomaisk reminded the congregation at the St. Barbara church in Pervomaisk that 'our representatives... wish to adopt laws whereby everything should belong to the state, that the authorities may appoint bishops and

priests. Tomorrow strangers may come to our church and say that this church belongs to them'. The archpastor gave his blessing upon the collection of signatures under an appeal to Ukrainian people's deputies until May 18 and called his flock to pray and hold a fast.

Speaking about the actions of those who initiated the bills, His Eminence Alexiy stressed, 'They want to destroy the church structure so that the Church may be governed not by His Beatitude Metropolitan of Kiev, nor the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, but bureaucrats. If they like a person, he will be the pastor, if not he will not be such'.

Bishop Nafanail of Volyn and Lutsk issued an appeal to the flock too, stating, 'It is difficult to believe but today, in the democratic Ukrainian society, which aspires for the implementation of European values and freedoms, there are new persecutions against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – the legal successor of the old Metropolis of Kiev. The Ukrainian Supreme Rada, which should work for the benefit of the citizens regardless of their religious affiliation, tries to adopt laws which will work against the largest Ukrainian Church'. He also called upon the faithful, 'through love, prayer and faith to rise against hatred', to defend their constitutional rights and tell society 'the truth about the fact that the Church is not a political institution but the Body of Christ'.

Bill No. 4128 met with a negative response of the Supreme Rada's council of scientists and experts. Among those who are against it is a number of major religious organizations in Ukraine. Severe criticism against it was expressed earlier by representatives of other Christian confessions in the country.

Thus, already in 2016, Bishop Stanslav of the Roman Catholic diocese of Kharkov and Zaporozhe said this about Bill No. 4128: '... Everything has been done to help the Kiev Patriarchate to take possession of the Moscow Patriarchate parishes. A corruption scheme is being built to allow parishes move freely to the Kiev Patriarchate... It is not good; it is unfair! Right is the one who is stronger – it is not a Christian way. It is the same raiding!'

Concerning Bill No. 4511, he noted that 'The Church is – of Christ; she is free; there should be no special statuses for her'. 'Why should a cage with a special status be created for the Church? Who needs this law on a special status?! It is humiliation for the Church and, generally speaking, it speaks very badly of Ukraine. It does not testify to the democratic nature of the state and rationalism', the Catholic prelate believes.

Igor Rudzik, secretary of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, leveled strong criticism against the notion of 'self-identification' as to one's affiliation to a community

proposed by Bill No. 4128: 'The bill proposes that the belonging of a person to a particular religious community should be established through self-identification with this religious community. But this contradicts our statute! Moreover it states that the self-identification is to be confirmed by one's participation in the religious life of a community. But 'religious life' is also a very vague notion. Is it only one's participation in divine service or one's indispensable involvement in other spheres of the life of a community?' He also noted that the decision on a change in the subordination of a religious community (the move of a community to a different religious organization) made by a simple majority is an interference in the internal affairs of a religious organization: 'According to our internal laws, at least two thirds of the community members should be present at the meeting. For this reason, we view this bill as interference in our internal church affairs'.

Yevgeny Ziskind, executive secretary of the Association of Jewish Religious Organizations in Ukraine, and member of the presidium of the Jewish Confederation in Ukraine, joins the criticism of the bills: 'Bill No. 4128 appeals to such a notion as 'self-identification', though no clear explanation is given at all to what is meant by it. For instance, in the Jewish tradition it is not enough for one to be only personally interested and determined. What is needed is also a number of rites and customs to be observed. The doors of our temples are always open and to each, but it does not mean at all that all those who come to a synagogue can be called members of our religious community, much less make decisions on its fate. So, this bill opens a way for raiding, capture of church facilities and lands only on the basis of the fact of 'self-identification'.

The annual report of the Supreme Rada Commissioner for Human Rights states that Bill No. 4511 contradicts the Ukrainian Constitution, Ukraine's international commitments and the religious legislation of the country. Sources:

<https://mospat.ru/en/2017/05/16/news145988/>

Ukrainians to gather in prayer at parliament on day of vote on anti-orthodox draft laws

May 16, 2017 – Faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) from all across the country, including parish and monastery representatives, will gather outside the Verkhovna Rada to offer prayers in connection with draft laws No. 4128 and 4511, which stand

to threaten the canonical Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

The bills, which will be considered on the parliamentary floor on the same day, have caused great concern throughout the country and beyond. Bill No. 4511 proposes that churches that have their administrative center in so-called “aggressor states” can appoint bishops only with the consent of governmental authorities, and that any confession cooperating with “aggressor states” can be forbidden. Bill No. 4128 legalizes the seizure of churches, which has already been happening against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate.

Petitions have been drafted in all regions of Ukraine, with thousands of signatures being collected, calling on the Verkhovna Rada to reject the bills which threaten the faith of the majority of Ukrainian citizens.

Ukrainian hierarchs have been raising their voices against the proposed measures as well. In an appeal posted on his diocesan website, Bishop Nathanael of Volhynia and Lutsk appealed to his flock to approach the situation with the Christian virtues of love and faith. “It is hard to believe, but today, in the democratic Ukrainian society, which declares its desire to embody European values and freedoms, a new persecution is unfolding, against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church—the rightful successor to the ancient Kievan metropolitanate,” the prelate writes.

“I appeal to all the faithful of Volynia, who value peace and do not desire new conflicts in the state, to stand against hatred with prayer, love, and faith... We, who are the ‘light of the world,’ must first of all convey to the public the truth that the Church is not a political institution, but the Body of Christ. Today, the future of Orthodoxy is in our hands,” the archbishop stressed.

“The clergy and laity are trying to get the people’s representatives to hear the opinion of the religious part of society and to prevent the legalization of discrimination on religious grounds in Ukraine. The believing citizens of Ukraine are convinced that the anti-Church decisions of the deputies, aimed at discriminating against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the escalation of religious conflicts, is not just a personal moral choice of the deputies, for which they will answer at the Dread Judgment, but it invokes the wrath of God on the country, which

they have been entrusted to lead,” the Ukrainian Church’s site reads.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/103495.htm>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/over-52-thousand-believers-of-odessa-request-mps-not-to-vote-for-anti-church-laws>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/archbishop-of-kirovograd-joasaph-urges-believers-to-stand-for-protection-of-church>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/bills-4511-and-4128-are-aimed-at-the-destruction-of-the-church-metropolitan-agaphangel-of-odessa>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/metropolitan-luke-calls-for-fasting-and-prayer-against-anti-church-bills>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/the-state-bluntly-interferes-into-church-affairs-uoc-representative>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/rada-is-determined-to-fight-with-the-church-expert>

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=dujour&div=12>

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/103536.html>

Serbian Holy Synod expresses support for suffering Ukrainian Church

May 29, 2017 – The Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church recently finished a session at the Patriarchate of Peć and Belgrade, held on May 14 to 24 under the chairmanship of Patriarch Irinej. The bishops discussed many issues concerning, first of all, the Church’s mission in modern society, and the problems of the spiritual revival of the nation, reports Sedmitza.

The synod also joined the primates of other Local Churches in standing against the recently proposed anti-Orthodox draft laws in Ukraine. The council of bishops sent a letter of support and prayerful solidarity to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow concerning the discrimination and hardships faced by the hierarchs, clergy, and faithful of the largest and only canonical Church in Ukraine—the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

In the letter, draft bills #4128 and #4511 are referred to as “unprecedented discrimination against the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church” and “open persecution against the majority of Ukrainian citizens, or the denial of their freedom of conscience

and their right to belong (or not belong) to the church or religious community to which they want to belong (or not belong).”

Thus, the Serbian faithful will increase their prayers for the suffering brethren in Ukraine, and “as a sign of fraternal solidarity with the great martyric holy Russian Orthodox Church,” Patriarch Irinej and the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church stated that they will send messages concerning the situation to religious, cultural, political, and public figures, and international organizations.

It was also decided to establish a department for supporting the sanctity of marriage and family, a department for bioethics, and a department for monitoring the activities of heretical organizations, sects, and non-canonical groups. The bishops also supported the construction of a memorial center in the Staro Sajmište district of Belgrade, where a WW2 concentration camp was located, dedicated to Serbian victims of the 20th century, including Jews, Gypsies, and all peoples who suffered.

The bishops also rejoiced to hear a report on the recent discovery of the incorrupt relics of St. Mardarije at St. Sava’s Monastery in Libertyville, IL. It was decided that the centenary of his arrival to America would be officially celebrated July 14 and 15.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/103892.htm>

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate demands return of all property seized from it, halt of attempts to create state Church in Ukraine

May 30, 2017 – The Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has called for an end to be put to church division in Ukraine and state interference in religious affairs.

“One should finally put an end to the attempts to create a state Church in Ukraine. All churches and religious communities should be equal to the state and serve freely,” the Synod said in an address issued on the 25th anniversary of the Kharkov Bishops Council.

Church division, which can only be overcome by “frank and sincere dialogue,” continues to exist in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate said in a document posted on its website on Monday.

“However, dialogue became impossible today

in a situation of open aggression by the “Kiev Patriarchate.” The first step towards it should be the halt of violence and aggressive rhetoric. All illegally seized church property should be returned to its lawful owners. Real dialogue can only begin after specific actions that confirm peace-loving intentions and declarations,” the document said.

The Synod also said the Ukrainian Orthodox Church today is the most populous religious organization in the country and it is represented in all regions of Ukraine.

“Don’t call us ‘Moscow Church’ just because we keep the centuries-old tradition that begins from the Christening of Kievan Rus in the blessed waters of the Dnieper and unites millions of believers who now live in Moscow, Minsk, Chisinau, and in many other cities and states worldwide,” the document said. Dozens of churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were taken over by representatives of the self-proclaimed “Kiev Patriarchate” after the fighting began in eastern Ukraine three years ago. These incidents occur amid the attempts made by the Ukrainian authorities to create a local Orthodox Church in the country. One of the goals is to separate the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Moscow Patriarchate.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13836>

Rivne region authorities refuses UOC to allocate land for children’s rehabilitation centre

June 15, 2017 – At an extraordinary session of the Kvasilov village council, many deputies abstained from voting for the allocation of land for the construction of the spiritual centre of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Thus, the village head’s order, taken under pressure, “on suspending the execution of the decision to allocate the land plot” was left in force.

The Rivne diocese of the UOC is planning to build a spiritual and educational centre in Kvasilov to provide social and spiritual assistance to children and young people with special needs.

The village council of Kvasilov of the Rivne region at first decided to meet the request of the Rivne diocese of the UOC and allocate a land plot. On May 24, 2017, the deputies almost unanimously decided to allocate land.

Later, the chairman of the village council suspended the

decision, since on June 9 picketers arrived at the session of the village council, among whom were non-local people and people in camouflage. They demanded to completely abolish the decision to allocate land for the construction of the spiritual and educational centre.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/rivne-region-authorities-refuses-uoc-to-allocate-land-for-children-s-rehabilitation-centre>

“Even Central Committee of the CPSU did not interfere with activities of the Church as brazenly as the current government”, – political expert

July 7, 2017 - Before our eyes, before the eyes of the entire world, Orthodoxy is being killed in Ukraine. Even under the Soviet rule, the Central Committee of the CPSU interfered into church affairs more covertly, at least not so impudently.

“Article 35 of the Constitution states: “the church and religious organizations in Ukraine are separated from the state”. Not very well separated, though. In the parliament, bill No. 4511 “is pushed through”. Its “gimmick” in Article 5 is the appointment of leadership of religious organizations only through coordination with the state institution – the Ministry of Culture,” the journalist said.

Commenting on bill No. 4511, he stressed that even in the USSR “there was no law according to which the appointment of Church leaders was to be coordinated with the bodies of the CPSU.”

Viacheslav Pikhovshek reminded that another anti-church bill #4128, allegedly facilitating the transition of religious communities from one confession to another, was disapproved not only by the UOC, but also by the Roman Catholic Church and other denominations.

He also gave an example of the real situation on May 16, 2017. “Village Zoryanoe of Vinkovtsy district of Khmelnytsky region. Right-wing radicals, led by deputy from “Freedom” party Burlik, seized the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church temple. They arrived, declared themselves to be a community, brought a representative of the Kyiv Patriarchate, handed him the keys to the church. Law enforcement officers, in their turn, were inactive.

Under the threat of seizures are not only temples of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. For if the

bill is adopted, any group of people can declare themselves a local community, and the internal order of the confession is ignored: for example, for a faithful Jew, it is not enough to declare himself as such, his actions in the community should be the testimony. The same is true about Lutherans. As for our state, it is trying to create conditions under which anyone declares himself a community and seizes church property,” said the political expert.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/even-central-committee-of-the-cpsu-did-not-interfere-with-activities-of-the-church-as-brazenly-as-t>

Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine approved antichurch bill

July 14, 2017 – On July 12 the Committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on Culture and Spirituality considered and approved bill No. 5309 “On introducing amendments to the Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations.”

Bill No. 5309 proposes to amend the Law “regarding the name of religious organizations (associations) that are part of a religious organization (association) whose governing center (management) is located outside Ukraine in a state that, according to the Law of Ukraine, recognized as carrying out military aggression against Ukraine and / or temporarily occupied part of the territory of Ukraine.”

Head of the Law Department of the UOC Archpriest Alexander Bakhov on his Facebook page commented on the Committee’s decision as follows: “This bill is supposed to deprive the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of its own name! As it turns out, they want to deprive the UOC believers not only of the opportunity to pray in their own temples, but also to take away the name of the Church! Perhaps Denisenko Mikhail Antonovich (Patriarch of the Kiev Patriarchate.) thinks that the name will give him the recognition of other Churches and canonicity?”

Experts note the discriminatory nature of bill No. 5309 towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/vr-committee-approves-antichurch-bill>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/vr-s-committee-is-set-to-consider-the-bill-against-the-uoc>

State TV and Radio Broadcasting Committee of Ukraine bans the import of epic about Saint Ilyia of Murom

December 7, 2017 – The Expert Council at the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine banned the wholesale import of books “Ilyia of Murom and Nightingale the Robber: Tales of the Russian Hero-Knights” and “Bogatyr Russian Fairy Tales”.

As the head of the department for analysis and development of the information space of the State Committee for Television and Radio of Ukraine Sergey Oleinik informed, the authorities expect to stimulate the Ukrainian market of printed products in this way. In particular, there will be massively more Ukrainian books.

“This happened last week, it was forbidden to give permission for the wholesale import of this literature,” Oleinik explained. According to him, despite the ban on wholesale imports, each person can transport no more than 10 copies in hand luggage across the border of Ukraine.

Oleinik noted that during the consideration of the ban issue, an expert council of 15 people voted “for” a ban on the wholesale import by a majority of votes. According to him, those books that were imported into the territory of Ukraine before the restriction entered into force will not be withdrawn from Ukrainian retail chains.

Earlier it was reported that the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine corrected the birthplace of Ilyia of Murom in Wikipedia, transferring it from Murom city to Morovsk near Chernigov.

The monk of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra Iliya Muromets died about 1188. The remains of Ilyia, who were in the bogatyr side-chapel of St. Sophia Cathedral, were transferred to the St. Anthony’s Cave of the Kiev-Pechersk Monastery.

The popular hero knight of the epic has been revered by the Church in the venerable sainthood since 1643, among the sixty-nine Saints of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/state-tv-and-radio-broadcasting-committee-of-ukraine-bans-the-import-of-epic-about-ilyia-of-murom>

<https://rian.com.ua/culture/20171205/1030103895/Ukraine-skazki-zapret-razyasneniya.html>

Believers of Stary Gvozdets urge the President to stop discrimination of the UOC

December 11, 2017 – The believers from Stary Gvozdets village and the UOC clergy addressed the President with a protest against the discrimination of the UOC, arbitrariness of the authorities and against anti-church bills. It is reported by the First Cossack.

“Mr. President, you used to go to our churches, visit our monasteries. For the sake of peace and order in the state, do not adopt these laws,” urges Igor Vivcharik, a believer in the community of the church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the village of Stary Gvozdets.

“These laws bear international enmity. Our contingent is primarily multinational, and it is impossible to put the entire Ukraine on a par with one Galicia,” priest Yuri Gichko of the Holy Trinity Church Rzhyshev believes.

The Orthodox Ukrainian from the village of Stary Gvozdets Oksana Pernarovskaya tells about cases of physical violence against believers of the UOC and asks President Poroshenko to restore law and justice.

The priest of the Volyn eparchy of the UOC, Protopriest Oleg Tochinsky, calls on MPs not to accept and not to vote on anti-church bills, including bill No. 4128, which worsen the position of believers inside the country and impair the international image of Ukraine.

Earlier, international non-governmental human rights organizations appealed to the Ukrainian authorities to stop discrimination against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and to withdraw draft laws Nos. 4128, 4511, 5309, aimed at restricting rights and discriminating religious organizations of the UOC.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/believers-of-stary-gvozdets-urge-the-president-to-stop-discrimination-of-the-uoc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgQKlFK2ohk>

Ministry of Culture tries to avoid legal assessment of its actions, – Reaction of the UOC

December 18, 2017 – The statement of the Legal Department on the judicial dispute with the Ministry of Culture about the non-registration of statutes of the eparchies and monasteries of the Ukrainian

Orthodox Church was published by the Information and Education Department of the UOC.

“Instead of proving the legitimacy of their actions in court, the Ministry of Culture first sabotages the court session, and then tries to drag the judicial dispute into the political and information context, as evidenced by a number of tendentious publications in the media and stories on the central television channels of the country,” the statement said. “The questions raised by the representatives of the Ministry of Culture in the media have nothing to do with the subject of the judicial proceedings and are aimed at putting pressure on the court, spreading false information about the Church and misleading people.”

“In addition, we believe that the calls of the representatives of the Ministry of Culture for the dialogue are of a declarative nature and are meant to end the judicial dispute on formal grounds, while avoiding the consideration of the case and an objective assessment of the legitimacy of the Ministry’s actions by the court,” the Church’s lawyers emphasize.

From December 2014 to May 2015, 11 statutes were submitted to the Ministry of Culture for registration, in particular 3 of eparchial administrations and 8 – monasteries. Lawyers of the UOC emphasize that the law sets a deadline of 1-3 months for registering statutes, but despite this, the statutes were under registration until June 2016.

During this time, as the Statement said, the officials of the Ministry of Culture created the appearance of the negotiation process without taking any decision in accordance with the law. At the same time, the Ministry of Culture had to take one of two decisions: to register or refuse to register the statutes.

Numerous public statements by the Director of the Department for Religious and Ethnic Affairs of the Ministry of Culture A. V. Yurash that, for certain reasons, they “do not want to refuse the registration of statutes” confirm that the official is guided not by law but by his own desire and a selective attitude towards religious organizations, according to the Legal Department of the Church.

“Considering the foregoing, we consider the actions of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine to be unlawful and reminiscent of the traditions of state-church relations of the Soviet period that were aimed at intervening and destroying the internal structure of our Church,” concludes the UOC.

The District Administrative Court of the city of Kiev

keeps hearing the case on the claim of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church against the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine regarding the non-registration of statutes of the eparchies and monasteries of the UOC. There have been four sessions held during the year, the last – on December 13, 2017.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/zashchita-tserkvi/ministry-of-culture-tries-to-avoid-legal-assessment-of-its-actions-uoc>

<http://news.church.ua/2017/12/14/zayava-yuridichnogo-viddil-uoc-shhodo-sudovogo-sporu-z-minkulturi-pro-ne-rejestraciju-statutiv-jeparxij-ta-monastiriv-ukrajinskoji-pravoslavnoji-cerkvi/>

Kiev eparchy of UOC names consequences of anti-church bills

December 25, 2017 – The Kiev Metropolitanate (UOC MP) held a meeting in the Refectory Church of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra attended by 621 clergymen, reports a UOJ correspondent. The vital issues of the life of the eparchy and the UOC in general were discussed.

Addressing the audience, the Primate of the UOC, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine stressed the need to talk about God rather than politics in the church. At the same time, Vladyka noted that one of the driving forces for robbery and desecration of UOC churches is dirty information, which is now spread by many mass media.

The Primate said that now the Church-state relations are relatively constructive, although in some regions the authorities are biased towards believers.

Particular attention was paid to the discriminatory bills, which some political forces are lobbying in the Rada. These bills are an example of prejudice against the multi-million flock of the Church. More than 300,000 believers of the UOC have signed against the adoption of these laws, which will open the way to church raiding and may become the beginning of a religious war.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/kiev-eparchy-of-uoc-names-consequences-of-anti-church-bills>

Chapter 4: Infringement of Orthodox Christians’ right to freedom of assembly including acts of vandalism against Orthodox Worship and Sacred Places.

Albania

Orthodox church profaned in Albania

July 18, 2017 – The desecration of Orthodox churches, monasteries, and holy sites has become common practice in modern-day Albania. The latest scandal was caused by a report of the TV station Top Channel, reports AgionOros.ru.

Inviting the audience to a jazz festival organized by the singer Eda Zari, the broadcast showed a music clip filmed inside an Orthodox church. The footage showed a jazz group playing with their backs turned to the holy altar.

It is believed that the filming took place at the Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos in Berat in southern Albania. The church was confiscated by authorities and is being used as a museum of Byzantine art. Visitors to the church-museum testify that the guides regularly enter into the altar and pick up and show visitors the sacred vessels and holy relics. In a number of cases, the confiscation of valuables and the destruction of holy sites have been carried out by the state itself. In August 2013, hired government thugs attacked an Orthodox Church in the southern Albanian town of Përmet, smashing icons and crosses and beating up worshippers. In early 2015, the government unilaterally decided to destroy the fencing around the Tirana Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ.

In March 2016, more than 300 clergy and laity gathered and requested that the government return churches, monasteries, and sacred objects and sites confiscated from the Church and profaned. The request was especially provoked by an earlier profanation of the same Dormition church in Berat, when photos were shot showing young girls advertising wedding dresses on the episcopal throne, and in front of the Royal Doors and iconostasis. Similar pictures were also taken at an Orthodox church in Elbasan.

The request notes the deleterious effect of such actions for the whole country, and that such blasphemies occur only against the Orthodox Church in Albania:

This is obviously a sacrilege and an insult to religious feelings. Certainly, such occurrences spoil the religious harmony for which our country boasts. Also, we highlight that such repeated offensive actions do not “promote” the cultural heritage of our country. It is worth mentioning the fact that such sacrilegious acts have not been committed towards any cult objects of the other religious communities in Albania. Therefore we protest because the state bodies, which still hold possession of the sacred sites and objects, even after twenty-five years of democracy in the country, give permission to desecrate the holy and gracious objects of the Orthodox Church.

