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Religious discrimination and problems of freedom of conscience in RF (2008-2009)

Review of Moscow bureau for human rights (MBHR)

The Russian Constitution formally guarantees freedom of conscience. “Russian Federation is a secular state. No religion can be established as an official or obligatory one. Religious associations are separated from the state and equal in front of the law”, clause 14 of the Basic Law of Russia states. Clause 28 of the Constitution guarantees everyone the freedom of conscience and belief including the right to profess any religion or profess none, choose, change and disseminate freely the religious or other creed and act in correspondence with it. The Constitution also proclaims prohibition of any forms of restriction of the citizens’ rights basing upon their religious belonging (clause 19 part 2) and prohibition of propaganda of religious superiority (clause 29 part 2) and also provides the right to a citizen of Russian Federation for alternative civil service in case the military service contradicts his creed or religion (clause 59 part 3).

Actually the situation differs considerably from the one proclaimed in the Constitution. The law “On freedom of conscience and on religious associations” adopted in 1997 already contained the first restrictions that made Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) “more equal than the others”. The law preamble mentioned the special role of Orthodoxy and also listed Islam, Judaism and Buddhism as the religions “being an integral part of historical legacy of peoples of Russia”. Official division of all the religions in the country into “traditional” and “non-traditional” ones was practically the result of appearing of this preamble. Clause 9 of the law established 15-year residential qualification for registration of a religious organization.

Complaints about breaches of right for freedom of conscience and belief make up approximately 5% of total number of complaints received by the Commissioner on human rights in Russia. Half of applicants at least object to introduction of new passports, pension cards and other state documents where so-called “bar code” is used (a “number of Antichrist” is seen in it). About 20% of complaints are lodged in connection with impediment of religious activity and discrimination of some beliefs. Up to 15% of complaints concern refusal to return a building for public worship or provide an area for its construction. Up to 5% of

applicants complain of oppressions on the part of law-enforcement bodies. Share of complaints concerning the issues of teaching religious or quasi-religious subjects in the state educational institutions and the problem of state registration of religious organizations does not usually exceed 3% though has a tendency to grow¹.

Religious discrimination on the part of officials

Actually it can be stated that despite the Constitution that declares the secular character of the state, considerable part of Russian officials demonstrate their sympathy exclusively towards the Orthodoxy in the version of Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow patriarchate (ROC MP).

In February 2008 information was placed on official web-site of Kemerovo regional administration containing deliberately false information about history of the Mormon Church and its activity on the regional territory using unlawful and deteriorative terms like “recruitment”, “sect”, “adherents” etc. Just after twofold address of the Commissioner on human rights V. Lukin this information was removed from website but its writers were not called to account at all.

In September 2008 mayor’s office of Novosibirsk prohibited conducting the concerts of classical Indian dancing in educational institutions of the city to adherents of Indian doctrine Sahaja-yoga. The “expert opinion” prepared by Informational-consulting center on the problems of sectarianism of the Cathedral of the most Orthodox prince St. Alexander Nevsky of the Russian Orthodox Church was the grounds for this².

In Khabarovsk in July 2008 local activists of “Young Guard of “United Russia” disseminated the leaflets “Watch out sect! “International society for Krishna Consciousness” during conduction of a festival of Indian culture. In March 2009 the leaflets were acknowledged extremist materials, and the warning was passed against the leader of Khabarovsk branch of “Young Guard of “United Russia” Ivan Djulyak concerning inadmissibility of extremist activity³.

In autumn 2008, after coming of an active Orthodox Christian A. Konovalov to the position of the minister of justice, the Ministry of justice of Russia announced its intention to initiate legal liquidation of more than 50 religious organizations that were registered by this department earlier. “Lasting non-submission of a list of information and documents envisaged by the law to the Ministry of justice” became the grounds for this. The candidates for liquidation include the organizations belonging to Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and other religious associations. In particular these are such organizations as Spiritual directorate of Moslems (SDM) of Volga region, SDM “Association of mosques of Russia”, SDM of Karachai-Circassia and Stavropol region, Bogorodsk eparchy of

¹ <http://www.ombudsmanrf.ru/doc/ezdoc/08.shtml>

² <http://www.ombudsmanrf.ru/doc/ezdoc/08.shtml>

³ <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2289>

Kiev patriarchate, Kazan-Vyatka eparchy of Russian Orthodox Old Believers' Church, Suzdal eparchy of Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church, Moscow branch of Institute for Judaic studies, Central spiritual directorate of Buddhists of Russia.

In April 2009 a scandal burst out; the Expert council for conduction of state religious studies' examination of the Ministry of justice of Russian Federation created in March 2009 was in the center of it. The Council membership announced by the order of the Ministry of justice dated March 3 included 24 persons, mostly officials and pseudo-Orthodox activists. On April 3 the first meeting of the Council took place when its leaders were elected. The famous "sectologist" A. Dvorkin was elected the head of the Council, and his deputies are: former deputy head of SDM of Tatarstan V. Yakupov who called upon to burn the prohibited literature, and R. Silantyev who became famous due to his scandalous book "Islam in Russia" and who proposed to check the Moslem literature regarding its attitude towards Christianity⁴. The Council got the right to determine which of the religious organizations existing in Russia are really such and which are not (formally its expert opinions are of advisable character but under conditions of unavailability of other opinions they would be actually perceived as mandatory ones). At the same time the mechanism of disputing the results of expert examination on the part of representatives of religious organizations was not formalized⁵.

