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Discrimination on the basis of religion and the problem of hate speech in Ukraine

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On the background of the growth of anti-Russian sentiments in Ukraine, there is an increase in intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

Every year, the Procession of the Cross takes place in Kiev in honor of the Baptism of Rus. This is one of the most respected and ancient traditions that exist in the Christian Orthodox Church.

At the end of July 2018, on the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus, there were held two religious processions.

The first was organized on July 27 by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. More than 250 thousand people took part in it.

The second was organized the next day by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate, attended by officials, including the president of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko, the mayor of Kiev Vitaly Klitschko, the first president of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk, members of the government, etc. About 60 thousand people took part in it.

The Ukrainian media organized a propaganda campaign against the first procession of the Moscow Patriarchate. Outright disinformation and hate speech were widely used in that campaign.

It was alleged that the participants of the “Moscow” Procession, who gathered from all over Ukraine, did it for money, although that Procession had four times more participants than the “official” one attended by the president of Ukraine.

Radical Ukrainian nationalist organizations blocked the passage of pilgrims from eparchies of Nizhyn, Chernivtsi, Rivne, and Odessa to Kiev. They also threatened to burn buses that would take pilgrims to the “Moscow” procession in Kiev. Individual representatives of government bodies and law enforcement agencies also prevented the arrivals of pilgrims to Kiev. During the procession of the Moscow Patriarchate, the police detained a group of radical nationalists who tried to arrange provocations.

In the Ukrainian media and social networks, there was a smear campaign directed against the procession of the Moscow Patriarchate, which was called “the procession of the state church of the enemy country”. Offensive epithets were widely used against the participants.

Some Ukrainian publications focused attention on the fact that some participants carried portraits of Nicholas II, accusing them of “pro-Russian orientation”, but believers bore them because the last Russian emperor is officially ranked as a martyr by the Russian Orthodox Church.

The incitement of hatred on the part of the Ukrainian media on religious grounds is contrary to the basic human rights commitments adopted within the OSCE and threatens to split and destabilize the Ukrainian society further.