We ask for the law no. 10057 Article 22/2 dated on 22/01/2009 on the “Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Albania and the Albanian Orthodox Church” to be finally applied and all the holy churches, monasteries, holy relics, icons and sacred objects of worship to be returned with no delay or excuses to the Orthodox Church. They are highly respected, honored and are sacred to all the Orthodox people around the world but also to the faithful in Albania.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/105183.html>

<http://agionoros.ru/docs/2709.htm>

Belgium, Germany

Intolerance towards Religious Symbols on package.

October 11, 2017 – The site of the Observatory on the Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe published 4 similar cases of exclusion of the Crosses from packages with the views of the Orthodox Churches.

August 31, 2017: In Belgium, the supermarket chain Lidl promotes its Greek ERIDANOUS products with images of the famous Anastasis Church in Santorini, Greece, complete with its world-renowned blue dome roof. However, the packaging image has photoshopped out the crosses from the tops the orthodox churches. Lidl spokesman said “We are avoiding the use of religious symbols because we do not wish to exclude any religious beliefs,” and “We are a company that respects diversity and this is what explains the design of this packaging.” The company later apologized, “Our intention has never been to shock. We avoid the use of religious symbols on our packaging to maintain neutrality in all religions. If it has been perceived differently, we apologize to those who may have been shocked.”

September 04, 2017: The world’s largest food and beverage company Nestlé has removed the Christian cross from its Greek yogurt packaging depicting the famous blue-domed Anastasis Church in Santorini, Greece. Supermarket brands Carrefour Lidl have used similar images.

September 15, 2017: After controversy over the Lidl supermarket group removing crosses from Santorini churches on the packaging of Greek foods, it appears that Lipton, a holding of the Unilever Group, also eliminated crosses from their packaging, including its Russian Earl Grey tea. The illustration is of an Orthodox church, but with the crosses removed from the domes.

October 11, 2017: In Germany Weideglück’s Greek Yoghurt packaging uses an image similar to those used by Nestlé. Carrefour, and Lidl, which depicts the famous blue dome of the Anastasis Church in Santorini, but with the cross removed.

Sources:

<http://www.intoleranceagainstchristians.eu/case/lipton-removes-crosses-from-product-packaging.html>

<http://www.intoleranceagainstchristians.eu/case/nestle-and-carrefour-removed-cross-from-greek-yoghurt-packaging.html>

<http://www.intoleranceagainstchristians.eu/case/lidl-supermarket-group-removed-crosses-from-santorini-churches-on-greek-products.html>

<http://www.intoleranceagainstchristians.eu/case/german-yoghurt-maker-weideglueck-removed-santorini-cross-from-packaging.html>

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Repeating attacks on Serbian cemeteries and sacred places in Bosnia and Herzegovina

November 5, 2017 – Serbian National TV channel RTRS broadcasted report on repeating attacks on Serbian cemeteries and sacred places in BiH.

On the 4th of November 2017 several tombstones were destroyed on the Orthodox cemetery in Brijesće near Sarajevo, 15 days before in the village of Karaula near Kakanj, the Orthodox plot at the Sarajevo cemetery Bara has been desecrated countless times. Over the past 15 years, only the Temple of the Transfiguration of the Lord in Pofalici in Sarajevo, has been desecrated 40 times. The perpetrators are mostly unknown.

The last attack on the Temple of the Lord’s Transfiguration in Sarajevo occurred on the 1st of November. Video surveillance cameras recorded an unknown man and woman breaking into a candle store in the middle of the day, without hiding their identity, from where they took a certain amount of money.

Metropolitan Dabrobosian Chrysostom condemned those facts of vandalism.

The police and the judiciary lack adequate response on the prevention of attacks and protection of Orthodox property and cemeteries in the Federation of BiH, says the channel.

Sources:

<http://rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=2767201>

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/srpska/107825.htm>

Croatia

Five Serbian Orthodox Churches broken into in Croatia

March 10, 2017 – Five Orthodox temples in Croatia have been broken into during the past several days, the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) announced on Friday.

Money was stolen, but no major material damage has been done, a statement released by the SPC Eparchy (diocese) of Dalmatia said.

The churches targeted in this way are located in Baljci, Stikovo, Krici, Miocix and Kanjani – in Dalmatia.

The police station in Drnis has ascertained that five Orthodox temples were broken into between March 6 and 8, and found that a small amount of money was stolen, but that there was no major material damage.

The same SPC diocese reported earlier this week that an Orthodox church in this area of Croatia was vandalized with fascist graffiti

Sources:

<https://inserbia.info/today/2017/03/croatia-five-serbian-orthodox-churches-broken-into/>

http://www.spc.rs/eng/croatia_five_serbian_orthodox_churches_broken

http://www.spc.rs/sr/objijeno_pet_pravoslavnih_hramova_u_dalmaciji

http://www.spc.rs/sr/nastavljen_niz_provala_u_hramove_eparhije_dalmatinske

Serbian churches in Croatia attacked again, priests in fear

March 22, 2017 – The statement of the Serbian Orthodox Church said that in the night between March 20 and 21 rioters desecrated the Orthodox Churches and broke into the church of Saint Georgije in Kricke and St. Jovan Krstitelj in Miocic, near Drnis in Croatia.

It should be noted that this act was against Orthodox believers, so the efforts of the police in Drnis to discover the perpetrators have not yet yielded the expected results.

“Every Christian should condemn the repeated acts of vandalism and, to do everything possible to respect his freedom gifted from God and respect religious orthodox feelings in Drnis area”, said the statement of Diocese of Dalmatia.

Vandals did not rob the Orthodox shrines nor desecrated the icons or the items of the churches, and as the statement said, the question emerges of the motive of unknown ravagers.

“We will continue the fast in prayer and peace before the greatest Christian holiday and we will pray to the Lord to reason the ravagers and to guide them to Christian virtues, to finally stop desecrating our shrines”, said the eparchy.

The statement adds that on 19 March, Church of Nativity of the Virgin in Medvidja was broken into, and that local priest immediately informed the police, who soon came to the field and conducted an investigation.

The southern door to the church was broken, and there was material damage.

Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary is in the process of reconstruction and part of the building material is in it. Nothing was stolen.

“This is another in a series of unfortunate events that took place in the Diocese of Dalmatia and the seventh temple broken into in the last month. We hope that the perpetrators will be discovered and punished”, said in a statement.

Sources:

<https://inserbia.info/today/2017/03/serbian-churches-in-croatia-attacked-again-priests-in-fear/>

Cyprus

Two Cypriot families suing Church because sons became monks

June 28, 2017 – Two local Greek Cypriot families have accused Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol, Abbot Epiphanius of Machairas Monastery, and the Cypriot Orthodox Church of pushing their sons into monasticism, suing them for a sum of 2 million euros (\$2,271,200) as compensation for “moral damages,” reports Russian Athens.

The judicial process, unusual for Orthodox countries, is set to begin on Thursday.

Machairas Monastery is an historic monastery dedicated to the Entrance of the Theotokos Into the Temple, located about 25 miles from the capital city of Nicosia. It was founded at the end of the 12th century close to the current village of Lazanias.

The clergymen gradually came into the life of a now-44-year-old monk’s life in 2002, affecting his development, and alienating him from his family, the mother who initially brought the case claims. “They resolutely opposed us, and he stopped being himself and became their follower,” the mother laments.

According to the mother’s testimony, her then 28-year-old son was “strong, energetic, and outgoing, with many interests; he was bohemian, with a sense of humor, a people person; he loved boxing, hunting, shooting, and diving.”

“He didn’t have anything to do with religion, and he was in serious relationship with a girl whom he was planning to marry. All of this changed, however, when the elder [Met. Athanasios] came into his life. My son began to confess and commune every week,” the sorrowful mother recalls.

Five years later, in 2007, the son declared that he

was leaving his doctoral program and becoming a monk. The mother is accusing Met. Athanasios of not listening to her complaints and not trying to dissuade her son from his decision. Instead, the hierarch replied that her son is already an adult, able to decide for himself what to do with his life.

Another woman has joined in the same case, whose son also became a monk at Machairas. Both mothers accuse the monastery of “brainwashing” their sons, which they believe is proven by a talk the metropolitan had with monks of the monastery. The women are in possession of a video recording in which the metropolitan speaks about having a “holy contempt” for themselves and for their former lives, and not communicating with their parents, which, seemingly unbeknownst to them, is a traditional monastic spiritual practice.

Tomorrow’s case is reminiscent of events surrounding St. Anthony’s Monastery in Florence, AZ in the early 2000s. Fox News KVOA TV 4 in Tucson aired a segment on February 9, 2006, no longer available online, which featured three sets of parents who were similarly upset that their sons had abandoned the pursuit of earthly glory in order to offer their lives to Christ in monasticism.

One of the monks, Fr. Theologos Pantanizopoulos was blessed to post a response online, after his parents continually slandered the monastery and their son’s new life. In his testimonial he recounts why he became a monk, stating, “It was God’s hand guiding me from the way that I was that led me to monasticism. If you could have seen me then...”

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/104733.htm>

Orthodox cemetery desecrated in Cyprus

August 23, 2017 – An act of vandalism was committed on the evening of Thursday, August 17, in a cemetery in the village of Kalavassos on the island of Cyprus, 37 miles south of the capital city of Nicosia. Tombstones of Orthodox Cypriots were subjected to desecration and destruction, many covered with Nazi and Satanic symbols, and some of the crosses were overturned, reports Sedmitza with reference to Romfea.

According to the statement of municipal council representative Lefteris Fokas, unknown intruders snuck into the cemetery and desecrated and destroyed fifteen graves and tombs, painting

swastikas and other symbols on some of the tombstones. Many of the gravestones were also desecrated with images of inverted pentagrams—a symbol of Satanism. Candles were also used in the profanation, pointing to a black magic ceremony, according to Cyprus Mail Online.

Residents of the village of Kalavassos believe the act was committed from people outside the community. The locals have strongly condemned the act of desecration committed at the cemetery located just 1,000 feet from residences.

The last known person to visit the cemetery was there on Thursday at 6 PM. As the police have reported, the act of vandalism was discovered by a Kalavassos citizen who went to the cemetery the next morning at 8:30 and alerted the village authorities after discovering the desecration.

Zygi village police are investigating the crime as unlawful entry and religious and malicious damage.

Sources:

<http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/08/18/kalavassos-cemetery-desecrated-graves-vandalised/>

<http://orthochristian.com/105926.html>

<http://www.sedmitza.ru/text/7433043.html>

Kosovo (territory)

Serbian Orthodox cemetery vandalized in Kosovo Mitrovica

June 6, 2017 – 90% of the graves in the Serbian Orthodox cemetery have been vandalized and desecrated. The incident occurred in a city that was at the center of the Kosovo War in 1998 to 1999, which pitted the Orthodox Serbian and Muslim Albanian sides against one another. Serbians are allowed to visit this cemetery once per year, which is located on the Albanian side of the city. Serbian bystanders have observed a mass destruction of their relatives’ gravestones recently.

Sources:

<http://www.sedmitza.ru/text/7252375.html>

<http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/124/drustvo/2756788/kosovska-mitrovica-na-groblju-unisteno-90-odsto-nadgrobnih-spomenika.html>

<http://www.radiokontaktplus.org/vesti/kosovska-mitrovica-na-groblju-unisteno-90-odsto-nadgrobnih-spomenika/10405>

Macedonia

Perpetrators set fire around ancient Orthodox Monastery

August 29, 2017 – A wildfire is threatening the unique Treskavec Monastery in the mountains near the city of Prilep in Macedonia, reports RIA-Novosti. The 13th century mountain Treskavec Monastery, dedicated to the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos, is considered one of the most beautiful monuments of Orthodox architecture in the republic and one of the most important spiritual centers. The monastery sits at 4,200 ft. above sea level on Mount Zlatovry, connected with Orthodox Byzantine culture and the Serbian Nemanjić dynasty. The monastery came under threat from a huge wildfire on Monday evening, the day of its patronal feast.

“Firefighters, municipal servicemen, and volunteers were fighting the flames around the monastery during the evening service... There are currently three active fires—from the western side of the monastery, where the landscape is impregnable, and also from the side of the villages of Gostiražni, Nebregovo, and Sivets,” according to Prilip fire chief Stanko Koleski.

Emergency services are investigating the possibility of arson, as local residents claim to have seen arsonists. The mayor of Prilep has asked the police to find and punish the perpetrators. The fire near the monastery has continued for 15 days; it was possible earlier to defend it by the efforts of the emergency services and hundreds of volunteers.

The fire was devastated by a previous fire in February 2013, which left only the church in usable condition. Today there is only one monk living at the monastery. The monastery also burned to the ground in 1990, but was restored by the local faithful and businessmen.

Sources:

<https://ria.ru/world/20170828/1501226607.html>

<http://orthochristian.com/106037.html>

Russia

Orthodox worship cross disappeared on the island of Vera

January 9, 2017 – On the island of Vera, located on Lake Turgoyak, Chelabinsk region on the eve of Orthodox Christmas, the worship cross was destroyed. The metal base, installed on the rocky outcrop, was cut off, and the cross disappeared, as reports ura.news.

The press service of the Chelyabinsk diocese immediately sent a representative, father Alexei Ermolyuk, who confirmed that the worship cross was gone. It is possible that the incident will be addressed to the police, the decision remains to the Zlatoust Dean, in charge of Miass environs.

“Yeah! I do not know what to say. The cross on the island of Vera on Turgoyak disappeared from the top of the cliff, which is the highest point of the island. When it was wooden, they burned (the crosses) regularly, and how did the iron attract someone ... and most importantly, for what purpose? “- wrote user in public “Tourism of the Chelyabinsk region” in the social network VKontakte.

Sources:

https://vk.com/wall-117007953_1697?w=wall-117007953_1697

<https://ura.news/news/1052273058>

http://chelyabinsk.74.ru/text/gorod/253280685113344.html?utm_source=ok&utm_medium=og&utm_campaign=smm

<http://www.interfax.ru/russia/544751>

Orthodox Christians had their worship disrupted by an organized picket

February 10, 2017 – About 15 to 20 people began to actively take photos during Orthodox worship inside the Isaakevsky Cathedral in St. Petersburg (Russia), which attracted the attention of the church attendees. The picketers proceeded to create a single line on the Western side of the Cathedral, raising placards with individual letters, which read, “The museum belongs to the city”. The diocese representatives chose not to involve the law-enforcement agencies. The picketers were opposing the transfer of the Isaakevsky Cathedral.

The police did not consider the picket as a sign of a

violation of public order, according to the Governor Georgy Poltavchenko. He made the statement in response to an inquiry from municipal deputies during a legislative meeting.

The disruption of the church service is part of a larger picket that took place earlier. On January 28, there were about 2,000 opponents of the transfer of the Isaakevsky Cathedral of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Field of Mars during a demonstration. The disagreement with the city administration took the form of a meeting with the deputies of the legislative assembly. The demonstration involved Deputy Boris Vishnevsky ("Yabloko"), Alexei Kovalev ("Just Russia"), and Maxim Reznik ("Party of Growth").

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=66149>

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=66402>

<http://www.fontanka.ru/2017/03/07/089/>

Authorities of a Nizhny Novgorod village are demanding the demolition of an Orthodox church.

February 20, 2017 – Believers of the Kornirovka (Nizhny Novgorod region) have had to face administrative barriers from the local authorities. They are demanding the demolition of a chapel, which a local resident built on top of a holy water source. Before the October Revolution, this terrain had a pre-existing church, which a man restored at his own expense. Nevertheless, local authorities claim it is not respecting zoning permits.

The residents of Kornirovka are perturbed. One hundred years ago, the terrain was occupied by a chapel. Now, the residents of the village are aiming to restore it without external assistance. Local authorities are challenging the villagers on their demands and they claim that the church is indistinguishable from a shed with a cross.

Alexei Chernov, the head of the municipal administration, stated, "In the court, I am giving everyone an example – if I built a house, and raised an American flag above it, can I call it the Embassy of the United States of America?"

But Kornirovka will be not be mapped on the geopolitical chessboard of international relations. The locals simply wanted their own house of prayer, but this turned out more problematic than presumed. According to the reporter Andrey Shamin, the

chapel is located at the very center of the village. This property could have become someone's private residence, a shop or a recreational center. But the villagers decided on a church. Prior to the building, the residents even collected signatures for its inception. But the municipal council intervened on the side of the few non-believers in the village, and they claimed that its presence is violating their rights.

Dmitry Orlov was the inspiration behind the building of the church. He paid for the building of the church out of his own pocket and received the blessing of the local bishop. Normally, no further paperwork is required afterwards. Following a predetermined practice, churches are recognized as being ownerless and they are automatically transferred to the balance of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as a place of worship.

Dmitry spent 200,000 rubles on the project. He could have used it on the expansion of his home or for the construction of a sauna, but instead, he got used to putting the well-being of others above his own. The enthusiast did not expect that his initiative would face such stiff resistance from the local authorities, and that they would consider the chapel an ownerless building.

Dmitry began challenging local authorities after he noticed a truly ownerless construction in the neighbouring village. An early 19th century church in a deteriorating state somehow ended up side by side with the property of the village head. The land that the bureaucrat occupied is public property on the local cadastral map.

The holy water source in Kornirovka is also located on public property. The court will determine if the local chapel has to be demolished or not. The local diocese has put a claim on the church and has sided with the residents of the village.

Sources:

<http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1767136/>

<http://rublev.com/novosti/v-nizhegorodskoi-derevne-trebuiut-snesti-postroennyi-mestnym-zhitelem-khram>

Attempt of arson of an Orthodox Cathedral in Voronezh

March 1, 2017 – The police have apprehended a man in Voronezh (Russia), who lit a fire in front of an Orthodox Cathedral in the center of the city.

According to the available information, the man drove up to the Cathedral entrance in his

automobile. He then lit several pieces of coal a few meters away. He then broke the windowpanes of two information booths and the chandelier.

A security guard noticed the delinquent and tried to stop him. However, he managed to resist and to get away. An hour later, he was apprehended by the Russian traffic police and delivered to a local police station. He refused to testify.

An investigation is currently being undertaken.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=66327>

<http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2017/03/d36487/>

Schoolchildren held a photo session in stolen priestly robes at an Orthodox church in place of the tsar family execution

March 2, 2017 – Teenagers in Yekaterinburg have stolen the priestly robes and made photos at the Church-on-Blood built in the place of the tsar family execution, as reports interfax.

Head of press service of the chief administration of the Russian Ministry of Interior for the Sverdlovsk Region Valery Gorelykh confirmed the fact of the incident to Interfax.

Resuming results of the inspection, preventive measures against the teenagers, their legal representatives and their school were initiated.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13620>

An Orthodox cross is cut down in Volgograd, Russia, followed by an attempt to burn the chapel

March 14, 2017 – A criminal investigation under category "vandalism" is opened because of an attack on the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, located in central Volgograd. The clergy is certain that the attempt to destroy the cross is a part of a chain of attacks on Orthodox sites in the city.

On the night of Tuesday, March 14, two unidentified men crossed the fence of the church. Their faces were hidden with scarves. They carried a chainsaw and a Molotov cocktail. They first sawed off the cross at the entrance, and then attempted to arson the church. Fortunately, a trespasser noticed the act. The assailants were scared and fled without completing their misdeed.

Shortly afterwards, the deacon who was inside the church was advised that the cross has been sawed off, and that there was an attempt to burn it. He ran out and saw that the cross was already on the ground. There was a bottle nearby with an accompanying smell of gasoline. The assailants dropped everything when they believed that they would be apprehended. The cross has been taken out to the backyard of the church. It will be restored in the near future in its former place. According to the church service members, this is not the first such attack.

"In 1995, when the church was not yet built, the church watchman was murdered. Five years ago, a group of thieves tried to enter, and they stabbed the security guard there. There are constant attempts to break the altar for sacrifices, located outside the chapel. There is not even very much to steal there, but this does not stop potential thieves. Just a month and a half ago, there was some insulting graffiti on the wall of the church. And each time, these violations are left uncovered".

Due to bureaucratic delays from the state authorities, the priests decided to take the protection of their church in their own hands.

"In order to defend the church, we decided to increase its security. We installed cameras on the church property and in the chapel. It seems evident why and who is doing it. It appears to be an intentional way of getting even with religion, Orthodoxy and Christianity. It does not look like teenagers and youth do it. It looks to be intentional and conscious.

The suspects were apprehended. They admitted that their misdeed was inspired by vandalism.

Sources:

<http://v1.ru/text/newsline/276627057827840.html>

<http://gg34.ru/ewe/crimeincidents/25255-v-volgograde-vandaly-pytalis-szhech-iverskuyu-chasovnyu-bozhej-materi.html>

<https://www.islamnews.ru/news-521899.html>

<http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2017/03/d36620/>

<http://volgeparhia.ru/zaderzhany-podozrevaemye-v-povrezhdenii-kresta-u-iverskoj-chasovni/>

A criminal case involving the desecration of an Orthodox cross is pre-emptively closed in Tatarstan

March 15, 2017 – A local city council member closes a criminal investigation involving the demolition of an Orthodox Cross in Tatarstan, Russia. He claimed “a lack of criminal base”.

It became known that on March 13, 2017 that the case was preemptively closed as far back as January 23, 2017. It involved an Orthodox Cross in the village of Tashkirmen.

The vandalism was attributed to the Director of the local fish factory and city council member, Peter Kuznetsov, who admitted that he cut the cross down because he didn't find it “aesthetically pleasing”, and that it was installed without his agreement.

In January, the city council of the village chose to close the case, citing a supposed lack of criminal content.

The parish of the church intends to reinstall the cross. The local authorities have attributed a land parcel for this purpose, but further information on construction timelines is not currently available.

Sources:

<http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2017/03/d36582/>

<http://www.evening-kazan.ru/articles/v-tatarstane-deputat-edinoross-spilivshiy-poklonnyy-krest-ostalsya-beznakazannym.html>

Court decision for setting fire on Blagoveshansk Orthodox church of Tyumen

March 17, 2017 – The court in Tyumen gave a verdict to a resident of Khanty-Mansiysk for setting on fire one of the churches of the region center. He is sentenced to five years in jail and one month in a strict penal colony. The court has also ordered 3 million Rubles to be compensated to the church for damages.

According to the official court report, on June 1, 2016, the defendant (Gregory Pakhtyshev) was leaving from a bookmaking shop, where he lost some money. He decided to go to the church. There, the defendant lit a candle and accidentally had it fall on the groundwork beside the altar. This caused a fire, which he could not stop. Then, the assailant stole 27.2 rubles from the church's donation box and

headed for the exit. He then met a security guard, whom Mr. Pakhtyshev smashed on the head with a piece of brick. The assailant could not flee and was apprehended by the incoming police.

According to an estimate, the cost of the repairs inside the church will cost over 2 million rubles. Furthermore, the fire destroyed church property for the value of about 959,000 rubles.

The defendant has been pronounced guilty under article 168 (destruction and damage of property on a large scale, conducted in a careless way with fire) of the Civil Code, and part 3, article 162 (robbery, conducted with physical assault, with the use of an object dangerous for life and health, accompanied by an illegal entry) of the Russian Criminal Code.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=66490>

Orthodox Christian residents of Krasnoyarsk are protesting the demolition of their church

March 18, 2017 – It has become known that the authorities of Krasnoyarsk intend to demolish the Orthodox temple consecrated to the Three Holy Hierarchs in order to widen the Sverdlovsk Street in the center of the city. The cathedral was built in 1890, almost 130 years ago.

Parishioners and local residents are protesting the demolition of the church. The city authorities have declared that they will not touch the church for the next three years, but then stated that the widening of the street without demolishing the church will be impossible.

Sources:

<http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/harassment/places-for-prayer/2017/03/d36633/>

<http://krsk.sibnovosti.ru/society/347540-vozmozhnyy-snos-hrama-na-ul-sverdlovskoy-obespokoil-krasnoyartsev>

Robbers attempting to steal gold from icons in an Orthodox Cathedral are apprehended in Chelyabinsk oblast

March 21, 2017 – Members of the Russian Guards have apprehended two men suspected of robbing church property in Kyshtym (Chelyabinsk oblast, Russia). In the morning of March 20, a worker of the Birth of Christ Church has contacted the local security when she saw the two men lifting the glass

on top of the icon to steal the golden portions. Both assailants have had a previous criminal record.

They are being pursued under articles 30, and 161 of the Russian Criminal Code (Assault accompanied with robbery).

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=66522>

A court verdict is handed out to an assailant for starting a fire of an Orthodox cupola near a holy water source

March 28, 2017 – In March 2017, the regional (oblast) court of Lipetsk (Russia) has handed out a guilty verdict to a 24-year old resident of Engels (Saratov oblast), named Alexander Adrianov, and to an 18 year-old resident of Lipetsk Pavel Shavrin.

The resident of Engels is guilty under Article 115.2 b),c) of Penal Code of Russian Federation – “Intentional Infliction of Light Injury”, Article 105.2 k) Murder committed by reason of political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or enmity, or by reason of hatred or enmity with respect to some social group;

Article 214 – “Vandalism committed by a group of people and motivated by religious hatred”

The resident of Lipetsk oblast is being pursued under Article 111.3, a),b) – “Intentional Infliction of Grave Injury – by a group of persons under preliminary conspiracy, against two or more persons”

Article 282 – “Incitement of Hatred or Enmity, as Well as Abasement of Human Dignity”

Article 222.1 – “Illegal Acquisition, Transfer, Sale, Storage, Transportation, or Bearing of Firearms, its Basic Parts, Ammunition, Explosives, and Explosive Devices”

According to the court materials, in the evening of April 27, 2015, the defendants, “who are members of a nationalist movement”, hid their faces with a scarf, and wounded two Abdakayumov brothers on the street. On the night of June 30-July 1, they set a wooden chapel on fire, and destroyed an Orthodox cross close to a water source dedicated to the icon of the Mother of God near the Saint-Uspensky Monastery in Lipetsk.

Adrianov is also being pursued for murdering a citizen of Uzbekistan in Engels on June 20, 2015.

On the night of July 3, 2015, the underage resident of Lipetsk oblast stabbed a sleeping homeless man, Mikhail Andreev, with several thrusts. He

is also being pursued for posting material on the Internet with Neo-Nazi ideology, with provocative discussions on religious themes, and inciting a conflict based on religious grounds”. Following a house search of the underage defendant's girlfriend's house, the police discovered materials for the creation of homemade explosives.

The accused have pleaded guilty to the accusations during the preliminary stages of the investigation.

The court has pronounced a guilty verdict for the resident of Saratov oblast, with 14 years in a maximum-security penitentiary. Adrianov's sentence is due to begin on March 28, 2017. His sentence includes the time he already spent in jail between July 3, 2015 and March 27, 2017. He will also need to pay legal fees in the amount of 14,400 Rubles (about 240 €).

The resident of Lipetsk is sentenced to 6,5 years in a correctional penitentiary and a fine of 5,000 Rubles. His sentence is due to begin on March 28, 2017. His sentence includes the time he already spent in jail between July 3, 2015 and March 27, 2017. He will also need to reimburse his victim a damage claim of 250,000 Rubles.

Sources:

<http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2017/03/d36689/>

<http://lipetsk.sledcom.ru/news/item/1111591/>

http://oblsud.lpk.sudrf.ru/modules.php?name=press_dep&op=1&did=927

Orthodox sepultures desecrated at Smolensk Cemetery in St. Petersburg.

April 7, 2017 – The Smolensk Cemetery in St. Petersburg has seen about thirty Orthodox Christian crosses and symbols destroyed by a group of young people. They have also defiled some monuments dedicated to victims of the TU-154 aviation catastrophe. The group of assailants has conducted their vandalism in the course of one kilometer.

The police have apprehended the suspects.

Sources:

<http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counreaction/2017/04/d36855/>

An Orthodox chapel is burnt in Arkhangelsk

April 24, 2017 – A chapel is burnt near a railway station in the city of Arkhangelsk, Russia.

It was initially believed that the fire was caused due to an electric malfunction. But further investigation led to a conclusion that intentional arson is the most likely reason. Items supporting this hypothesis were found on the crime scene upon investigation from law enforcement authorities.

Firefighters succeeded in containing the fire a mere five minutes after its start.

The chapel was built in 2006, but it has been inactive for a few years. It closed after a church was built nearby. The chapel lost its function as a result, and its vocation was temporary. It was planned to be demolished.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=66897>

<http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/vandalism/2017/04/d36884/>

Two residents of Bryansk are suspected in stealing icons from an Orthodox Church

May 25, 2017 – Two assailants with a past criminal history have been arrested for a series of thefts in Orthodox Churches in the Bryansk area.

Upon arrest, the law enforcement agencies seized two out of five icons, stolen from the Orthodox Church of Mitrophan Voronezhsky, in the village of Rybchevsk.

An investigation under article 158 (“Theft”) of the Russian Criminal Code has been opened.

The police is investigating their links with the previous, similar crimes in the Bryansk area.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=67214>

Robbery and desecration of a Russian Orthodox Church in Voronezh

May 29, 2017 – Unknown assailants have broken into the Bogoyavlensk Orthodox Church in the center of Voronezh and stole the donation box. The incident occurred on Monday morning. The police are currently investigating the perpetrators, trying to determine the amount of the funds stolen. A

criminal investigation under article “Theft” has been opened.

Furthermore, local media Sources: state that the perpetrators not only stole the donations box, but also vandalized the church, throwing icons everywhere.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=67268>

Vandals burnt a four-meter cross beside the Andronikov monastery in Moscow

May 29, 2017 – On Sunday night, unknown assailants burnt the four-meter cross beside the Saint Andronikov monastery in Moscow.

“The vandals hacked it with an axe, covered it with flammable liquids and burnt the cross beside the monastery”, according to Lada Savonina, the Director of the monastery’s public restoration movement.

The cross was established near a miraculous well and was installed with the hands of the revered Andronik in 1357.

The Moscow Patriarchate has condemned the burning of the cross.

“The burning of the cross is a sign of a non-acceptance of the main symbol of Christianity, which demonstrates God’s love to mankind”, commented Vahtang Kipshidze, the assistant to the Department of Relations with the Media.

According to him, the desecrated cross “is the foundation not only of the Christian faith, but of Russian culture, whose best examples are located in the Museum of Andrey Rublev” (located beside the monastery). This arson is a sign of a “spiritual deficit and a lack of proper upbringing”.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=67242>

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=67252>

Vladivostok Monument to St.Tsar Nicholas II desecrated

June 14, 2017 – A monument to Royal Martyr Nicholas II, the last Russian tsar, was vandalized in Vladivostok on June 11. The unknown criminals defaced the monument with green paint at night.

The local faithful, unable to bear the affront to the beloved saint, came out to clean the monument, according to Igor Nikonov, the leader of the local

branch of the Autocratic Russia Party who initiated the installation of the monument, which stands on the grounds of the Holy Protection Cathedral in the center of the city.

The unveiling of the monument was timed to mark the 125th anniversary of a visit by then-Tsarevich Nicholas to the city from May 11-21, 1891, after returning from his journey to Asia in 1890–91, during which an assassination attempt was made on Russia’s future emperor in Otsu, Japan on April 29/ May 11, 1891.

The official opening and consecration of the monument took place on December 19, the feast day of St. Nicholas—the heavenly patron St. Tsar Nicholas.

The appearance of the monument in Pokrovsky Park caused a heated debate among the local community, some thinking a short visit from a Crown Prince unworthy of a monument. Proponents of its installation pointed out that the city’s Partisan Avenue was initially named for the tsar, precisely in honor of his visit to the city. Other opponents simply found the bust unsightly.

Although Tsarevich Nicholas II was able to make only a short visit to Vladivostok, in that time he left a significant mark on the history of the city and the region, laying the beginning of the Trans-Siberian railway, the railway station building, a monument to the Russian navigator Admiral Nevelskoy, and the Dalzavod dry dock. He also visited Vladivostok Fortress, the Museum for the Study of the Amur Region, the female college and the male prep school. The Ussuri Railway was also finished under his direction. Most of these events are memorialized on the monument.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/104320.htm>

Monument to Tsar Nicholas II, Tsarevich Alexey in Novosibirsk attacked with axe

August 1, 2017 – Novosibirsk police are looking into the damage inflicted on a monument to Tsar Nicholas II and his son Tsarevich Alexey, installed in July at St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, reports Interfax-Religion, with reference to the press service of the regional office of Russian Internal Affairs.

According to police, a 31-year-old Novosibirsk man placed a ladder against the newly-consecrated monument, and, having climbed up it, dealt several

blows with an axe. Security officers happened to pass by at the time and were able to detain the vandal and hand him over to the police. Motive and cost of damages are yet to be established.

The head of the tsarevich in the monument, which was apparently the target, is currently covered over by a cloth. The statue of the emperor himself was not damaged.

The monument had only just been opened on the square in front of St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Novosibirsk on July 16, the day before the Church commemorates the holy Royal Martyrs. It was consecrated by Metropolitan Tikhon of Novosibirsk and Berdsk. The consecration was also attended by Bishop Paul of Kolyvansky, the dean of Novosibirsk churches Archpriest Alexander Novopashin, and the clergy of the Novosibirsk Diocese.

Rector of the St. Alexander Nevsky cathedral Archpriest Alexander Novopashin explained that the choice of location for the monument was no accident, as the cathedral itself had been built in honor of Tsar Alexander III the Peacemaker, the father of Tsar Nicholas II, with a donation of 7,500 rubles from Tsar Nicholas II himself for the cathedral’s iconostasis, and donations from Maria Feodorovna, the wife of Tsar Alexander III and mother of Tsar Nicholas II. “Finally, you can see, behind the back of Tsar Nicholas Alexandrovich stands an arch with a cross. It is a symbol of Golgotha!” the priest said.

Fr. Alexander also noted that Novosibirsk was previously known as Novo-Nikolaevsk, in honor of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, the patron saint of Tsar Nicholas II.

Sources:

<http://vn.ru/news-toporom-iskromsali-pamyatnik-nikolayu-ii-v-novosibirske/>

<http://orthochristian.com/105513.html>

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=67821>

Orthodox Sretensky Monastery church evacuated due to bomb threat in Moscow

November 27, 2017 – Parishioners were evacuated from Sretensky Monastery’s Meeting of the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God Church today due to a bomb threat, Izvestiya reports.

There were five people in the church when the threat was called in. All were evacuated safely and a

thorough sweep is being carried out.

The threat did not interrupt the schedule of today's "On the Murder of the Royal Family: New Evaluations and Materials. Discussion" conference which is being held at Sretensky Monastery and Seminary with the participation of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill.

"Everything is quiet," one of the security guards working detail for the conference told RIA-Novosti. Work is being carried out in a usual manner he added.

Sources::

<http://orthochristian.com/108676.html>

<https://ria.ru/religion/20171127/1509669863.html>

<https://iz.ru/675908/2017-11-27/prikhozhan-evakuirovali-iz-sretenskogo-khrama-v-moskve-iz-za-ugrozy-vzryva>

Orthodox Church and Sunday school destroyed by arson in Rostov

December 16, 2017 – On the morning of December 16, unidentified persons set fire on the temple in honor of the icon of Mother of God from Don, situated in the park named after Anatoly Sobin in Zheleznodorozhny district of Rostov. Attackers also destroyed and burned the parish Sunday school in the premises.

Both buildings were temporary trailers, equipped with the efforts of parishioners – local residents, on the initiative of which the parish appeared three years ago.

For several years the Orthodox community in its own right ennobled the adjoining territory, uprooted the reinforced concrete piles, built benches, planted trees. During this time, a Sunday school was created, not only construction, but also missionary, educational and social projects were realized.

After the publication by some persons of the petition against the construction of the Orthodox temple, threats were received at the address of the parish.

A spokesman for the Head of the Don Metropolitanate, Igor Petrovsky, at a briefing hold at the site of the tragedy, reported following:

– Literally this summer, several people opposed to the church, started persecution of the Orthodox parish in honor of the Don Icon on the Internet. They published a petition, which contained a clear factual lie. The parishioners were accused of cutting all trees, taking almost the best place in the park, and so on. In fact, the parish got the outskirts of the

park, where they wanted to build an auto repair base. Then this site was abandoned and it turned into a spontaneous dump. The trees on this vacant lot were planted by parishioners, local residents. They were very indignant with the lies that appeared on the Internet on behalf of local residents, also as with a call to fight against the construction of the temple. I am sure that it is the Internet provocateurs who are responsible for that high degree of social hatred and enmity that led to arson and pogrom.

"We hope that the authorities will do everything possible to find the perpetrators of this monstrous crime, and they will pay special attention to the instigators who push people foreheads in the name of their anti-church complexes," he said. Petrovsky.

In connection with the misfortune of the arrival of the Don Icon of the Mother of God, the head of the Don Metropolitanate, Metropolitan of Rostov and Novocherkassk, Mercury addressed the flock and all not indifferent inhabitants of our region with the request to render all possible assistance in restoring the temple burnt by the attackers.

Sources:

<http://www.pravmir.ru/hram-v-chest-donskoy-ikonyi-bozhiey-materi-v-rostove-na-donu-do-i-posle-podzhoga-foto/>

<http://rostoveparhia.ru/arkhipastyr/novosti-sobytiya/51940/>

The memorial cross vandalized in Andronikov Monastery

December 17, 2017 – The memorial cross, mounted at the place of ancient water well, built by the founder of the Andronikov Monastery, was vandalized by unknown people. During the walk-over of the Monastery and its ancient nekropole the acts of vandalism were reported. The surface of the memorial cross was deeply chopped by the axe and the thinnings were found far and near.

Earlier this year, vandals had already tried to burn this memorial cross. It had blackened, coated but had not burnt down. After restoration works had been completed the access to the cross was restored. Arsonists had not been found what caused the recidive, confined Lada Savonina, executive director of social movement for resurrection of Andronikov Monastery.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax.ru/moscow/592202>

Turkey

Georgian prisoners in Turkey on hunger strike for place to pray

August 7, 2017 – 150 Georgian citizens, serving sentences for various crimes in Turkey, have declared a hunger strike in their Constantinople prison. Among their demands is an area for prayer, reports Georgian news station Rustavi-2.

Family members of the prisoners speak about cruelty to convicts and have accused diplomatic representatives of negligence.

"150 prisoners, all Georgians, are on a hunger strike," already on the fourth day, according to Irma Keinishvili, the wife of one of the participating prisoners. Their grievances and demands include better food and better overall treatment, as well as a place and materials to build a prayer corner, to offer their Orthodox prayers to God. "We have officially applied to the embassy, but nothing has been done," Keinishvili explained.

According to the Georgian Foreign Ministry, the Consulate General in Istanbul has received a message about the ongoing hunger strike from the parents of one of the prisoners, reports Novosti-Gruzia. "The consulate has contacted the Prosecutor's Office in Istanbul and the agency for carrying out sentencing... According to the explanation of the prisoners, of the reasons for beginning the hunger strike is the demand to meet with a Georgian priest," the ministry's statement read.

Representatives of the Georgian General Consulate intend to meet with the prisoners after receiving proper authorization, although the Foreign Ministry's message also notes that the prisoners should already have all the materials they need for a space to pray.

For its part, the Georgian Patriarchate will do its best to help the prisoners, patriarchal secretary Fr. Michael Botkoveli told InterpressNews after learning of the hunger strike on the internet.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/105618.html>

<http://www.interpressnews.ge/en/politicss/88942-patriarchs-secretary-says-georgian-patriarchate-will-do-its-best-georgian-prisoners-in-the-turkish-prisons-to-be-visited-by-clerics.html?ar=A>

<https://www.newsgeorgia.ge/grazhdane-gruzii-obyavili-golodovku-v-turetskoj-tyurme/#t20c>

<http://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/81928#plr>

Ukraine

Radicals attack UOC temple in Ptichya village

January 2, 2017 – In Ptichya village of Dubno district, Rovno region (Ukraine), dissenters are trying to seize a temple of the UOC. According to the UOJ source, a police squad has been called to the place, as reports UOJ.

Adherents of the Kiev Patriarchate got together in a church house on the pretext of having a choir rehearsal. According to the UOC believers, who keep guarding the church door in Ptichya village, the light suddenly disappeared in the churchyard. Then about 20 men in balaclavas began to push their way towards the side-door of the church, wedging away and beating those on duty.

The schismatics had an angle grinder, and they intended to cut off the locks. Yet the UOC believers, who had been told about the church storm and who immediately arrived at the church, precluded the temple takeover by the KP members.

So far the police have been informed about the clash in Ptichya. Law enforcers assured they would try to sort out the situation. However, the encounter is still on.

The UOC faithful ask all not indifferent people to pray for them.

The UOJ follows the events.

According to the UOJ outlets, the UOC believers have been able to defend their church. Adherents of the Kiev Patriarchate are gradually leaving the place, yet the UOC parishioners have stayed for an all-night vigil.

Odessa region orthodox churches robbed and desecrated

January 31, 2017. On the night of January 30, two churches of the Belgorod-Dniester deanery in Odessa were robbed and the altars desecrated. A total of UAH 4,000 was stolen from St. Andrew's parish in the village of Andreevka, and Kazan Icon parish in the village of Monashi, reports a UOJ correspondent.

The stolen funds had been collected by parishioners to be transferred to a social and humanitarian aid center in Odessa to help refugees from East Ukraine, the poor, and the ill

The press secretary of the Odessa diocese stated that the attackers "violated not only civil, but the Divine

law, defiling the church altars by their crimes.” Several dozens of churches have been attacked over the past two years, with police as yet detaining no suspects. These are the first attacks of the new year.

Sources:

<http://spzh.news/en/news/37961-kyiv-patriarchate-attacks-uoc-temple-in-ptichya-village>

Attempt of seizure of Orthodox chapel in Ukraine

January 5, 2016 – In village of Nikiforovtsy of the Nemirov district, Vinnitsa region (Ukraine) St. Basil the Great's chapel was attended by representatives of the Kiev Patriarchate who got off the locks. The intruders did not show any documents proving their ownership of the temple, as reports Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

The incident was preceded by a meeting, which, according to Fr. Alexander Rodzenko, was attended by people who do not live in the village. By a majority vote they took a decision on the transfer of the UOC religious community of the village to the Kiev Patriarchate. In addition, the agitators claimed that “the priests of the UOC will now take more money for the funeral service.”

The head of the Uman Orthodox diocese addressed himself to the authorities with a request to protect Christian relics from vandalism

January 6, 2017 – In an open statement, the priesthood and members of the Uman (Ukraine) Orthodox congregation are worried about the desecration of the Holy Cross.

The archbishop of Uman and Zvenigorod Panteleimon has notified the authorities, law-enforcement agencies and other religious organizations about the vandalism of the Crucifixion Cross that took place in Uman on December 31, 2016. This was reported by the Information-Enlightenment department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) of the Moscow Patriarchate.

“As it became known from some Sources: of the media, eyewitness reports and camera recordings, the act of vandalism was conducted by members of the Jewish community. We would like to remind everyone that these are not the first such acts of disrespect, hostility, and insult to religious sentiments aimed against the Christians and believers in our city from the above-mentioned community. Such an act is unacceptable in the

modern civilized world and society” noted the Archbishop Panteleimon.

His Eminence also underlined, “We condemn such an atrocity, and at the same time, we pray to the Lord that He may forgive them a sin of such gravity, for “they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34), and through their spiritual blindness and wrath they assault the Lord Himself, creating an interreligious strife as a result.”

Aside from that, the archbishop called for the law-enforcement and all other public order agencies concerned to ensure security, a peaceful coexistence of religions and to not allow the occurrence of such transgressions in the future.

Sources:

<http://news.church.ua/2017/01/06/vidkrita-zayava-arxiiepiskopa-umanskogo-panteleimona-do-vladi-ta-pravooxoronciv-z-privodu-narugi-nad-rozpyattyam-u-misti-umani/#more-114273>

<http://news.church.ua/2017/01/01/vandaly-oskverniliraspysatye-iisusa-xrista-v-umani/?lang=ru>

<http://news.church.ua/2017/01/06/upravlyayushhij-umanskoj-eparxiej-obratilsya-k-vlastyam-i-pravooxranitelyam-s-prosboj-zashchitit-xristianskie-svyatyni-ot-vandalizma/?lang=ru>

Moscow Patriarchate church in Kiev pelted with Molotov cocktails

January 16, 2017 – Vandals tried to set fire to the Peter Mogila Church (belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate) in Kiev on Monday, as reports Interfax.

Four bottles containing an incendiary mixture thrown at the church bounced off its wooden walls, a spokesperson for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church said.

“It was only a miracle, under the protection of the Holy Mother, that the church remained intact. The bottles were not smashed and bounced off the walls,” the church rector Archpriest Ioann Tronko, said.

Behind the attempt to set the church on fire is a desire to seize the expensive land on which it stands, he said.

“The parish has been suffering for half a year now from aggressive actions of unknown investors who are intent on building a multi-storey building in place of the church,” the statement said.

This is a second arson attempt on the church. The first attack was attempted a year ago.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13529>

Kiev's Peter Mogila Orthodox church was attacked by unidentified men

January 16, 2017 – Moscow calls for a thorough and unbiased investigation of the attack on a Ukrainian Orthodox church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Kiev and punishment of those responsible, Russian foreign ministry's envoy for human rights, democracy and the supremacy of law, Konstantin Dolgov, as reports TASS agency.

Kiev's Peter Mogila church was attacked by unidentified men in the small hours on Monday. The attackers bombarded the church with Molotov cocktails.

“These reports give grounds for the most serious concern. Regrettably, it was not the first instance of blatant vandalism and intentional banditry against canonical Ukrainian Orthodox churches,” he said. “No doubt, it was yet another attempt in a series of forcible takeover of property of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate we have recently witnessed.”

“It is a flagrant violation of the legal rights of Orthodox believers in Ukraine. These are unlawful actions,” he said. “It is unclear what law enforcers did in this situation but in the past they connived at such actions either directly or indirectly, or watched them indifferently.”

“It is important to clarify this information, to conduct a thorough and unbiased investigation, to expose and punish those responsible,” the Russian diplomat stressed.

“The Ukrainian authorities must do that under their international liabilities to ensure unimpeded realization of the right to freedom of religion, to prevent further whipping up of emotions in society, destabilizing the situation as far as religion is concerned,” he stressed.

He said the situation requires a most thorough investigation. “It is not ruled out that the more than passive reaction of the Western capitals has played its negative role. The outgoing Obama administration has done nothing to compel the Kiev authorities to stop such illegal actions,” the Russian diplomat noted. “The passive position of international human rights organizations is only encouraging extremists.”

Such actions, in his words, must be resolutely condemned as they are “fraught with unpredictable consequences.”

Sources:

<http://tass.com/politics/925342>

Six unknown tried to rob and burn the UOC shrine in Kiev

January 18, 2017 – On 18 January nearly 5 a.m. the unknown made an attempt to break into Kiev-based church of Bogolubskaya icon of the Holy Virgin. There were likely six offenders. The church is located in Lukyanovka, on the territory of Kiev city clinical infectious diseases hospital for children, as reports UOJ.

“Our duty man heard somebody knocking on the church walls,” tells senior father, priest Viacheslav Patrickenko. “He came outside and saw six men on the church territory. Those, who were tinkering around the door did not apparently expect somebody to come from the opposite direction.”

The unwanted guests told the man “they had come to a church service.” At the same time they quickly turned round and left.

The man on duty found out the glass on the church icon was broken, while the corner of the wooden church was poured amply with petrol. A big petrol spot was found on the other part of the church too.

The senior priest filed an application to the police upon the fact.

Over the year of 2016 malefactors undertook three attempts to commit a theft in the church of Bogolubskaya icon of the Mother of God.

As it was reported by the UOJ, on 16 January the unknown tried to set fire to UOC temple of Godmother's icon “Softening of Evil Hearts” in Syrets area in Kiev.

Sources:

<http://spzh.news/en/news/38485-six-unknown-tried-to-rob-and-burn-the-uoc-shrine-in-kyiv>

Churches belonging to Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine attacked 13 times over past year

January 19, 2017 – Churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) of the Moscow Patriarchate have been attacked 13 times over the past year, UOC Information and Education Department head Bishop Kliment of Irpin said, as reports Interfax.

“Only the UOC has been attacked, and the [Ukrainian] Interior Ministry hasn't solved a single crime in this time. Even following a blatant attack on the church in Baby Yar over the summer, when some thugs pelted it with Molotov cocktails, the law enforcement closed the case citing the absence of component elements of a crime, although there is even a

video online in which unidentified people attack the church and shout nationalistic slogans,” the website of the Ukrainian newspaper Vesti quoted Bishop Kliment as saying. Some of the attacks took place in Kyiv, including those in which unidentified people set fire to the churches in the Pushkin Park and near the tuberculosis clinic. Moreover, attackers threw Molotov cocktails at the St. Peter Mogila church and tried to set fire to a church on the grounds of a children’s infection clinic, he said.

Since the start of hostilities in Ukraine, members of other Orthodox denominations have occupied dozens of UOC churches, including with support from radical nationalists and local authorities.

The UOC attributes the incidents to the Ukrainian leadership’s desire to set up a local Orthodox Church in Ukraine by separating the UOC from the Moscow Patriarchate.

A miracle-working icon of John the Baptist stolen from Liadova Orthodox monastery

February 7, 2017. An ancient miracle-working icon of St. John the Baptist was stolen from Liadova beheading rock monastery named in the night of 6th to 7th of February. It is reported by the UOJ correspondent.

Malefactors burgled the door of the temple of “Rejoice and Consolation” Holy Virgin and of all sanctities available there hankered only after St. John the Baptist icon. The ancient icon with a small casket containing relics of the saint was embellished with plenty of golden and silver pendants, which were gifted by the faithful as a sign of their gratitude for the miracles worked upon the saint’s intercession. An over meter-high icon was standing in the central part of the temple before the Ambon and could immediately catch an eye of robbers. The icon’s size and its solid wooden frame make it quite heavy – one person could hardly manage such weight.

None of the monastery’s residents did not hear the door being smashed and did not hear the evil-doers. Liadova monastery is located in rocks on the Dnieper bank at the height of over 100 meters; during that ill-starred night strong wind and heavy snowfall muffled the sounds. On top of that, the temple “Rejoice and Consolation” Holy Virgin is situated on the third floor of the brethren’s building from the opposite side to their cells.

In the morning a crime scene team arrived at the place, led personally by director of Mogiliov-Podolsky police department Valery Zhuchkovsky. The policemen found the icon in the forest not far from the monastery covered with snow. Golden and silver pendants were torn off from the sanctity, but the image and casket with relics were not damaged. There were found some golden items near the icon, too.

According to the police communications department in Vinnitsa region, the law-enforcers are carrying out operative events to establish the people involved in the crime. The icon was returned to the monastery and put at the same place.

“This icon of St. John the Baptist with a piece of his relics is ancient – it was sent by God to our monastery and it has been to many regions of Ukraine,” says the Reverend Father of Liadova Beheading monastery Archimandrite Anthony (Netrebin). “The icon is miracle-working; it has bestowed a lot of healings, that’s why it had so many pendants.”

As the Reverend Father noted, due to the plunder the gate construction to the monastery will be accelerated and the security tightened. “Now people have become very aggressive and indifferent to sanctities. There have been arsons and plunders at so many churches! I think the reason is the propaganda against the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.”

Liadova monastery is one of the oldest in Ukraine. It was founded by the Venerable Anthony of Kiev-Pechersk Caves earlier than the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra and in 2013 celebrated its 1000 anniversary. In 1938 the monastery was exploded by the Soviet power. Its rebirth began in 1998.

Radicals seize another Ukrainian Orthodox Church

February 11, 2017. Representatives of so-called “Kiev Patriarchate,” with the support of “Right Sector” radicals seized a canonical parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the village of Kotyuzhyny, in the Ternopil region, as reports pravoslavie.ru website.

The site of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s Information-Educational Synodal Department reports that the takeover of the Church of Protomartyr Stephen went “according to the standard scheme.”

“Right Sector of Ternopil” radicals arrived early in the day, supposedly to keep order, but at a general meeting of the village they went on a rampage, intimidating believers of the canonical Church, demanding they give up the right to pray in their own church which legally becomes to the community.

However, as the radicals wrote on their Facebook pages, they were unable to scare everyone in the village into giving up their spiritual home and handing it over to uncanonical “Kiev Patriarchate”. “It’s a pity that most of these pensioners didn’t heed their children who voted for the Ukrainian Church,” one of the “Right Sector” activists wrote, referring to the movement to have one united autocephalous Ukrainian Church under the “Kiev Patriarchate.”

OSCE concerned about frequent thefts in UOC churches of Odessa region

February 11, 2017. Representatives of the OSCE special monitoring mission in Ukraine initiated a meeting with the dean of the Belgorod-Dniester district, Archpriest Rustik Vykhodtsev, during which frequent cases of theft and vandalism in Orthodox churches of the district were discussed, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists website.

OSCE observers in Odessa Cornelius Nolan and Aram Harutyunyan, as well as assistant of the security department Igor Solovyev, considered the inter-confessional situation that prevailed in the city and the region and discussed issues of cooperation of the Odessa diocese with local authorities and law enforcement agencies.

As reported earlier, there have been five thefts in the churches of the UOC in the Odessa region since the beginning of 2017. Offencers go beyond theft and commit acts of vandalism. No suspect has been arrested so far.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church compares persecutions of Orthodox believers in Ukraine to Soviet atheist era

February 13, 2017. Head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church administration Metropolitan Antony of Borispol and Brovary compares ongoing persecutions of Orthodox believers in Ukraine to actions of Bolsheviks, as reports Interfax-religion website.

“The things we see in certain western regions of our Motherland where Orthodox churches are seized, believers are beaten, priests with their families are thrown outside, can be called a complete breakdown of law and order,” he said in his interview published by the UOC website.

According to him, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church faces “slender and threats, and their logics and context do not differ from apostatic ideas which resulted in mass victims and repressions in the 20th century.”

From the beginning of military actions in Ukraine representatives of the self-proclaimed Kiev Patriarchate seized several dozens of UOC churches, some of them were captured with the support of local authorities and radical nationalists.

The community of Ukrainian Orthodox Church is not allowed to build a church, despite approval from the court

February 18, 2017 – The Saint-Nicholas community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) in the village of Veliky Omelyanik, despite a won lawsuit, has received additional administrative problems. Representatives from the Volyn Oblast’s architectural-construction

inspection department have disbursed funds for further judicial proceedings, despite the expiry of the legal payment term. The case was transferred to the Lvov Administrative Appeals Court for further decision.

According to the head of the Saint-Nicholas community, the Hieromonk Ilya Vishnevsky, the analysis of the case in the Appeals Court will take place in March. The community, after winning the case in October 2016, has received a notice that the decision of the Volyn administrative tribunal has entered into force, since the defendant, while asking for an appeal, has not paid his legal fees.

Once the community received the court decision, they attempted to restore the paperwork for the building of the church. It is to be reminded that the Municipal council has declined its own permission on the building of a new UOC-MP church on the property, located in the village Veliky Omelyanik. The community of the UOC-MP has opened a lawsuit and won the case.

In order to restore the paperwork after winning in court, the community addressed itself to the Center of administrative services. They were surprisingly declined twice with claims of minor errors inside – the same ones that were unquestionably accepted prior to creating administrative barriers to the UOC-MP for the building of the church foundation.

Earlier, the Ukrainian Orthodox Journalists (UOJ) reported that the UOC-MP community of Veliky Omelyanik has won the lawsuit for the permission of building a cathedral.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/obshchine-upts-na-volyni-ne-dayut-stroit-khram-nesmotrya-na-razreshenie-suda>

Former UOC MP priest lies about the transfer of an Orthodox church

February 20, 2017 – Igor Zelenski of the Kiev Patriarchate has published a provocative message on his social media page to proclaim that the Church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in the village of Bugayevka has been transferred to the Kiev Patriarchate.

Igor Zelenski was previously a priest of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Further investigations have shown that he has a criminal background for extortion.

Sources:

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/02/20/svyashhenik-upc-kp-shho-nabrexav-na-jeparxiyu-upc-maje-sudimist-za-shaxrajstvo/>

<http://www.reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/28891317>

The Member of Parliament from the political party “Svoboda” is asking the General Prosecutor’s office to seize a Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the village of Mnishin

February 20, 2017 – The deputy of the Rivne oblast council, Alexander Savchuk, has prepared a project to the General Prosecutor’s Office of Ukraine to transfer the property of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Veil of Our Mother in the village of Mnishin, Rivne oblast under the government.

“We would like you to take appropriate measures in the frame of the current law to return the local historical sites back to the ownership of the state.” he said Savchuk has also agitated for legally pursuing individuals who are guilty of transferring the Church of the Veil of Our Mother, as well as providing proof of ownership, as well as providing those documents to the land registry office in 2014.

Sources:

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/02/20/nardep-vid-svobodi-prosit-genprokuraturu-ta-sbu-vidibrati-v-upc-cerkvu-v-seli-mnishin/>

<http://uoj.org.ua/ua/novosti/sobytiya/nardep-vid-svobodi-prosit-genprokuraturu-ta-sbu-vidibrati-v-upts-tserkvu-v-seli-mnishin>

http://rivnepost.rv.ua/lenta_msgshow.php?id=74541

Residents of Irllyava are asking for protection against the violations of the Uniate Church

February 21, 2017 – Residents of the Uzhgorod oblast village Irllyava wrote an open letter to the head of the local council, with a demand to resolve a dispute with the Greek-Catholic-Uniate community of the village. According to the Union of Orthodox Journalists (UOJ), the residents are sure that the Uniates want to illegally seize the Saint Elijah Church, located on the village cemetery.

The lawyer of the Mukachevsky diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP) made a decision to draft a territorial map for the localization of the Greek-Catholic-Uniate Church on Taras Shevchenko Street. This document, according to the lawyer, could allow the Greco-Catholic-Uniate community to privatize the church. This is because from a judicial point of view, the Church of Saint Elijah is not registered with the land registry office. And the Uniates, once they receive the

map of the locality, could register the church as their property.

82 out of 120 residents of the village signed the petition against the village council’s plan. The residents insisted that the head of the council provides an explanation, but he did not show up to the planned meeting, citing unfavorable weather circumstances. Moreover, residents of the village took a photo of the sky to show that this claim was not true.

The parish members consider that the Saint Elijah Church is needed for the Greek-Catholic-Uniate community as a source of income. Currently, people of all confessions can be buried in the cemetery. However, as some members of the Uniate community have said, anyone who is not “Greek-Catholic-Uniate will have to pay an additional 2000 griven per cemetery place”.

The lawsuit between UOC-MP and the Greek-Catholics is being reviewed in the Superior Agricultural Court of Ukraine. The date of the first session is not yet set.

Sources:

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/02/21/zhiteli-sela-irlyava-prosyat-zaxistiti-jix-vid-protipravnix-dij-uniativ/>

<http://uoj.org.ua/ua/novosti/otnosheniya-konfessij/greko-katoliki-visudili-pravo-sluzhiti-v-khrami-upts-na-zakarpatti-video>

In Kozelets, the city council illegally transfers an Orthodox Church to the Kiev Patriarchate

February 25, 2017 – The members of the Chernigov oblast council have transferred the Ascension Church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) to the Kiev Patriarchate.

The church was handed over to the Kiev Patriarchate, despite protests from the UOC members and the Cross procession, conducted as a sign of protest last summer. There were attempts from Kiev Patriarchate members to disrupt the procession.

Attempts to block the transfer of the church were made by the deputy from the party “Our Land” Arthur Zinoviev.

Sources:

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/02/25/u-kozelci-nardepi-peredali-xram-kijivskomu-patriarxatu/>

<http://uoj.org.ua/ua/novosti/sobytiya/u-kozeltsi-nardepi-peredali-khram-kijivskomu-patriarkhatu-nezvazhayuchi-na-protesti-viruyuchikh-upts>

<http://uoj.org.ua/ua/novosti/sobytiya/u-kozelts-f-laret-vts-z-dobrobatami-zrivayut-khresniy-kh-d-upts>

Kiev Patriarchate and the Right Sector are planning to seize a church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Kinahovtsy (Ukraine)

March 5, 2017 – Assaultants from the “Right Sector” along with members from the Kiev Patriarchate have once again tried to capture the Church of Peter and Paul of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP). However, the fact that the church had many parish members inside served as a deterrence for further aggression. The assaultants left without achieving their goals.

Two days prior, the assaultants tried to conduct a referendum inside the village which they wanted to use as a pretext for capturing the church. The assaultants claimed a supposed “87%” success ratio for the transfer of the church in the village. It turned out that only 59 people voted, with many not even being resident of Kinahovtsy. As for the rector of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), Father Vitaliy Gureva, he collected signatures from the parish members to support the church.

“The security firm we hired in Kiev, along with the determination of our parish members, which spend nights inside the church, has forced the assaultants to abandon ideas of a forced takeover”, said Father Vitaliy. Now, according to him, the believers are threatened with seizure through the “legal way”, that is, re-registration of the parish of the UOC.

The church is the only canonical one in the vicinity, with many Kiev Patriarchate parishes existing not far away.

The believers of the UOC, of the village Kinahovtsy, have contacted the law enforcement agencies, along with the authorities, with the goal of further protecting their rights.

Sources:

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/03/03/cijeji-suboti-rozkolniki-zapidtrimki-pravogo-sektoru-planuyut-zaxopiti-xram-upc-v-s-kinaxivci-na-ternopilshhini/>

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/02/25/gromada-upc-sela-kinaxivci-vidmovilas-brati-uchast-u-provokaciji-upc-kp-ta-pravogo-sektoru/>

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/03/06/rejderi-ne-spromoglisya-zaxopiti-xram-u-kinaxivcyax-ale-obicyali-povernutis/>

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/02/26/gromada-upc-sela-kinaxivci-zvertatimetsya-do-derzhavnoji-vladi-z-proxannyam-pro-zaxist-svojix-prav/>

Kiev Patriarchate and volunteers illegally occupy the Orthodox Assumption Cathedral of the Lavra and hold a 15-minute service

March 13, 2017 – On 11 March representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate (UOC-KP), accompanied by a group of volunteers in camouflage, occupied the Assumption Cathedral of the Holy Dormition Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, where they performed a service despite the protests of the clergy of the UOC, writes Patriots of Ukraine.

Representative of the UOC-KP, priest Dmitry, accompanied by 200 volunteers who participated in the service, came to the Cathedral on the pretext of visiting the National Kiev-Pechersk Historical and Cultural Reserve.

Two priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church attempted to prevent a 15-minute worship of the Kiev Patriarchate followers, however, as reported, “the activists asked not to interfere with the service.”

The radical group justified their provocation by the fact that the Assumption Cathedral is part of the reserve, which “belongs to the people of Ukraine.”

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/kyev-patriarchate-and-volunteers-occupy-the-assumption-cathedral-of-the-lavra-and-hold-a-15-minute-s>

Bishop Kliment of Irpen: the service of the Kiev Patriarchate in the Kiev Pechersk Lavra is a provocation of outcasts

March 13, 2017 – The service held by the Kiev Patriarchate in the Kiev Pechersk Lavra is not linked to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church and is a provocation attempt.

“What we witnessed in the Uspensk Cathedral of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra can hardly be called a church service. It was clearly a provocation from the so-called ‘Kiev-Patriarchate’. During a touristic excursion, a group of people entered the church, and afterwards they began a church service with seditious demands in their prayers. When they were told that church services of such kind must be agreed upon with the priesthood, they physically assaulted the clergy of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra”, reported Bishop Kliment.

The main goal of the assailants was diffusing a video recording on the Internet. “Their goal wasn’t to conduct a prayer, nor to receive any spiritual guidance from the Uspensk Cathedral, but rather to diffuse their video through social media to create an incident”.

The bishop was not able to confirm if such seditious acts could be repeated from the part of this schismatic group. He stated that the creators of the incident have a “marginal status even within the Kiev Patriarchate”. “I believe that this incident matches their cultural and spiritual level”.

According to a previous report from the Ukrainian Orthodox Journalists (UOJ), about 200 people led by a priest from the unrecognized Kiev Patriarchate tried to conduct a church service inside the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra. They physically assaulted the monks who tried to stop them.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/episkop-irpenskiy-kliment-sluzhba-upts-kp-v-kievskoy-lavre-eto-provokatsiya-marginalov->

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/kievskiy-patriarkhat-i-volontery-zanyali-uspenskiy-sobor-lavry-i-proveli-15-minutnuyu-sluzhbu>

<http://ria.ru/religion/20170313/1489892493.html>

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is building a new church as a result of having theirs illegally seized by the Kiev Patriarchate

March 13, 2017 – The canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church was illegally seized in 2015 in the village of Katerinovka, Ternopol oblast. Because of this seizure, the Ukrainian Orthodox community is searching for funds to build a new church as a result of not having a permanent place for conducting church services.

“Members of the Kiev Patriarchate and the Right Sector seized the canonical Orthodox Church in honour of the holy martyr Saint George. In order to prevent further strife in the community, they have decided to build a new church”, stated the community in a communique.

Furthermore, the charity’s press release notes that the village council has not yet allowed the building of the church and has not yet granted any land. In response, one believer has offered the use of his land parcel for the building of a home. This home could be used as a

church to allow the community to conduct liturgies there any time.

The conduct of church services inside private houses is not forbidden neither by the laws of Ukraine, nor by the canons of the church. According to ancient Christian traditions, a lack of churches in the ancient world has led many church services to be conducted in private homes of believers.

The current cost of the new church is estimated to be 71,000 Ukrainian grivens. So far, only nine thousand has been collected. The official start of the works has begun on March 7, and the inauguration of the new church is planned for May 7, 2017.

Sources:

<http://www.sedmitza.ru/text/7040510.html>

In Badovka, the Kiev Patriarchate uses the last resort to keep the seized church of the canonical Orthodox Church

March 14, 2017 – In the village of Badovka, Rivne region, representatives of the Kiev Patriarchate again prevented believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from entering the church, belonging to the UOC (Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP).

On March 6, a court eviction order from the Supreme Economic Court of Ukraine ordered the Kiev Patriarchate to leave the church that they illegally occupied in 2014.

On March 3, 2017, a human rights activist of the Rivne diocese of the UOC received a call from the state prosecutor, who said that the court order would not take place because of a lawsuit filed by representatives of the Kiev Patriarchate in the Supreme Court of Ukraine.

“We already have a similar practice in the diocese of Rivne, when members of the Kiev Patriarchate submit another lawsuit not from legal entities, but from individuals. This time, the opponents turned to the manipulation of the patriotic consciousness of the population by using the case of the Donbass War veteran Valentin Sergeyevich Zakhozhy, a Badovka resident, who in February 2017 filed a lawsuit in the Rovno District Administrative Court and the Ostroh District Court, demanding that they revoke the decision on the right of ownership to the church.

Also, it became known from the court’s decision that he requires to seize the church building. “The cases on his claims have not yet been scheduled for consideration yet, as V. S. Zakhozhy did not pay the court fee,”

commented Catherine Ivaniuk, the human rights activist of the Rivne diocese of the UOC.

In connection with this claim, the state prosecutor suspended the execution of the court’s decision of December 20, 2016 until March 17, 2017.

“We do not want to aggravate the situation, we simply seek justice,” says Archpriest Viktor Zemlianoy, head of the department for the settlement of interfaith disputes at the Rivne diocese of the UOC-MP– the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Mary Magdalene Church was built by the believers of the UOC-MP. Our key benefactor was Viktor Gubitsky, who now serves as a cleric of the Kiev diocese of the UOC-MP. I think this fact should not be appealed against by any villager – everything happened transparently.”

Now while the legitimate owners of the church – the believers of the UOC-MP – are forced to pray in the country house, eagerly provided for worship by a local resident, the Kiev Patriarchate continues to use the church for their own purposes.

As reported by the UOJ, on December 20, the Supreme Economic Court of Ukraine ordered the Kiev Patriarchate to vacate the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Mary Magdalene Church of the UOC in the village of Badovka, Rivne region, seized by the Kiev Patriarchate two years ago.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-badovka-uoc-kp-uses-the-last-resort-to-keep-the-seized-church>

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/03/14/u-badivci-upc-kp-vikoristala-ostannij-zasib-shhob-utrimati-zaxopenij-xram/>

<http://uoj.org.ua/ua/novosti/sobytiya/sud-povernuv-viruyuchim-upts-zakhopleni-kiivskim-patriarkhatom-tserkvu-sela-badivka>

In Glukhovo (Ukraine), unknown individuals broke inside an Orthodox Christian cathedral and changed the interior décor

March 19, 2017 – About 70 unknown individuals entered the Orthodox Cathedral of Saint Nicholas (Moscow Patriarchate) in the city of Glukhovo, Sumy oblast. According to the Union of Orthodox Journalists (UOJ), the individuals were accompanied by a chaplain, along with visitors who claimed to come from a “Train of Friendship”, originating in Western Ukraine. They entered the church and changed the décor inside.

As it became known to the UOJ from their Sources;

the parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) was not contacted about this prior hand. On the other hand, the entrance of these individuals into the cathedral was insisted on by the mayor of Glukhovo. He argued that the church is located “on the balance of the city”.

No one entered the altar. No assault or physical incidents occurred during the incident.

Sources:

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/03/19/u-glukxovi-nevidomi-osobi-pronikli-do-xramu-upc-ta-zvershili-tam-svij-obryad/>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-glukhove-neizvestnye-pronikli-v-khram-upts-i-sovershili-tam-svoy-obryad>

A new attack is planned against an Orthodox church in the village of Ptichiya

March 19, 2017 – There is a plenary session of the village council planned for the village of Ptichiya, Rivne oblast (Ukraine). One of the questions that will be discussed involves conducting a referendum about the transfer of the Saint Uspensky Church of the village. The residents of the village see this as another attempt at seizing the church.

“Questions pertaining to the church cannot be discussed in a local town recreational center”, declare the parish members of the Saint Uspensky Church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP).

The parish has rights to towards the Church since 1996, and the Superior Ukrainian Agricultural Court confirmed these right on January 26, 2016. Furthermore, ever since 2012, the Ukrainian government considers any such referendums to be illegal.

The Church in the village of Ptichye is currently not officially allowed to be used for church services. Nevertheless, the Kiev Patriarchate has ignored this administrative ban of the Superior Court and continues to conduct church services there over the past two years. The believers of the UOC-MP have to conduct services in the garage of the local church rector.

The Union of Orthodox Journalists is monitoring the situation.

Sources:

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/03/19/planujetsya-cherгова-ataka-na-xram-viryani-upc-sela-pticha/>

<http://uoj.org.ua/ua/novosti/sobytiya/planu-tsya-cherгова-ataka-na-khram-viryani-upts-sela-pticha>

Robbers attempting to steal gold from icons in an Orthodox Cathedral are apprehended in Chelyabinsk oblast

March 21, 2017 – Members of the Russian Guards have apprehended two men suspected of robbing church property in Kyshtym (Chelyabinsk oblast, Russia). In the morning of March 20, a worker of the Birth of Christ Church has contacted the local security when she saw the two men lifting the glass on top of the icon to steal the golden portions. Both assailants have had a previous criminal record. They are being pursued under articles 30, and 161 of the Russian Criminal Code (Assault accompanied with robbery).

Sources:
<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=66522>

The Kiev Patriarchate has invented a new way to retain a seized Orthodox Christian Cathedral of the Moscow Patriarchate

March 22, 2017 – The legal trade union PRIVÈ is going to handle the legalization of the transfer of Saint Vladimir Cathedral in Kiev.

According to the managing partner of the firm, Evgeny Kramarenko, “our legal firm PRIVÈ is handling the consulting, accompaniment, and judicial assistance to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate. The documents we collected have been forwarded to the Internal Revenue Service of Ukraine and to the Land Registry Office”.

The land registry documents of the Saint Vladimir Cathedral have been lost in 1938. In 1852, Metropolitan of Kiev and Galicia, Filaret (Amphiteatrov) has written a letter to Tsar Nicholas I to express the importance of building a church in Kiev, dedicated to Saint Vladimir.

On September 1, the Cathedral was sanctified in the presence of the higher clergy, the imperial family dignitaries and the Kiev Metropolitan Ionnikiy (Rudnev). In 1929, the Cathedral was closed by the Communist authorities and became a museum of anti-religious propaganda. After the liberation of Kiev in 1944, the Cathedral became the seat of the Metropolitan of Kiev and Galicia, exarch of Ukraine. In 1988, a celebration was held in the church in honor of 1000 years since the Christening of the Kiev Rus. In 1995,

the Synod of the Kiev Patriarchate was held in the same cathedral.

Sources:
<http://pro.church.ua/2017/03/22/kijivskij-patriarhat-pridumav-yak-legalizuvati-zaxopleniya-volodimirskogo-soboru/>

In Rivne oblast (Ukraine), the authorities are delaying to return the seized church of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church

March 27, 2017 – It has been more than three months since the representatives of the Kiev Patriarchate ignore the decision of the Superior Agricultural Court of Ukraine, which gave a verdict of eviction. Furthermore, the executive authorities does not allow believers to worship in their rightful place of cult. They are not taking proper action to enforce the court’s decision.

Despite attempts of Kiev Patriarchate members to appeal the court decision, it remained without changes. The Superior Court rejected their appeal last week.

This has led to a registration of a complaint within the Superior Court of Ukraine by the Judicial Department of the Rivne diocese.

Sources:
<http://news.church.ua/2017/03/27/na-rovenshchine-vlast-tormozit-zakonnoe-vozvrashhenie-zaxvachennogo-xrama-obshchine-upc/?lang=ru>

Supreme Court defends Ivano-Frankivsk faithful from the mayor’s eviction pressures

March 28, 2017 – The highest judicial body of the Ukrainian judicial system ruled in favor of the parishioners of the Holy Transfiguration Church of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) of Ivano-Frankivsk, reports the website of the diocese. The court found the claims of officials to believers unfounded.

Since November 2016, the executive committee of the City Council of Ivano-Frankivsk and personally the mayor of the city Ruslan Matsynkiv have been pressuring the UOC community to leave the church. Believers have appealed to various instances and repeatedly written letters, including to the President and the Prime Minister of Ukraine, and to the OSCE. The Supreme Economic Court of Ukraine on February 6, 2017 ruled in favor of the religious community of the UOC. But the officials of Ivano-

Frankivsk were not satisfied with the decision of the court and filed an application in the Supreme Court of Ukraine to review the decision.

Having considered this application, the highest judicial body of Ukraine came to the conclusion that it was groundless, and by the decision of the panel of judges of the Economic Chamber of the Supreme Court of Ukraine on March 17, 2017 denied admission of case No. 909 / 932/15 to the production by the Supreme Court of Ukraine.

Sources:
<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/zashchita-tserkvi/supreme-court-defends-ivano-frankivsk-faithful-from-the-mayor-s-claims>

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=66597>

<http://news.church.ua/2017/03/28/spaso-preobrazhenskij-xram-ivano-frankovska-ostaetsya-v-upc-verxovnyj-sud/?lang=ru>

Canonical Orthodox Christian believers of the village Nesterovtsy (Ukraine) are launching a lawsuit to regain the church seized by Kiev Patriarchate

March 30, 2017 – The Khmelnytsky oblast (regional) court is considering the lawsuit launched by the parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the village of Nesterovtsy. The parish wants to have their church returned to them by the Kiev Patriarchate, who seized it in June 2016. A former priest of the UOC-MP who joined the Kiev Patriarchate is conducting the services in the church. He was excluded from the canonical Orthodox Church for amoral behavior.

Due to the seizure, the parish conducts church services inside a former sewing workshop.

The services of the Kiev Patriarchate usually attract about 5-6 people, whereas those of the canonical Church attract about 30 people.

The UOC-MP has already won the lawsuit on an administrative level. The court than transferred the case to a different instance in order to conduct a criminal lawsuit.

The situation is currently being monitored by the Union of Orthodox Journalists.

Sources:
<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/veruyushchie-nesterovtsev-snova-sudyatsya-za-khram-zakhvachenny-raskolnikami>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/raskolniki-poprosili-sud-rassmotret-delo-o-zakhvate-khrama-posle-paskhi>

A man broke into an Orthodox church in Nikolaev oblast (Ukraine)

April 18, 2017 – A man was arrested in the Troitskoe village in the Nikolaev oblast of Ukraine.

A local village resident called the police to notify of a break-and-enter case in the local Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the morning of April 16. The police established that the man broke into the church just to light a candle.

The man looked like he was “mentally deranged”, and the law-enforcement authorities called an ambulance to deliver him to a hospital. The police are investigating the case of violation.

Sources:
<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-nikolaevskoy-oblasti-muzhchina-vylomal-dver-v-tserkov-chtoby-postavit-svechku>

An Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is defiled and robbed in Odessa

April 24, 2017 – Unknown assailants have robbed the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) of Dmitry Solunsky in Odessa.

The robbers disabled the security system by breaking the barrier installed on the window. They proceeded to steal the moneybox with the donations of parish members. The money was collected to help the victims, migrants, veterans, sick children and orphans who have suffered because of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

The evildoers have also damaged some church property. They have broken into the food closet, which was dedicated to collect food for the malnourished, cut the bags with grains and mixed them with dirt.

They have also broken the frame of the icon with Saint Dmitry Solunsky, which was decorated by the parish members as a sign of gratitude for miraculous healing of illnesses and the solving of difficult life situations.

Sources:
<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=66886>

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/102935.html>

<http://news.church.ua/2017/04/23/v-odesse-vory-oskvernili-i-derzko-ograbili-xram-video/?lang=ru>

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13734>

Unknown individuals committed arson on an Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)

April 25, 2017 – Unknown individuals lit a Parish house of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP) in the Nikolayev oblast of Ukraine.

An unidentified young man was seen running out of the church at the time of the arson and disappearing in an unknown direction.

The Rector of the church, Archpriest Nikolay Chutora has filed a complaint with the local law enforcement authorities.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=66911>

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13739>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-novomirgorode-podozhgli-postroyki-khramovogo-kompleksa-upts>

<http://news.church.ua/2017/04/26/v-novomirgorode-kirovogradskoj-oblasti-neizvestnye-pytalis-szhech-cerkovnye-sooruzheniya/?lang=ru>

Kiev Patriarchate disrupts the divine service in the canonical Orthodox Church and broke up the altar entrance

May 16, 2017 - Several dozens followers of the self-proclaimed Kiev Patriarchate rushed in a church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) during the divine service and broke the doors leading to the altar.

About twenty “priests of the self-proclaimed Kiev Patriarchate” ran into Sts Peter and Paul Church in the village of Kinakhovtsy in the Ternopol Region in the evening on Monday. They then proceeded to rush to the altar, broke the central gates and came into the altar where they started conducting their “service.” Rector of the church priest Vitaly Gureva tried to stop the seizure, but they pushed him from the stairs outside.

The UOC-MP informational Sources: note that it was not the first attempt to seize Sts Peter and Paul Church in Kinakhovtsy. On the eve followers of “the Kiev Patriarchate” demanded the keys from the church sacristan as they wanted to conduct their “prayer service” there, but he did not give the keys to them.

As was reported, early in March parishioners of Kinakhovtsy fought for their right to pray in their

own church under jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. Activists of the Pravy Sektor radical organization (banned in Russia) tried to oppose them.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13787>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-kinakhovtsy-village-a-handful-of-kp-members-bully-the-uoc-community-s-headman>

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=67094>

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/103487.html>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/otnosheniya-konfessij/smi-pytayutsya-razdut-mezhreligioznyy-skandal-v-sele-kokhanovka>

A member of Khmelnytsky regional council has seized a canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church

May 16, 2017 – Representatives of the Kiev Patriarchate, with the help of the Khmelnytsky regional deputy V. V. Burlik from the “Svoboda” party, captured the canonical Saint-Uspensky Orthodox Church in the village of Zoryanoe. When commenting the situation, the Archpriest Mikhail Varahoba noted that the village deputy who took advantage of his institutional position to capture the church initiated the struggle in the village.

“Member of the Svoboda party, led by V. Bulik, have demanded the vacation of the church under threat of physical violence. In order to avoid vandalism and physical violence, we had to surrender the keys and to forfeit all documents for the church”, underlined the priest.

Father Mikhail has noted that V. Burlik, in addition to trying to incite the faithful of the canonical Church to join the Kiev Patriarchate, has also been involved in illegal activities.

“The deputy was also involved in collecting signatures about the “transfer” of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the Kiev Patriarchate. He didn’t even bother to await the end of the signature collect, and instead arranged for the arrival of a priest from the Kiev Patriarchate to come and become “nominated” as the village spiritual head.

He declared that the police has been contacted to open a case against deputy V. Burlik.

Sources:

<http://news.church.ua/2017/05/17/na-xmelnychine-deputat-oblastnogo-soveta-otobral-v-upc-xram/?lang=ru>

The Tabernacle with the Holy Sacraments is stolen from a Khmelnytsky (Ukraine) church

June 1, 2017 – The Tabernacle with the Holy Sacraments was stolen from the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, named Svyato-Pokrovsky, in the village of Adamovka. The evildoers have broken into the side door of the church, and entered under the cover of the night. According to Archpriest Michael Varahoby, they have also desecrated the church, and were planning to steal the icons inside. It appears as though they did not have time to complete their misdeed. The law enforcement agencies are currently investigating the details of the crime. He is also shocked that the vandals chose to steal the Tabernacle – an object that is sacred for believers, but not so much from a financial value.

Archpriest Varahoby believes that the crime was done under the influence of the dislike for the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. One such church was captured recently in the nearby village of Zoryanoe. Furthermore, a hate campaign is being led in the region to seize even more churches.

The Archpriest commented that “In Adamovka, most people are good and pious, and they attend the church services. But the “Right Sector” and “Freedom” party are misinforming the people about the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Most people do not react to their campaign, but future consequences remain to be seen”.

The Svyato-Pokrovsky Church was built in 1773. It stands in a relatively isolated part of the village, the government allocates very little funds for it, unlike for the church located in the center. The Archpriest recommends adding more lighting around the church for a more secure environment.

Sources:

<http://news.church.ua/2017/06/01/na-xmelnychine-iz-xrama-upc-poxitili-daroxranitelnicu-so-svyatymi-darami/?lang=ru>

Greek Catholics seized the Moscow Patriarchate Ukrainian Orthodox Church in western Ukraine

June 5, 2017 – Priests of the Greek Catholic Church on Sunday, the Feast of the Holy Trinity, seized old Annunciation Church in the town of Kolomyia, the Ivano-Frankovsk Region.

Militants of the nationalistic movement Chornaya Sotnya participated in the seizure. Its rector

Archpriest Vasily Kobelsky told that Greek Catholics entered the church by deceit and celebrated a liturgy there.

“This day UGCC activists and priests organized a traditional march to the tomb of the Ukrainian archers located not far from our church. Security Service official came up to me and asked to let them in to the church as they wanted to pray there. But Greek Catholic priests, there were thirteen of them, went right to the altar and started celebrating the liturgy,” he said.

Greek Catholics had already made an attempt to capture this church in 2009 with the support of the city council.

Earlier, the Moscow Patriarchate criticized UGCC for their attacks and anti-Russian rhetoric, noting that the traditional Orthodox and Catholic believers should pay attention to this problem.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=67331>

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13845>

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/104032.html>

Statement of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in connection with events surrounding the Holy-Annunciation church of UOC in the city of Kolomyia, Ivano-Frankivska oblast

June 4, 2017 – On the Day of Holy Pentecost, in the city of Kolomyia 13 priests of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (UGCC) together with their faithful and supported by “Chorna Sotnia” (“the Black Hundred”) fighters, entered the Holy-Annunciation church, which belongs to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and celebrated a liturgy there. After that, the church was illegally locked, and since then religious community of the UOC has been unable to pray in their own church. Negotiations regarding the future of the church are currently in progress.

In addition to their attempt to seize the above-mentioned church, the clergy and faithful of the UGCC have also been heard issuing threats to capture another UOC church in Kolomyia – namely, the Holy Dormition Cathedral. Also threats were levelled at the Parish Rector – Archpriest Mykolay Smetaniuk. The faithful of the Church are facing intimidation, slander, threats of violence, and mostly coming from

the mouths of Uniate chaplains, one of whom is Fr. Michael Arsenych. Leaflets with false information and with incitement against our church are being distributed among the residents of Kolomyia.

The UOC religious community has been using the building of the Holy-Annunciation church since 1990 on a legal basis. At the present time, the Kolomyia-Chernivtsi Diocese of the UGCC has not presented any legal proof that in any way whatsoever confirms the fact that the said church was transferred for use to the UOC religious community with the proviso that the said church has to be given to the UGCC in future. In the case that the UGCC diocese considers the Holy-Annunciation church as its own, then it should prove that allegation in a civilized way, i.e. via court.

Despite the peaceable position declared in the official statement of Kolomyisko-Chernivetska diocese of the UGCC with that regard and all assurances that “the incidents mentioned were not initiated by the UGCC”, the diocese does not explain participation of UGCC priests in the conflict, especially those who provoked and called to capturing of the church that belongs to a religious community of the UOC.

Also, we find calls to renewal of historical justice that were set forth in the UGCC Statement, inadvisable and inopportune for the present time. According to the Statement, the UOC community must return a church that allegedly belonged to the UGCC. In such approach we see danger of further interconfessional confrontations based on the principle of historical justice renewal.

For example, St. Mykolay church on Askoldova Mohyla in Kyiv as well St. Mykolay the Good church at Podol and other historic churches that are currently being used by Greek-Catholic communities, were originally built as Orthodox churches and had historically belonged to the Orthodox Church. For instance, St. Mykolay the Good church at Podol was a place of pastoral ministry for famous orthodox theologian Archpriest Oleksandr Glagolev (1872-1937).

Thus, according to the logic in the Statement made by Kolomyisko-Chernivetska diocese of the UGCC, the UGCC in its turn also have to return to the UOC those churches, which the UGCC is currently using, and which should have been given up, by the logic of the Statement, “in favour of other religious confessions”, because the UOC also does not have “any moral or legal right” not to return them. The situation by the Holy-Annunciation church in Kolomyia may cause some reciprocal actions towards Greek-

Catholic churches in other regions of Ukraine. We are convinced, that such an approach will not bring more peace and stability into interconfessional relationships. The canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church stands on the positions of interconfessional peace and avoidance of any possible religious confrontation.

Besides, it is a known fact that in the city of Kolomyia the UGCC has about 20 churches at its disposal, while the UOC only has 2. So, it is very unlikely that the attempt of seizing the Holy-Annunciation church was caused by a deficiency of churches for UGCC faithful. Having studied a number of videos that were filmed at the location of the incident, we can state that Uniate priests, who came to the Holy-Annunciation church in order to urge a UOC community to change their confessional jurisdiction, used hostile rhetoric and explicitly hounded their fellow citizens for their confessional affiliation.

We are convinced that such actions of the UGCC clergy contradict with the general vector of Orthodox-Catholic relations. Since, according to the Havana Joint Declaration, “Orthodox and Greek Catholics are in need of reconciliation and of mutually acceptable forms of co-existence” (Havana Joint Declaration, p. 25).

We are calling upon the leadership of the UGCC as well as leaders of Kolomyisko-Chernivetska diocese of the UGCC to approach this issue calmly and carefully, in the spirit of Christian love and respect to religious beliefs of other people, and with awareness of full responsibility.

Sources:

<http://news.church.ua/2017/06/09/statement-of-decr-uoc-in-connection-with-events-surrounding-the-holy-annunciation-church-of-uoc-in-the-city-of-kolomyia-ivano-frankivska-oblast/?lang=ru>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-kolomye-vlasti-narushili-zakon-i-prevysili-svoi-polnomochiya-pravozashchitnik>

Dnepr court gives the UOC temple to a businessman. Now he wants to grab the land.

June 14, 2017 - A businessman named Mr. Polatsky sued the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in the city of Alexandria, Kirovograd region. He is now insisting that the Church of the Nativity of Christ is the property of his son. Moreover, he wants to take away the land, which was transferred to the community of the UOC for permanent use.

Mr. Polyatsky presented the Alexandrian eparchy of the UOC “an extract from the State Register of

Property Rights for Real Estate on the Registration of Rights and Restrictions”, according to which the church and other structures belong to his son on the basis of a gift agreement. In turn, the church was given to Polatsky by the decision of the industrial district court of the city of Dnepr (judge – V. Moroz). The trial on this issue lasted for six days.

The eparchy told the UOJ that representatives of the religious community were not present at the hearings, since they were not notified about the proceedings.

On the site of the City Council of Alexandria, a draft decision appeared, according to which the land plot is taken away from the community and transferred to Polyatsky for a 49 year lease.

The community of the UOC appealed the decision of the court and wrote an Appeal to the mayor of the city of S. Tsapyuk and the elected deputies.

The construction of the temple in Alexandriya's Pobeda microdistrict began in 2011, when the local administration allocated a plot of land to the UOC community for permanent use. Three years ago, the construction of the church in honor of the Nativity of Christ was finished with the help of the above-mentioned businessman, Anatoly Polyatsky.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/dnepr-court-gives-the-uoc-temple-to-a-businessman-now-he-wants-to-grab-the-land>

Icons from the XVIII stolen from a church in the Vinnitsa region (Ukraine)

June 14, 2017 – Three icons have been stolen in the village of Kalitinka, Vinnitsa region, from the Saint-Dmitry church of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The theft was reported by the Rector of the church. According to the report, unknown individuals broke into the church, breaking the wooden window preemptively. They proceeded to steal icons of Saint Nicholas, an icon of the Head of John the Baptist and the Myrrh bearers.

One icon has already faced an attempt of theft. In the 1990's, certain evildoers attempted to sell it out of the country, but the customs service apprehended the criminals.

The assailants are currently being searched for by the police.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-vinnitskoy-oblasti-iz-khrama-upts-pokhitili-ikony-xviii-veka>

In Volyn priest evicted from his children asks Supreme Court to review the case

June 20, 2017 – The state authorities of Horokhiv district of Volyn region plan to implement the court's decision to resettle two children from their parents. It is related to the claim of the Kyiv Patriarchate about eviction from the village church house in Uhryniv of the couple – a priest of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) and his wife-regent together with their two children, their younger son being born after the appointment of the father to serve at this parish. The court only partially satisfied the requirement of the Kiev Patriarchate about the complete eviction of the family from the house: the juveniles were not evicted at the time of filing the lawsuit.

The scandal with the division of church property between the two rural communities has continued for almost three years. At the same time, the priest of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church was delivered an ultimatum – either he joins the Kiev Patriarchate, or he is driven away from the village – despite the fact the Kiev Patriarchate community was not even registered at that time.

After protopriest Rostislav Sapozhnik refused to change the confession, the Kyiv Patriarchate, with the support of local authorities and businesses, seized the village's Holy Cross Exaltation Church, a church house on its territory and a new cemetery chapel. The last community's real estate asset out of the reach for schismatics was the priest's house, which had been built and maintained by the UOC parish, privatized by the Kyiv Patriarchate and claimed to be its own property. The family registered here, who paid all the bills and a land tax, was sued to be evicted.

In Horokhiv district court the claim was refused: after dismissal and resignation of the judges, the lawsuit was transferred to a neighboring district. On April 5, 2016, the judge of Lokachin District Court, Irina Voznyuk, announced that the claim was partially satisfied: adults, according to her decision, were evicted from the disputed house, while the children could stay further. A few months later it became known she had resigned.

On August 30, 2016, by the decision of the board of judges of Volyn Court of Appeal, the decision in the first instance was upheld. At the same time, judges

were not interested in the fact that the defendants provided a refutation of false data that they allegedly had other real estate property. Nor were they interested in the information from the village council of Uhryniv, according to which the family of the priest was registered in the disputed house.

In the cassation instance, the decision was left unchanged.

The couple has nowhere to live. The community of the UOC, deprived of its temple, continues to conduct divine services in one of the rooms of this house.

The clergyman applied to the executive service with a request to postpone the execution of the decision until the Supreme Court considers a petition to review the case. So far no response has been received from the executors.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-volyn-priest-evicted-from-his-children-asks-supreme-court-to-review-the-case>

In Khmelnytsky region non-canonical church proponents obstruct construction of UOC church

September 2, 2017 – In the town of Volochisk in the Khmelnytsky region, non-canonical church proponents demand to forbid the construction of a UOC church. Several priests of the Kiev Patriarchate call on the residents to obstruct the building of the church in every possible way. At the same time, they film their illegal actions and post them on Facebook. According to a UOJ source, the temple of the canonical Church is being built on legal grounds: all the permissive documents are available.

Kiev Patriarchate followers and their supporters have already violated the law on private property: they moved a construction trailer to where they considered it necessary.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-khmelnytsky-region-schismatics-obstruct-construction-of-uoc-church-video>

Two men attempt to steal relics of Great Martyr Paraskeva from Zaporozhye church

September 20, 2017 – Two men were detained early this morning at about 1:40 AM at St. Andrew's Orthodox Cathedral in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Zaporozhye for attempted robbery, especially

of the relics of the Great Martyr Paraskeva of Iconium which had been brought to the city the day before, reports the Melitopol-based Mestnie Novosti (Local News).

The two men were spotted scaling the church fence by a local resident who called the police. Two patrol crews arrived on the scene.

The police spotted a broken lattice on one of the windows, and the lights were on inside the church. The church guard helped the police get inside the church, where they found the two unknown men, born in 1993 and 1996, talking between themselves. The officers found damage to the reliquary containing the relics of St. Paraskeva. The relics themselves were found at the entrance of the church, where the thieves had thrown them when they noticed the police officers.

The relics of St. Paraskeva arrived from the Holy Protection-Theodosius Monastery in Balta to the Zaporozhye Diocese on June 26 in celebration of its 25th anniversary. They are scheduled to remain in the diocese until September 3.

500 hryvnia (\$19) stolen from the guard's jacket was also found on the men, and they had found a donation box which they were planning to break into. After checking police databases, the police established that the men had previously been found guilty of breaking and entering and robbery.

An investigative task force from the Shevchenkovsky Regional Department later arrived on the scene for further inspections. All evidence was seized in the presence of witnesses.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/106505.html>

http://www.mv.org.ua/news/159805-nochyu_v_zaporozhe_ograbili_cerkov_i_pytalys_vynesti_svjatye_moshi.html

Priest of UOC won an appeal against the church seizure

September 23, 2017 – The rector of the Holy Protection Church of the UOC in the village of Gribovitsa of the Ivanichi district, the Volyn region, Protopriest Igor Margita won an appeal against the chairman of the Gribovitsa village council Pavel Stepanets, who was one of the initiators of the Orthodox church grab by the Kyiv Patriarchate.

The priest filed a lawsuit in the case of Stepanets' abuse of authority: the representative of the local authorities refused to provide Protopriest Igor with the information he needed.

In the first instance, the case was closed, as the period for recovery was exhausted during the trial. On September 20, 2017, by the decision of the Volyn Court of Appeal, Igor Margita's claim was partially satisfied: Pavel Stepanets was recognized as a violator, but the court did not impose a fine on him, justifying it by the fact that the statutory period has expired.

In Gribovitsa, there was a two-year confrontation between the community of the UOC and the local village council, whose head actually led the seizure of the Orthodox church by the Kyiv Patriarchate. The priest of the UOC faced persecution and attempts of administrative pressure, which became senseless after the opening of a new temple of the canonical Church in the village.

The secretariat of the Verkhovna Rada authorized representative for human rights joined the conflict resolution. On October 12, 2016, the ombudsman responded to Protopriest Igor Magrita's complaint that there are grounds in Stepanets' actions for bringing him to administrative responsibility.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/priest-of-uoc-beats-in-court-the-head-of-the-village-council-initiating-church-seizure>

Lviv court takes away Orthodox church in the village of Kuty from UOC community

September 30, 2017 – On September 26, the Lviv Economic Court of Appeal handed over to the Kyiv Patriarchate the Church of the Holy Righteous Anna in the village of Kuty in the Shumsk district of the Ternopil region, reports Zaxid.Media.

For several years, the religious community of the Holy Righteous Anna has been trying unsuccessfully to secure the return of title rights to the temple it built. The Ternopil Economic Court abolished the right of ownership of the UOC community to the church. The basis was the absence of the "Act of commissioning". The document was not found in the archives, although the shelf life of such documents is 10 years. The church was built in 1997.

According to the court's decision, the Ternopil regional state administration was recognized as the temple's administrator, which has the right to provide the church with alternate use for the communities of the UOC and the UOC-KP.

According to local residents, the community of the UOC headed by the rector Fr. Igor Kushniruk, has

practically lost hope of upholding its rights in court and is planning to build a new church.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/lviv-court-takes-away-church-in-the-village-of-kuty-from-uoc-community>

<http://zaxid.media/news/3678111>

Unknown vandals desecrate grave of St. Alexander (Petrovsky)

October 10, 2017 – On the night of October 6, presumably between 1:00 and 2:00 AM, the grave of the holy Hieromartyr Alexander (Petrovsky) was vandalized in the Kharkov city cemetery, reports the Kharkov Diocese.

The cross at St. Alexander's grave was broken, and his gravestone was partially damaged.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/107024.html>

<http://www.eparchia.kharkov.ua/readnews/1887>

Kiev Caves Lavra under threat by radicals

October 11, 2017 – Deputy abbot of the Kiev Caves Lavra Metropolitan Paul of Vyshgorod and Chernobyl has raised the issue of a possible attack against the holy site by radical forces during the days of the feast of the Holy Protection of the Mother of God, October 14-17, reports Vesti.

The bishop has composed a letter, addressed to Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Prime Minister Vladimir Groisman, the public prosecutor and Ukrainian Security Service, the head of the national police Sergei Knyazev, and the head of the Ministry of Interior Affairs Arseny Avakov, with a request to suppress all attempts at aggression against the lavra. "We really hope that people will not raise a hand against this sacred site and this will not happen. We are not occupied with politics, we pray. But I'm constantly receiving calls from various political powers warning about a possible attack against us," Met. Paul writes.

Leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists Nikolai Kokhanivsky stated that their organizations, together with the groups the Right Sector, Freedom, and the National Corpus will hold the "March for the Glory of Our Heroes" in Kiev, passing through Maidan Square, where the bloody 2014 revolution took place, moving down St. Michael Street, along which sits the Kiev Caves Lavra. 10-20,000 are

expected to participate in the march.

Advisor to the Minister of the Interior Ivan Varchenko has stated that he has not heard of the radicals' plans, but has promised that in the case of emergency, all preserved objects will be protected.

Met. Paul also recalled that at the same time a year ago, 500 people in ski masks gathered near the monastery, insulting believers and throwing stones at the lavra. Last year on October 14, participants in the "March of the Nation" procession, which included members of the Right Sector, which routinely seizes canonical churches and physically assaults clergy and believers, set off pyrotechnics near the Caves Lavra.

In July of this year, nationalist Viktor Trigub spoke about discussions "to take control of the Ukrainian Lavra reserve," and in July of last year, former advisor to the Minister of the Interior Ilia Kiva declared his desire to free "the Lavra from seizure and violence by the FSB ghouls in riassas."

Sources:

<https://vesti-ukr.com/kyiv/260430-atakujut-ili-projduť-mimo-radikaly-rasskazali-napadut-li-na-lavru>

Ukrainian radicals disrupt allocation of land to Pochaev Lavra

October 13, 2017 – Right Sector radicals in the Western Ukrainian city of Ternopil are continuing to intimidate deputies of the Pochaev city council in order to block the allocation of a plot of land to the Holy Dormition Pochaev Lavra. The radicals disrupted yesterday's meeting of the regular session of the city council which was to consider the land question, reports the Information-Education Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

This is now the second aggressive attempt to block the council from taking up the issue of granting land to the Pochaev Lavra, which would be used to build new structures for the brethren to live in.

In late June, representatives of the nationalist-extremist group Freedom started a fight, thwarting the city council session which was considering the question of granting permission to change the purpose of the land in question. Pochaev mayor Vasily Boiko reported the incident to the police and to the "Public Advocacy" NGO which represents the interest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to international organizations.

The incident was reported to the European community at a meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Warsaw.

"Activists of the Right Sector and Trident, in collaboration with the National Corpus and Freedom are ready to take decisive actions to prevent the treacherous actions of the local authorities," Right Sector members wrote on their Facebook pages before the start of yesterday's session.

Given the serious and dangerous pressure, the question of the land-grant was again not taken up. Despite that they achieved their desire end, the masked men continued to insult the deputies, clergy, and elderly women gathered at the meeting.

One of the deputies spoke about how they were already subjected to intimidation before the session. "If you vote, we will find every one of you, in your homes, and you will see what will happen to you," they were told. "Is this correct? I'm a free person—the Ukrainian Constitution clearly says that everyone has the right to freedom of religion. So why do you come every time and do violence against the deputies? It is not right," the deputy stated.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/107153.html>

Uniate clergy physically attack Orthodox

October 23, 2017 – The Ivano-Frankivsk Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has published a video showing clergy of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church brutally beating women and other Orthodox believers outside the Annunciation Church in Kolomyia, which has been the subject of an ongoing battle, reports the Information-Education Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

A group of young men in ski masks, headed by Uniate priests, used brute force to stop parishioners of the Annunciation Church from entering and holding Divine Liturgy yesterday. The video shows people being punched and kicked.

One of the active organizers of the provocation Uniate priest Nikolai Medinsky is seen punching Orthodox faithful, and harassing them, calling them "Moscow pigs." The Uniates promised to "smash" those who were videotaping their abuse.

Parish rector Fr. Vasily Kobelsky noted that the riots had begun the previous Sunday, when a Uniate priest threatened the Orthodox faithful with a Kalashnikov gun.

The battle over the church has been dragging on for several months. On June 4, 2017, the feast of Pentecost, Uniate priests with the support of soldiers

of "the Black Hundred" group made a raider siege of the church, fraudulently entering the church and celebrating their liturgy there. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church made a statement soon after, explaining the historical situation surrounding the parish.

On October 4, the Ivano-Frankivsk district administrative court recognized the legitimacy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's claim to the building, which the Uniates have ignored. The Uniates again seized the church yesterday, while about 60 police officers passively watched, according to the Union of Orthodox Journalists.

"The state has an obligation to simply stop the ongoing infractions. The government should abide by the laws it itself has written. The governmental authorities need to fulfill their functions, not just watch the doers of lawlessness," stated Archpriest Nikolai Danilevich, the deputy head of the Ukrainian Church's Department for External Church Relations.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/107474.html>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/zakhvat-khrama-v-kolomye-strategicheskoe-porazhenie-ugkts-predstavitel-upts>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/veruyushchikh-upts-vytalkivali-iz-khrama-v-kolomye-pri-bezdeystvii-politsii-foto>

Reaction of the chairman of the Synodal Department for Church and Society and the Media to the situation in the Annunciation Church in Kolomiya.

November 9, 2017 – The chairman of the Synodal Department for Church and Society and the Media Vladimir Legoida recently addressed the sorrowful events occurring with the Annunciation Church in Kolomiya, Ukraine, calling the situation, in which Uniates have stolen the church from the Orthodox faithful, outrageous, reports pravoslavie.ru.

"It is absolutely unthinkable what is happening with the parishioners of the Annunciation Church in Kolomiya in the Ivano-Frankivsk Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, who have been denied the right to pray in their church, in their own country," Legoida stated.

The Holy Annunciation Church has been the subject of an ongoing battle between the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and the Uniate Greek Catholic Church which has illegitimately seized

the church building. On June 4, 2017, the feast of Pentecost, Uniate priests with the support of soldiers of "the Black Hundred" group made a raider siege of the church, fraudulently entering the church and celebrating their liturgy there. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church made a statement soon after, explaining the historical situation surrounding the parish.

Two weeks ago, the Ukrainian Orthodox diocese published a video showing clergy of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church brutally beating women and other Orthodox believers outside the Annunciation Church. The Uniates had seized the church on October 18.

"The lawlessness and hatred with which these persons, calling themselves parishioners of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, act, is reminiscent of the events of the era of militant communism, when believers were expelled from churches under false pretenses," he stressed.

"The actions of those who have seized the church is worthy of the godless era of communism, but not of believers in Christ, which these people consider themselves," the Church representative added.

"I urge you to hear the call of the simple parishioners of the Annunciation Church, who have turned to the president of Ukraine, to Pope Francis of Rome, to international organizations, and to Ukrainian society with the request to intervene in the situation around the Annunciation Church in Kolomiya, and to take the necessary measures to restore the violated rights of the Orthodox community," Legoida concluded.

Sources:

<http://orthochristian.com/107930.html>

<http://orthochristian.com/107474.html>

<http://orthochristian.com/104295.html>

Radicals disrupt consecration of Orthodox memorial cross

December 16, 2017 – On December 16, in Malin, Zhytomyr region, provocateurs disrupted the service of the UOC and the consecration of a renewed memorial cross, writes "Zhitomir Info".

Hardly had Metropolitan Vissarion of Ovruch and Korosten started consecrating the cross, when activists in camouflage and balaclavas arrived in several cars.

Provocateurs immediately began to call the faithful separatists, shouting that the service was conducted

in Russian, although it was Church Slavonic. In addition, they said that the burial service of Ukrainian soldiers was allegedly not performed in the churches of the UOC.

As a result, the consecration of the cross was disrupted: not to provoke further conflict, the priests left the site.

Indignant parishioners told the activists that the disruption of the consecration was a specially planned action, to which the activists responded that they had come for free.

“Provocators arrived synchronously on several cars, acted cohesively and orderly. The godless, some of whom were in balaclavas, were not even stopped by the fact that at the time of their “invasion” the faithful were praying for peace, mutual understanding, restoration of the territorial integrity and health of ATO soldiers, while Metropolitan Vissarion of Ovruch and Korosten was preparing to consecrate the sanctuary. The provocateurs recorded all of their actions, probably in order to further report to the customers, ” noted the representatives of the All-Ukrainian Association “Dostali!”

The roadside cross, erected at the entrance to Malin of the Zhitomir region 7 years ago, with time began to destroy and was renewed.

Sources:
<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-malin-patriots-disrupt-consecration-of-memorial-cross>

Orthodox themple shelled in Novolugansk

December 18, 2017 – During the evening divine service a projectile hit the territory of the Orthodox Ascension Temple, in Novolouganskoye of the Bakhmut district (Ukraine), as reports Gorlovka Diocese. The attack occured on the eve of the day of the memory of Saint Nikolas of Bari, one of the most venerated saints in the UOC. The explosion damaged the foundation and the wall of the diaconicon, blasted fifteen windows in the temple, torn the slate from the roof of the diaconicon and the coal barn.

No one of the parishioners was injured.

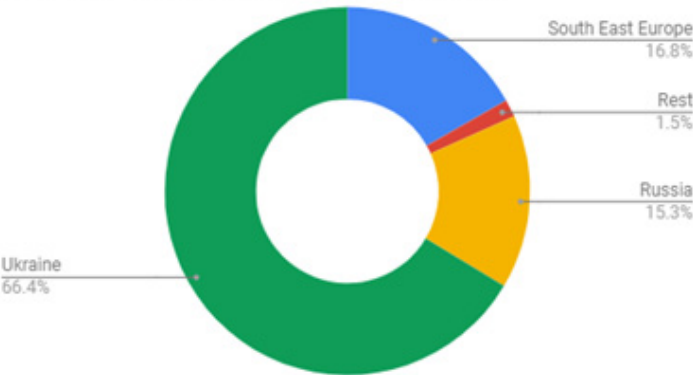
According to the testimony of the priest of the temple, priest Roman Sotnikov, the canonada lasted for the third day.

Sources:
<http://gorlovka-eparhia.com.ua/v-hram-sela-novoluganskoe-popal-snaryad/>

Conclusions.

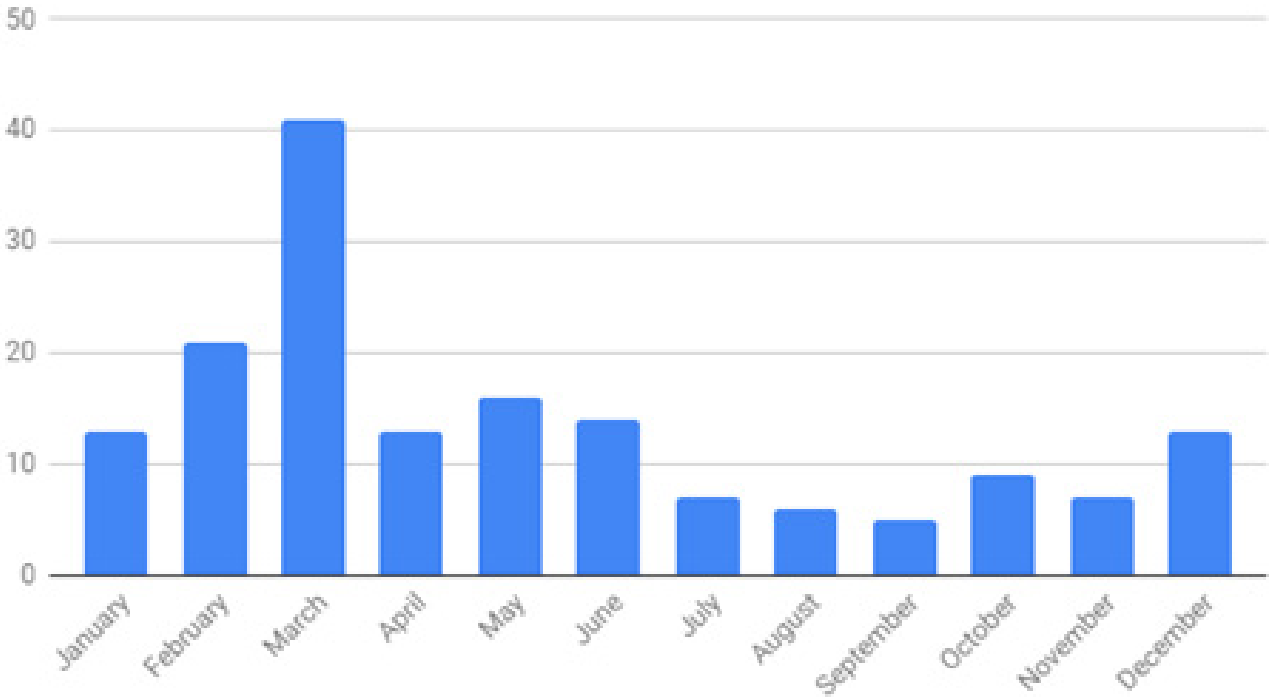
In 2017, the Centre had published 165 incidents disclosing violations of Orthodox Christians’ freedoms and rights. Around 66% of collected incidents are from Ukraine, 17% from South East Europe (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Turkey), and 15% from Russia. Additionally, there is one incident from Poland and one joint incident from Germany and Belgium.

Distribution of collected news by Sates



The violations are distributed across all the year with typically around 13 incidents per month. The number of incidents per month rocketed in February and March with 21 and 41 respectively. The violation activity plunged to the lowest point in July and was bottoming out until September (including) with around five incidents per month. The remaining dispersion of violation activity per month can be observed below:

Distribution of collected news by months



1. Most defamation incidents recorded in 2017 came from Ukraine. There, half of the incidents occurred in March. The most prominent defamation was a speech of the leader of the non-canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate) on the 21 March 2017 at the Ukrainian parliament. Separate notice should be given to incidents of false denunciation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's (Moscow Patriarchate) clergy to the police. In Albania, a deeply offensive book against the Serbian Orthodox Church was published in 2017 and caused wide negative reaction among believers.
2. Article 9 "freedom of thought, conscience and religion" of the European Convention on Human Rights imposes a positive obligation on signatory States: to protect religious communities against physical and verbal attacks by third persons¹. In Ukraine, approximately half of the physical attack cases were triggered by members of non-canonical religious organizations and radical nationalists (Right Sector). Hostile environment towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) remained in Ukraine during 2017. It should be noted, nearly all cases of a church seizure, that are presented separately in the last chapter of this report, contains also incidents of violence and inhuman treatment. In South East Europe, the most frequent type of incidents in 2017 was insulting graffiti paintings against Serbs and the Serbian Orthodox Church, also there were murder of clergy incidents.
3. Incidents of the chapter "Discrimination of Orthodox Christians and violation of their freedom of expression" can be grouped into two categories with respect to State's obligation: the obligation not to impede the normal functioning of religious organizations, and to respect for the autonomy of religious organizations. As a matter of fact, the latter two negative obligations are imposed additionally by article 9 "freedom of freedom of thought, conscience and religion" of the Convention upon signatory States².
 - a. Among South East European countries, most incidents of State's impediment of the normal functioning of Orthodox Churches, collected by the Centre in 2017, occurred in Greece. According to Greece's constitution, the Orthodox Church and the government have partnering relationship. The government acts against this constitutional partnership and thus obstruct the functioning of the Greek Orthodox Church. In Albania and the territory of Kosovo the situation remains tense.

In Ukraine, the main issue that provoked many publications in the media was the refusal to register the internal charters of dioceses and monasteries by the Ministry of Culture. This issue lasted for the whole year and grabbed wide attention from inside and outside of Ukraine. Another group of incidents was connected to the ban to commemorate certain Orthodox saints; thus, some books were banned, the people responsible for establishing monuments were incriminated. The main engine of the latter incidents was the will to remove the figures that reminds spiritual connections with Russian nation from the public sphere of Ukraine.

- b. The State's obligation to respect for the autonomy of religious organizations enshrines the commitment not to interfere in inter-denominational conflicts³. In 2017, violations of the latter obligation were only represented by incidents from Ukraine. The most prominent example of this violation was an attempt to consider two discriminative bills directly against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) at the Parliament: No 4128 and No 4511. In fact, those bills had been attempted and failed to pass during 2016. To recall, bill No 4128 practically proposed to legalize raiding churches, and bill No 4511 requested to impose the control of the interior activity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) by the political authorities.

Moreover, the Ukrainian government were directly and openly interfering in the affairs of the Orthodox Church by attempting to create a united orthodox church in Ukraine with the help of Constantinople Patriarch Bartholomew, despite Ukraine's international obligations and the State's constitution that emphasized the separation of church and state and thus imposed on the State the role of the neutral and impartial organiser of the exercise of various religions, faiths and beliefs. The President, his representatives, and other members of the government were actively realizing the policy of creating a united orthodox church by writing official letters and statements, paying a visit to Constantinople and negotiating on this matter with Patriarch Bartholomew and his representatives.

The engine of the latter incidents in Ukraine was the State's will to cut spiritual-cultural ties with Russian nation by discriminating the canonical Orthodox Church and by favouring the religious groups that formed by schism from the canonical Orthodox Church. As a matter of fact, the canonical Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) has been historically present in three nations: Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian.
4. The last chapter enshrines incidents that represents impediment of an Orthodox service directly or indirectly. Religious worship is an action that is also protected under Article 9 "freedom of thought, conscience and religion" of the Convention . Thus, the incidents collected in 2017 by the Centre further divided into two categories: impediment of an Orthodox service by third parties and hindrance for orthodox community to have a church.
 - a. The typical examples of impediment of an Orthodox service in 2017 were direct obstruction of a church service, illegal usage of a church by third parties, and theft of sacred objects. In Russia, there were relatively low number of incidents of this type. However, one requires separate attention. On 10 February, a group disrupted a church service by picketing inside an orthodox church. This resembles the infamous case of P-y riot's political expression in a church in 2012. In Ukraine, the main driver of majority of incidents was the uncanonical religious organization Kyiv Patriarchate and the engine was an ongoing conflict between the latter organization and the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

¹ European Court of Human Rights, "Guide on Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights" (Updated on 31 May 2018), p.77.

² European Court of Human Rights, "Guide on Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights" (Updated on 31 May 2018), pp.49-76.

³ European Court of Human Rights, "Guide on Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights" (Updated on 31 May 2018), pp.67-71.

b. A place of worship is an essential element for exercising freedom of religious worship. In 2017, the incidents of impediments for orthodox community to have a place of worship was the following types: direct seizure of a church by third party, damage of an existing place of worship, hindering a new church construction (either legally, or physically), and vandalism. In South East Europe, the most frequent incident type was vandalism and desecration of Orthodox cemeteries. The separate mentioning deserves situation in Albania: the desecration of Orthodox churches, monasteries and holy sites, that was confiscated by the government earlier, continued to be a frequent practice in 2017. In Russia, most incidents were in the form of vandalism and the most frequent engine of an incident was an opposition to a new tendency of churches being restored and rebuild in Russia by some part of local societies. In Ukraine, the wide spread incident type was the seizure of a church by a non-canonical Christian denomination with the help of radical nationalists (Right Sector) fuelled by the ongoing inter-denominational conflict. As a matter of fact, physical violence, intimidation was typical methods of the perpetrators in seizing a place of worship.

Appendix A: Reaction of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania to defamation.

Protest about a “novel” that insults Orthodox faithful and beyond, as well as the religious harmony in Albania

December 2, 2017 – From time to time certain groups create various rumors, with falsehoods and fabrications, to insult figures in the Orthodox Church. Recently at the Book Fair in Tirana an offensive book was presented. This was the so-called “novel” entitled Devils in Cassocks by Sejdi Kondi through the Çamëria Publishing House. The book was being promoted at a stand run by a group with specific political leanings. This book is a rant, a sick fantasy and although it appears to be a novel, it immediately refers to two historical names, that of St. Cosmas of Kolkondas (Fier) and of Archbishop Anastasios. The cover shows an icon of the former and a photograph of the latter. It is more than clear that the book’s purpose is to strike at their authority and sully their name, by inventing imaginary dialogues and completely distorting their history. But foremost, this book offends all Orthodox faithful, both in Albania and worldwide who especially respect these figures.

Though strong protests have been organized both within and out of the country, we are obliged to add the Orthodox Church’s official protest directed at the writer, the publishing house, and the political circles which insist on promoting this book. The time has come for this unheard sacrilege to end and for this shameful book to be removed from circulation as it offends not only the Orthodox community, but also is a sour note in the religious harmony of which our country boasts and which is the basis for our peaceful co-existence.

The Orthodox Church will most certainly continue its creative efforts, radiating love and hope in all directions. St. John Chrysostom referred to the aforementioned phenomenon as early as the 4th century saying, “The Church is victorious when they fight it; it is strengthened when they plot against it; and it becomes brighter when they offend it... it is always blossoming.”

Source:

<http://orthodoxalbania.org/alb/index.php/en-us/lajme-3/blog/4506-protest-about-a-novel-that-insults-orthodox-faithful-and-beyond-as-well-as-the-religious-harmony-in-albania>

Appendix B: Reaction of the Local Orthodox Churches to the infringement of Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s freedoms and rights in Ukraine.

The Bulgarian Patriarch showed solidarity with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in defending the rights of Orthodox Christians in Ukraine

February 10, 2017 – The Patriarch Neophyte has stated that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church is praying for peace in Ukraine, and has expressed support and deep compassion for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) in its time of trial.

With the blessing of his Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphriy of Kiev and all Ukraine, the Chief Administrator of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Metropolitan Anthony of Borispol and Brovarsk has met His Holiness Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria.

The meeting was also attended by: the Vicar of the Sofia diocese and Bishop of the Branicki Gregory, the Protosingel of the Sofia diocese Protopresbyter Angel Angelov, the Rector of the Saint Nicholas Cathedral in Sofia Archimandrite Philipp (Vasiltsev), the assistant of the Chairman of External Church Relations of the UOC Archpriest Nicholas Danilevich and the teacher of the Kiev Theological Academy and Seminary A. Muzolph.

The visit took place by way of an invitation of the Metropolitan Nicholas of Plovdiv. From February 11 to 12, Metropolitan Anthony of Borispol and Brovorsk participated at the conference, dedicated to the memory of St. Lucas of Crimea, as well as the ten-year anniversary dedicated to the enthronement of Metropolitan Nicholas to the Plovdiv.

During the meeting, Metropolitan Anthony passed the greetings of His Holiness Onuphriy of Kiev and all of Ukraine to the Patriarch Neophyte. When describing church life in Ukraine, the Metropolitan emphasized that in the context of internal and external challenges facing the country, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church dully and consistently supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Metropolitan Anthony described the peace-making mission of the Church, part of whose congressional members no longer reside on Ukrainian-controlled territory. In the background of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the Church is assisting the victims and the internally displaced persons. It is also making efforts to free prisoners. The Chief Administrator expressed certitude that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church could have done more had it not faced artificial barriers.

His Holiness Patriarch Neophyte took an interest with the situation of the St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev, which he visited during his trip to Ukraine in 2012. According to the Patriarch, this Cathedral impressed him greatly. Metropolitan Anthony stated that one of the cathedrals from the sanctuary was transferred to one of the breakaway groups, not recognized by the Pan Orthodox Council. During their discussion, the problem of interreligious strife in Ukraine was raised. The administrator of the UOC stated that lately the department of religion and nationalities at the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, which called to recognize the equality of all religions, is showing a biased and nonobjective stance towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. They do not react to the violations of the rights of believers, the seizures of churches, and they create administrative obstacles during registration procedures of UOC structures. In reaction to such actions, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has had to file a lawsuit with the goal of protecting its rights. According to the Metropolitan Anthony, the first session in court was scheduled for the end of the upcoming month.

The Primate of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church wished his Holiness Metropolitan Onuphriy, the Episcopate, the Clergy and the Believers the help of God, as well as patience and hope. Patriarch Neophyte reassured the Metropolitan Anthony that the Bulgarian

Orthodox Church is praying for peace in Ukraine, and is compassionately sympathizing with the fraternal Ukrainian Orthodox Church. He expressed certitude, that all of these trials will soon pass.

Sources:

<http://news.church.ua/2017/02/11/upravlyayushhij-delami-upc-vstretilsya-s-patriarxom-bolgarskim-neofitom/?lang=ru>

<http://pro.church.ua/2017/02/13/upc-podala-do-sudu-na-minkult/#more-6844>

Metropolitan Timothy from the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem comments on the Uniate Church, Kiev Patriarchate, and the persecution of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church

March 3, 2017 – Metropolitan Timothy (Margaritis) of Vostrsky responded to questions about the persecution of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church and many other topics, as reports pravlife.

“Most Reverend Metropolitan, Orthodox believers in Ukraine find themselves in a very complicated situation nowadays, and they need the support of other Orthodox Christians. The Church of Jerusalem is the mother of World Orthodoxy. It was in Jerusalem that the Church of Christ was born and Christianity spread across the world. In Cyprus, you are an Exarch of the Holy Tomb, and I would like to take this opportunity to ask you some questions that worry many believers in Ukraine”.

I am very grateful that my opinions on these questions are important for you. In addition, even though I am not the “official voice” of the entire Church of Jerusalem, I will nevertheless express my point of view. Seeing that I was the General Secretary of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, my position is based on Church tradition and Church rules. I would also like to use this as an opportunity to express my deep regards for the Orthodox believers in Ukraine.

Ever since the Euromaidan of 2014, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is experiencing pressure from the new government and radical groups. According to the representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, there were over 40 Churches seized from them over the past three. These seizures are done with physical force, and includes cases of assault against the clergy and the believers themselves. A few days ago, there was an article about the activists of the “Right Sector” and the schismatic group calling itself the “Kiev

Patriarchate”. They have captured a church in the village of Kotushina in the Ternopol oblast. Could you please comment on this situation?

I sincerely regret that such a tragic situation is occurring in Ukraine. I have visited this country several times, and I have many friends there among the clergy and believers. Some of them have joined the schismatics, but we pray for them and we know that the Lord will bring them back to the bosom of the canonical Orthodox Church. History shows us that the Church often goes through trials from people, but it always comes out triumphant. The Prelate John Chrysostom said that when someone wages war against the Church, the Church wins, and when it is rocked by waves of trials, the Lord’s ship does not sink.

The multiplication of the amount of Churches that the schismatics have captured by force is a theft of the Lord’s property. It cannot be justified and it is reminiscent of the actions of the pagans, who conducted attacks on the holy Churches in ancient times.

When I hear about the seizure of churches and the beating of priests, I cannot understand how someone calling himself or herself an Orthodox Christian can attack another Orthodox Christian. The Orthodox Christians of Ukraine are citizens of the same country, and yet divided by their political views. The actions of those who seize churches are not worthy of Orthodox believers.

Most Reverend Metropolitan, when speaking about schismatics and the seizure of churches, we cannot ignore the main culprit, who is harassing Orthodox believers and conducts the beatings of priests. It is the schismatic Kiev Patriarchate, which conducts its attacks with the support of radical groups.

The division of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church occurred because of political, and not religious reasons. Christ was crucified, buried and resurrected for our Salvation. And thus, there where the Son of the Lord reigns, must also reign the Lord’s Truth and Peace, and not personal political interests and opportunities.

When a person does not rely on the Lord, his heart is seized by the Devil. Schisms and heresies are often planted by such passions as egoism, vanity, love for power and the pursuit of self-elevation above the Church and people. Church history has numerous such examples.

The Devil is responsible for the aggressions and destructive actions against our brothers. We must love not only our friends, but also our enemies. If certain people in Ukraine believe that they are the more “more

genuine Orthodox Christians” than others, then they must pray for their brothers, and not persecute them. For one can overcome all passions and divisions with the Love of Christ. In addition, one must never show aggression against their brothers, for any aggression is a temptation from the Devil. Those who support aggression, war and blood spilling are under the power of the Devil and are capable of any evil deeds. The history of the Middle Ages shows that the Catholic Church used various methods to force people to accept their faith, including torture. This contradicts the teachings of the Gospels. Unfortunately, today we can compare the actions of the schismatics and radicals of Ukraine (which includes seizures of churches and the assault of believers), conducted “in the name of Christ”, as the dark and cruel times of the Inquisition.

Thanks to its media outlets, the heads of the schismatics are breeding rumors that the World Orthodox Synod will soon recognize the canonicity of their “Church” and it will accept them among other Orthodox Churches. Is this true?

Every parish located outside of the bosom of the canonical Church seeks support in order to continue to exist and to strengthen. Certainly, certain believers outside of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church would like to know that their Church is accepted by other Churches. Thus, they attempt to find support from other recognized Orthodox Churches. All the Orthodox Churches currently have liturgical dialogue and canonical unity with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, headed by the Metropolitan Onufriy of Kiev and all of Ukraine.

Most Reverend Metropolitan, the media outlets of the schismatics regularly spreads rumours about a supposed recognition of “their Church” by other Orthodox Churches, hoping first and foremost that their congregation does not return to the canonical Church. With this disinformation, they attempt to create strife among the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, creating the impression that it does not matter which Church to visit, either that of the Moscow or the Kiev Patriarchate. How do you view this situation?

The Lord warns us that we must keep ourselves away from false prophets and false teachers. Thus, an Orthodox believer should only go to the Church that is officially recognized by other Orthodox Churches: it is there that believers receive the continuing grace of the Lord. This grace is continuing and uninterrupted to our current days since the times of the Apostles. Certain archdeacons claim that they have the Apostolic

continuity, but without the blessing of the canonical Church, it does not bring to Salvation. The Orthodox Church teaches us to follow the true Shephard, who cares for the salvation of ours souls, and not to follow false prophets.

Most Reverend Metropolitan, if the representatives of the schismatic groups do not belong to the members of the Church of Christ, than can we call “sacraments” that which occurs during their Church services? Do they have a sacred character, or is this something like an illusion of a sacrament? Does it make a difference as to where one must take the Holy Communion – in a canonical Church of Christ or in a schismatic one?

It is important to know that the Lord’s Grace only exists in the canonical Church. It is evident that the sacraments that occur in schismatic Churches do not receive neither Lord’s blessing nor his grace. Because the forces of strife are trying to plant seeds of discord and to lead a war against the Church, they cannot have the Lord’s grace. The Church is led by the words of Basil the Great, who said that those who leave the Church lose the Lord’s grace and the ability to conduct sacraments.

Most Reverend Metropolitan, you might have heard that the Ukrainian authorities are attempting to control the current Church situation: they have sent delegations to the Patriarch of Constantinople with an attempt at recognizing the schismatic Kiev Patriarchate and with the creation of a “single Church” out of the pre-existing ones.

Since the first centuries of Christianity, the authorities have attempt to influence Church life. But this does not mean that this interference is the work of God. In our times, the authorities of Ukraine are attempting to subjugate the Church and to use it for political goals. They sent their delegations to the Jerusalem and Constantinople Patriarchates with an attempt at gaining an advantage. But the canonical Churches are above politics, because the Lord warns us that “Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save”. The Church must distance itself from such interferences.

Can an Autocephalous status be granted to a schismatic group in Ukraine from one of the Orthodox Patriarchs, and what are the chances of such a false congregation to obtain such a status?

All Orthodox Churches defend first and foremost the unity of Orthodoxy and are subjugated to the canons of the Church which regulate its internal life. The decision to grant an autocephalous status is discussed and decided at the Great Synod.

Can you please provide some ways to overcome the schism in Ukraine? Is there an alternative way, other than repenting from the schism and reuniting with the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church?

Metropolitan Onufriy heads the canonical Church of Ukraine. Any questions pertaining to the overcoming of the schism can be solved through dialogue with this Church and realizing the goal of healing the wounds on the Body of Christ, to reunite the parts of the Son of God, to heal the souls of all Orthodox believers, who were seduced by the actions of certain Church figures. And this dialogue must be accompanied with humility, repentance and love. There is no doubt that political interference must be done with in order to build Church life based on its Lore, rules and the Love of Christ.

If there is no repenting from the schismatic group, than can the Constantinople Patriarchate or any other Orthodox Church grant an autocephalous status to them?

I cannot predict the behavior of one specific Church, but every Church is the keeper of the Holy continuity and the Holy Canons, and thus it defends the unity of Orthodoxy. Above all, this means respecting the territorial jurisdiction of each individual Church. Any transgression from these principles leads to conflicts and divisions, which goes against the teachings of the Apostles and the challenges that the Church is facing today.

One must note that the territory of Ukraine falls under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

You regularly speak with representatives from other Churches. How do other Patriarchs view the schismatics? Is there some sympathy towards them from some Orthodox Churches?

In Church, the word “sympathy” applies to all people, because the Church calls people to love everyone, the same way that the Lord loves us and wants our salvation. Thus, we pray for the unification of the Church, about the end of schisms and the return of the lost ones to the rightful Church. Every rector of local Churches is guided by the fact that he is a blessing for the Church, and they act according to this principle.

Many people in Ukraine recognize that the government authorities and the false Kiev Patriarchate work together in order to eliminate the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. (UOC-MP). For example, there is a draft bill, which would force the UOC-MP to change their name. Other initiatives would force the clergy of the UOC-MP to

coordinate candidates with the secular authorities. Do you believe that secular interference into Church affairs is allowed? Does the state have the right to force the Church to coordinate who should be a rector, and how the Church should be named?

I will re-emphasize it again – secular authorities always try to interfere into Church life to obtain an advantage. Our faith teaches us, that we must pray for our rulers, but we must not obey their tenets of faith when they contradict the Gospels. The Lord teaches us, “Give to Caesar the things that are the Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”. Every person must first obey God in order to save his soul. Thus, if the authorities insist on actions that go against the salvation of the soul, then the believers that do not accept these demands will be justified in the eyes of the Lord.

As for the renaming of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, I believe that the secular authorities must take into account the rights and freedoms of religious organizations in their self-determination, the choice of their name and not to interfere in these questions.

Most Reverend Metropolitan, in the recent all-Ukrainian Cross Procession, Father Viktor Zemlyansky of the UOC-MP (the organizer of the event) was harassed by the law-enforcement agencies with searches. According to the lawyer of Father Viktor, the searches were conducted with procedural violations. Moreover, these agents were threatening this priest, his wife and three small children (7, 8,9 years old) with their semi-automatic machine guns. They closed them up in small rooms and did not let them out. The official website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has a message from the head of the Church’s legal department, father Alexander Bakhov about this affair, who stated the following, “The Rivne oblast is one of the most conflictual regions, there were 12 seized churches of the UOC-MP since 2014. The number would have been greater, had Father Viktor and the people around him not put in a substantial effort. They helped prevent the seizure of several churches, and several courts ruled in their favor against the raids of the Kiev Patriarchate. Undoubtedly, such activism could not have been unnoticed. I am inclined to think that the search was a method of harassment and intimidation. In your opinion, in the event that this persecution of the Church, which can be compared to the era of the Soviet Union, continues, do you believe that other Orthodox Churches would come to defend the canonical Church of Ukraine, which faces systematic discrimination?

The persecution of Christians has existed in all times and continues to this day. Persecutions will exist in the future, because the Devil seeks to pull people away from Salvation. Canonical Churches can bravely express this dissatisfaction with what is happening in Ukraine, because they are obliged to defend the rights of believers.

The discrimination of believers and the persecution of the Church are the works of the Devil. We must conduct a prayer, fasting and Love of Christ, and forgive them, as Christ forgave them when he was crucified on his cross. During Church services, we ask the Lord to give wisdom to the authorities so that they allow every individual to practice their faith.

Most Reverend Metropolitan, I would like to bring up a complicated topic for Orthodoxy – the Uniates. It is well known that the members of the radical group “Right Sector”, which conducts seizures of churches, used to call themselves the “Trizub of Stepan Bandera” and they collaborate closely with the Uniate Church. Moreover, they always arranged for security during mass meetings of the Uniate Church. Now, these people are capturing churches in favor of the false Kiev Patriarchate, they assault believers and priests. The head of this schismatic Kiev Patriarchate, Filaret Denisenko, recently stated in an interview that his “priests” occasionally conduct Church services with the Uniates, and they are considering merging. In the eyes of some believers, this looks like a collusion between the Uniates and the Schismatics, ready to create a Union in order to suppress the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In one interview, Professor Yaroslav Gritsak of the Lvov Catholic University openly cites one individual from the Uniate community, who states the importance of battling the Byzantine-Orthodox legacy of Ukraine. What is your opinion on the Uniate question, and can an Orthodox Christian discuss the possibility of a Union with the Uniates?

The goal of the Uniates is to subjugate Orthodoxy to the Roman Pope and to the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, the actions of Uniates in different parts of the world, and the aggression of Uniates against the Orthodox faith is a well-known fact, ever since the Uniates began to exist. In the Near East, there have been attempts to replace the Orthodox Patriarchs with Uniate structures. In their actions, the Uniates resemble wolves in sheeps’ clothing. We remember well the events in Ukraine in the XVI and XVII centuries, when the Catholics of Poland (with Western support) attempted to eliminate the Orthodox Church through the Uniate Church.

They had the goal of spreading the Pope's power into Ukraine. The situation was saved by a series of Jerusalem Patriarchs, who became the spiritual guides for the people near the Danube. Patriarchs Theophanes III, Paisius I and Dositheos II were the enlightened and spiritual Sheppards of Jerusalem, who defended the Orthodox Faith in Ukraine. It is a well known fact that the Patriarch Theophanes gave ruling diocesan authority to certain bishops of Ukraine. At that time, it seemed as if the Uniates would seize power in Ukraine, but the plans of the Lord were different.

The recent news about seizures of churches hurt us greatly, but we are sure, that Orthodoxy will continue its way. Moreover, those who conduct mutual Church services with Uniates, can no longer call themselves Orthodox Christians.

It would have been better for Uniates to change their position and to re-join Orthodoxy. We would share a mutual joy. But joining them through compromise is a major sin, and the Lord will not bless such an enterprise. In order to avoid such a rash action, we must pray to the Lord. In our time, there are many temptations aimed against Salvation. Thus, we must be warriors of Christ, who do not sleep on the watchtowers of Orthodoxy.

Most Reverend Metropolitan, you might have heard that the schismatics and the authorities are actively trying to create a project called a "Unified Local Church". The emphasis is on patriotism, and the rules of the Church and its canonicity are secondary. According to them, if you love your country, than you have to support such initiatives, otherwise, you are a traitor of national interests. How would you have acted, if you had a choice between joining such a schismatic project under the pretext of patriotism, or to remain in the canonical Church and be labelled a traitor?

Faith in Christ and the Church is the most precious side of a human life. A Christian must firstly live according to Church rules. Their elimination is a way towards anarchy within the Church. If everyone does whatever they want in the Church, than the Lord's commandments will be destroyed. We must obey the Church. There is no salvation outside the Church. Moreover, as such, I would like to remind believers to give to Caesar the things that are the Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. Of course, it is important to love one's country. However, to love a country and to obey laws that destroy the Church is a big sin. If a person is faced with such a dilemma, than he or she must choose the salvation of their soul. We must be

patriots, love our country, but not act in such a way that our love to our country goes against our love towards the Church and Christ.

It is well known that Metropolitan Onufriy, the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, never supported aggression against anyone. Moreover, the believers of the UOC are located in Donetsk and Lugansk, where there is an ongoing armed conflict, and in other regions of Ukraine, where there are no armed conflicts. He notes that we are all brothers in Christ. Thanks to his intervention, some captured Ukrainian soldiers have been liberated from the Donetsk Republic. However, his peacemaking actions are creating a row of criticism from schismatic and Uniate preachers, who claim that the War in Donbass must be done from a position of strength. Is peacemaking acceptable when the country is experiencing an armed conflict, or the questions of peace between the populations must be solved after the end of an armed conflict?

I know Metropolitan Onufriy as a truly spiritual man, a true Sheppard, who puts his soul for another one. It is out of this root that his peacemaking position is based. Those who are guided by war and blood spilling do not belong to Christ and are guided by the Devil, who always hated people and seeks to create strife between believers.

Today we are witnessing a tragic situation. We see how the Eastern Slavic people have been divided into several parts. It is similar to brothers from the same family feuding against each other. It is a fratricide which is guided by hatred rather than the love preached by Christ. It is not only painful but also sinful – for those who divide up the Church, are dividing up the body of Christ. Moreover, this sin is not washed away even with the blood of martyrs.

We would like to have your opinion about the Roman Pope and his peacemaking mission to Ukraine and to the regions peopled by Orthodox Christians. It is well know that the Pope tried to help the Christians of Syria who live in the territory occupied by ISIS. They are known to persecute Christians. Now the Pope is initiating a humanitarian mission in Eastern Ukraine called "the Pope for Donbass". Are there any results from such initiatives? Did some countries or organizations partake in them to help the Christians of Syria and are there any possibilities for the Vatican to change the situation in places where Orthodox Christians are in a poor situation?

It is a difficult question. On the one hand, Christianity teaches about helping your neighbor. On the other

hand, the Vatican and other international organizations help with a certain goal in mind. The calls to help Christians in various countries have been made, but I believe that real help can be given if there is a pan-Orthodox fund whose goal would be to help those in need, and not pursue religious expansion.

Recently, during a meeting between the head of the Uniate Church and the Papal secretary Claudio Guderotti in Ukraine, he expressed his interest to expand into the east of the country. What do you think about that?

It is true that the Vatican, when providing help, is guided by its personal goals. This gives reason to suspect them in using humanitarian crises for expanding their religious convictions.

What would you like to wish to the Orthodox believers in Ukraine?

Today, Orthodox Christians live in difficult times and follow the path of Christ. Conviction in faith and an unbreakable loyalty to the Church is something heroic. We must recognize the pastors, who keep the integrity of the faith in the Church. We must remember the words of the Apostle Paul, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you". I would like to wish for there to be peace in Ukraine, and to stop the division of the Church and civil divisions, for there to be times, when there would no longer be schisms, but one unified canonical Orthodox Church. May the Lord keep all of you. Thank you!

Sources:

<http://pravlife.org/content/o-sgovore-uniatov-i-raskolnikov-i-o-sudbe-upc-mitropolit-ierusalimskoy-cerkvi-ekzarh>

<http://www.romfea.gr/ekklisia-kyprou/13412-bostron-timotheos-stin-oukrania-prospathoun-na-xrismopoiisoun-tin-ekklisia-gia-politikous-skopous>

Patriarch Kirill surprised to see no intl reaction to violence against Church in Ukraine

April 18, 2017 – Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, at his last meeting with Italian President Sergio Mattarella, shared photo images of paramilitary groups' violence against parishioners of the (Moscow Patriarchate's) Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

"The silence of the world community is astounding," the patriarch said at an annual Easter reception at the Russian Foreign Ministry.

"Our Church is being oppressed, there have been

attempts to take away civil rights and pass legislation precluding normal registration of Orthodox parishes in Ukraine, churches are being forcibly seized. One can talk about it for a long time, but when you see paramilitary groups in camouflage costumes forcing people out of their churches – this, too, is astounding," Patriarch Kirill said in his speech.

All local Orthodox Churches support the Moscow Patriarchate's Ukrainian Orthodox Church in its opposition to the breakaway "Kiev Patriarchate," he said, adding that he showed pictures of clashes at his meeting with the president of Italy.

"Our Ukrainian church is being called an aggressor church, being told to tear up its ties with Moscow Patriarchate, accused of being unpatriotic. But the people keep their loyalty to the canonic order. Those being forced out of their parishes remain within our canonical jurisdiction, very often building a new church instead of the seized one. But there were cases of new churches also being seized," the patriarch said. "Surprisingly, all this is being covered up by global silence," the patriarch said.

Sources:

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13718>

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=66847>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/v-mire/patriarkh-kirill-prezidentu-italii-mirovye-soobshchestvo-molchit-o-pritesneniyakh-veruyushchikh-ups>

Heads of Orthodox Churches speak out against Ukranian anti-orthodox draft laws

May 25, 2017 - A number of hierarchs throughout the world have expressed their opposition to the two bills recently proposed in Ukraine, that would significantly hinder, if not forbid, the activity of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. Among the vocal hierarchs have been several primates of Local Churches, as well as local hierarchs.

The first bill, No. 4511, "On the special status of religious organizations with headquarters located in states recognized by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine as aggressor states," proposes that such religious organizations be able to appoint metropolitans and bishops only in agreement with the governing authorities. The same bill also gives the government the right to forbid a confession if its representatives cooperate with religious centers in "aggressor states."

No specific denominations are mentioned in the bill, but only the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) meets all the criteria listed.

The second bill, No. 4128, practically proposes to legalize raiding churches. The document introduces the term “self-identification” and clarifies the minimum number of representatives of a religious community needed to decide to change membership to an active Ukrainian religious center.

His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East expressed his support for the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church in a letter to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, reports the Information Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

“We condemn any move that would affect the sovereignty of the Ukrainian people, and we also strongly condemn any step which affects the independence, reliability, integrity, and freedom of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church,” His Beatitude writes.

The proposed laws are “aimed at increasing tensions and changing the identity of Ukrainian society,” the patriarch believes.

Joining his brother bishop, Patriarch Theodoros II of Alexandria and All Africa has also voiced his support for the Ukrainian faithful and his opposition to the proposed parliamentary bills in a May 23 letter to Pat. Kirill.

“The state cannot adopt laws about the Church on its own without the participation of the Church itself, especially in a country that claims to respect European values,” the African primate writes. In his opinion, Ukrainian leadership needs to “take a neutral position and not be controlled by irresponsible nationalist circles.”

On behalf of the entire Church in Africa, Pat. Theodoros voices his support for the canonical Ukrainian Church “in the struggle for the preservation of the inviolable privileges of the Orthodox communities of Ukraine,” condemning any such legislative decisions by the Ukrainian parliament as “invalid.”

In a letter to the chairman of the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada, Metropolitan Rostislav of the Czech Lands and Slovakia writes that adopting such laws would undermine the foundations of religious freedom and equality of churches and religious organizations in Ukraine, and would raise tensions and cause instability in

Ukrainian Society, reports the UOC’s Information Department.

“The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is the sole canonical Orthodox Church on the territory of Ukraine. Our Local Churches are not connected by territorial boundaries, but they are deeply connected by close historical relations,” the primate writes. “We perceive very close to the heart what is happening with our brothers in Ukraine today, and are worried about the future of holy Orthodoxy and the canonical Church. We are deeply concerned about the intention of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine,” he continued, expressing the deep love that exists between the Local Orthodox Churches.

“Your Excellency,” Met. Rostislav writes, “praying to the Lord, we demand the withdrawal of these bills.”

Several other hierarchs, including Metropolitan Pavel of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, and a number of hierarchs in the Ukrainian and Moscow Churches have also spoken out against the dangerous bills.

Sources:

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/103786.htm>

The Jerusalem Patriarch condemns attempts of churches seizure in Ukraine

June 6, 2017 – Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem speaks against attempts of Ukrainian breakaway groups to capture churches belonging to believers of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

“We decisively condemn those, who commit actions aimed against parishes of the canonical Orthodox Church in Ukraine. It is not in vain that the holy fathers remind us that destruction of church unity, a schism, is the hardest sin,” the patriarch said at the reception dedicated to the main feast of the chief Russian church in the Holy Land – the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Jerusalem.

Patriarch Theophilos, who was quoted by the website of the Russian Ecclesiastic Mission in Jerusalem, wished the Holy Spirit enlightened minds, hearts and gave strength to “preserve precious gift of church unity granted to us by divine providence.”

Sources:

<https://mospat.ru/en/2017/06/06/news147188/>

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13849>

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=67355>

Communiqué adopted at the meeting of the Committee of Representatives of the Orthodox Churches to the European Union

October 8, 2017 – From 6 to 8 October 2017 the Committee of Representatives of Orthodox Churches to the European Union (CROCEU) held its annual meeting in Moscow (Russian Federation) in the Department of External Church Relations of the Patriarchate of Moscow, at the kind invitation of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia. The main topic of this year’s meeting was “The Orthodox Church in Solidarity with the peoples facing extremism and terrorism”.

At the meeting the representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Moscow Patriarchate, the Patriarchate of Romania, the Patriarchate of Bulgaria, the Church of Cyprus and the Church of Greece offered their thoughts on the topic. Officials of the Russian State, the Holy See and members of NGOs made further interventions. Over the past few years we were all struck by the brutal terrorist attacks within Europe and beyond. The CROCEU members prayed for all those innocent victims who were injured or brutally killed. They expressed their particular concern about the persecutions of Christians in the Middle East and the difficult situation of Orthodox Christians in Ukraine. They called for strengthening interreligious dialogue, solidarity, implementation of coherent and integration policies, education of people in religious matters, further cooperation between Church and State. CROCEU is looking forward to promote dialogue on the aforementioned topics with the European Institutions.

On Saturday October 7, the Committee visited a number of venues such as the Saint Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Post-Graduate Studies, the Saint Alexius of Moscow hospital, the Saint Demetrios School of the Sisters of Mercy and the Saint Peter Orthodox Secondary School. CROCEU members had a meeting with the Chairman of the Holy Synod Department for Church Charity and Social Mission H.G. Bishop Panteleimon of Orekhovo-Zuevo.

The program culminated on Sunday, October 8, when the Committee participated in the Patriarchal Divine Liturgy at the Holy Trinity Saint Sergius Lavra. At the end of the Divine Liturgy the members

of CROCEU met with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia where they had a discussion on various topics.

Sources:

<https://mospat.ru/en/2017/10/09/news151149/>

ROC: In Ukraine they want to make people afraid to go to the lawful Church

December 10, 2017 – The support of all Orthodox Churches warms the soul of the faithful people of Ukraine, as well as a firm, strict adherence to the canonical rule, which excludes any unilateral politically biased proclamation of autocephaly. It was said by by Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill on December 6 during the meeting with His Beatitude Metropolitan of the Czech Lands and Slovakia Rostislav, reports Patriarchia.ru.

The Primate of the ROC stressed that the Ukrainian authorities are unable to implement the decisions of even their own courts. “The temples are seized by force, with physical beating of people. We win the courts, but court decisions are not implemented, because groups of militants occupy temples, do not allow the bailiffs to enter, local authorities are afraid of radicals.”

According to the First Hierarch, the appearance of any autocephaly by illegal means “will further complicate the situation, further rupture the Orthodox body of Ukraine.” He explained that despite the huge support of people “certain political forces want to legally change the name, to deprive our Church of its historical name -” Ukrainian Orthodox Church “, linking it with Russia, which they call an “aggressor country.” That is, they want to create psychological and political prerequisites for people to be afraid to go to the legitimate Church.”

Patriarch Kirill thanked His Beatitude Metropolitan Rostislav for his position of rejecting anti-church bills in the Verkhovna Rada. “The Rada took a time-out, but it is not known how it will end. Therefore, I would ask to be constantly vigilant and react in all possible ways, because only public opinion, including that in the European Union, can act on those people who are trying to destroy our Church,” he said.

Sources:

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/v-mire/roc-in-ukraine-they-want-to-make-people-afraid-to-go-to-the-lawful-church>

<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5080042.html>

Appendix C: Photos



July 14, 2017 - Orthodox seminarian brutally beaten to death in Dnepr (Ukraine).

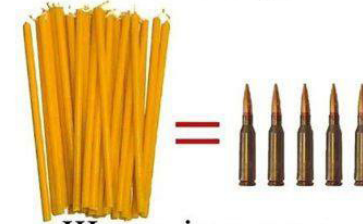


October 23, 2017-A group of radicals used brute force to stop parishioners of the Annunciation Church from entering and holding Divine Liturgy in Kolyomyia (Ukraine).



January 29, 2017 - Senior priest of Saint Michael church UOC (Moscow Patriarchate) attacked by three radicals in Katerinopol (Ukraine).

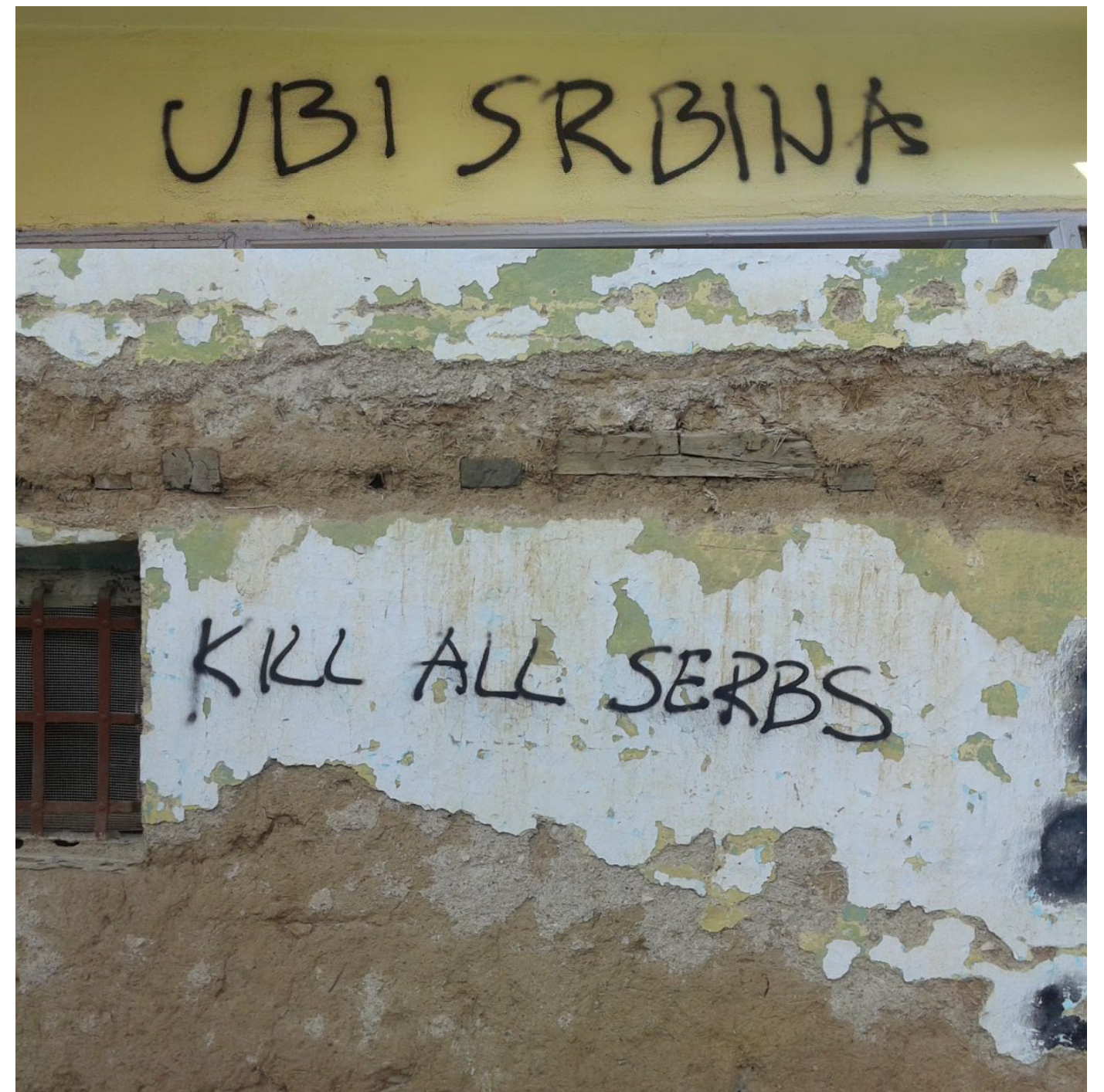
Кожен тиждень з Почаївської
Лаври до Москви передається
100 тис Євро



Ще досі ходиш в
російську УПЦ МП
та фінансуєш війну
проти України?



October 5, 2017 - Ukrainian nationalist Facebook group spreads defaming information about the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate and other derogatory and blasphemous posts.



February 15, 2017 - Serbian Orthodox Bishop in Kosovo-Metohija strongly condemned anti-Serb graffiti which appeared on several locations in the vicinity of the Serbian Orthodox church in Gnjilane (Kosovo territory).



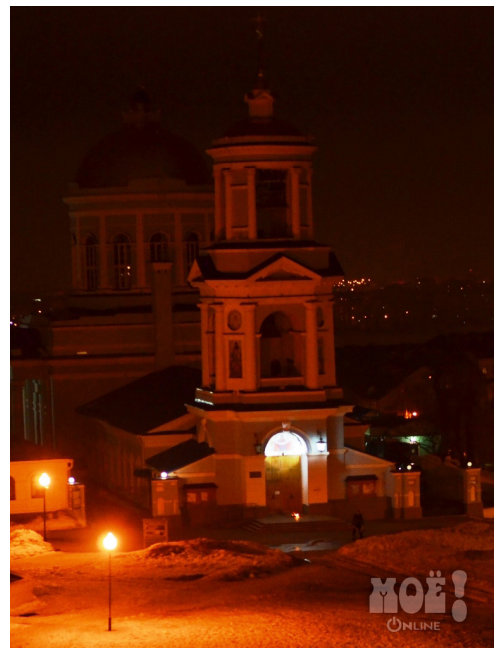
April 25, 2017 - Unknown individuals lit a Parish house of the UOC-MP) in the Nikolayev region (Ukraine)



December 6, 2017 - Orthodox Church and Sunday school destroyed by arson in Rostov (Russia).



May 29, December 17, 2017-Recidive vandalism of the memorial cross in Andronikov Monastery (Moscow).



December 30, 2017 - Altar apse of the All Saints Temple arsoned in the town of Mytishi near Moscow.

March 1, 2017 - Attempt of arson of an Orthodox Cathedral in Voronezh (Russia).

April 22, 2017 - An Orthodox chapel severely burnt in Arkhangelsk (Russia).



July 18, 2017 - The Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos in Berat in Albania profaned with a jazz festival.



August 23, 2017 -Tombstones of Orthodox Cypriots were subjected to desecration and destruction in the village of Kalavassos (Cyprus).



June 14, 2017. Monument to St. Tsar Nicholas II desecrated in Vladivostok (Russia).

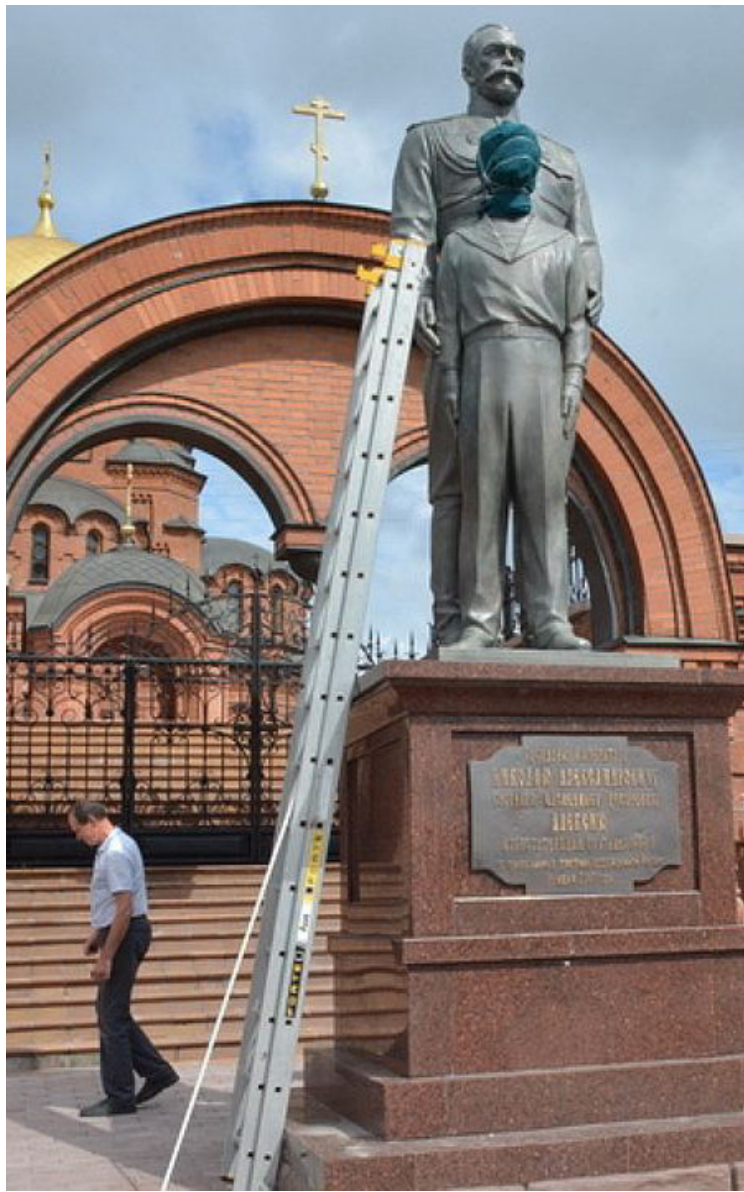


April 7, 2017 - About 30 Orthodox sepultures desecrated at Smolensk Cemetery in St. Petersburg (Russia).

October 6, 2017 - Grave of the holy Hieromartyr Alexander (Petrovsky) vandalized in the Kharkov (Ukraine).

December 18, 2017 - A projectile hit Orthodox Ascension Temple, in Novolouganskoye (Ukraine).





August 1, 2017 - Newly-consecrated monument to the holy Royal Martyrs in Novosibirsk attacked with axe.



November 5, 2017 - Repeating attacks on Orthodox Serbian cemeteries and sacred places in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



March 14, 2017 - An Orthodox cross is cut down, followed by an attempt to burn the chapel in Volgograd (Russia)



April 24, 2017 - Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) of Dmitry Solunsky in Odessa (Ukraine) desecrated.

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.