These were non-transparent criteria of selection of the Council participants and odious figures of its leaders that caused the scandal. Famous human rights activist, head of Slavic legal center A. Pchelintsev stated on April 10 that the order of the Ministry of justice on approval of the Council expands illegally the authorities of a new expert body, and this is the breach of the federal law "On freedom of conscience and on religious associations". He noted that there are practically no professional students of religion in the council and one of its participants at the minimum is the author of texts acknowledged extremist by the court. Student of religion, professor of chair of state-religious relations of Russian academy of public service Remir Lopatkin noted that this order of the Ministry of justice is a manifestation of "legal nihilism" and is directed "at discord, at incitement of dissension in the society". This would be the very effect caused by implementation of supervisory functions of new Council – even the Soviet Council on the problems of religions had no such functions. "In the situation of growth of tension in the society under conditions of crisis this is the threat for national security to introduce one more line of split into the society", R. Lopatkin stated⁶.

Head of Department on relationship of the Church and society archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin spoke in support of A. Dvorkin. He stated on April 10 that the Council members are "competent people at least" and accused the critics of the Council of the fact they are worried that it included the people who were not afraid

⁴ <http://www.minjust.ru/ru/news/events/index.php?id4=87>, <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-18044.html>

⁵ <http://www.rg.ru/2009/03/13/religia-ekspertiza-dok.html>

⁶ <http://www.blagovest-info.ru/index.php?ss=2&s=3&id=26898>

to criticize openly the activity of those who received financing from abroad. As for Dvorkin himself, V. Chaplin expressed complete support to him though he had to acknowledge that the information presented by the “sectologist” was not always trustworthy⁷.

Famous TV anchorperson, member of the Public chamber Maxim Shevchenko stated that creation of a new Expert council of the Ministry of justice is an “abuse addressed to the Administration of the President, to Moslem and whole Russian public”. “Newly formed council of the Ministry of justice does not include Moslem theologians, scientists, specialists in Islamic studies and jurists who would be capable of providing an objective estimate of any books. This body is not authoritative so the Moslem centers and public would hardly pay any attention to its decisions to say nothing about being guarded by its conclusions”, the head of Council of muftis of Russia Ravil Gainutdin stated.

Member of the Public chamber, head of Moscow bureau for human rights Alexander Brod spoke in mass media with a statement concerning appointment of Alexander Dvorkin a chairman of the Expert council. “Such development of events seems most dangerous, especially under current conditions of aggravation of interethnic and inter-religious relations in Russian Federation; due to this we request the Ministry of justice to revise its decision”, he noted. MBHR director also noted that he considered it expedient to review the issue of membership of this Council again with attraction of a broad circle of independent experts⁸. On April 14 the head of Russian Pentecostals, member of the public chamber of RF Sergey Ryakhovsky stated that the minister of justice of RF Alexander Konovalov must send in his resignation. S. Ryakhovsky does not agree with the membership of the new council of the ministry. In his interview to Protestant channel TBN he said that he was expecting “most indecent actions” from this council and named its creation an “attack on freedom of speech and religious rights of human” that “would be similar to those that took place both in Soviet time and in tsarist time”. He also stated his intention to create an alternative expert council together with his colleagues in the Public chamber⁹.

The institute of religion and law announced the start of an action “No – to inquisitors!” late in April; everyone willing was proposed to send the opinions and votes in support of Open address to the minister of justice of RF A.V. Konovalov within it with a protest against discrediting the examination of students of religion by appointing A. Dvorkin the head of expert council.

In response A. Dvorkin accused S. Ryakhovsky of attempts of “climbing into power” “acting in the spirit of “orange revolution””¹⁰. Mr. Dvorkin accused A. Brod of “aspiration to abolish the democratic procedures” laying stress on the fact that he was freely elected by the council members¹¹. Director of Human rights

⁷ <http://www.blagovest-info.ru/index.php?ss=2&s=3&id=26898>

⁸ <http://www.rusk.ru/newsdata.php?idar=182367>

⁹ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=29748>

¹⁰ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=29762>

¹¹ <http://www.rusk.ru/newsdata.php?idar=182374>

center of the World Russian people's council Roman Silantyev who was elected Dvorkin's deputy accused S. Ryakhovsky of "intolerance towards dissidence". He also announced the coming of a "team of high-class professionals known not just as competent officials but as authoritative scientists too" to the Ministry of justice and "mass dismissal of politically committed officials who actually privatized the religious sphere"¹².

The minister of justice A. Konovalov also stood up for Dvorkin stating on April 21 that the Council was created by the Ministry of justice "in strict correspondence to legislation in force, and its decisions are of only advisory character". He also accused the critics of A. Dvorkin and of the Council of inappropriateness and inadmissible pressure¹³.

The views confessed by A. Dvorkin himself became clear after the statement made by him on May 16 that for him as for the chairman of the Council of the Ministry of justice it doesn't matter whether the religious organization was registered or not – it may be a "sect" anyway like availability of a passport of the RF citizen does not exclude that one may be a criminal¹⁴.

Another newly appointed member of council, Saratov "sectologist" Alexander Kuzmin, disseminated a document on May 11 titled "Incursion of sectarians on Saratov: action "Feel the force of changes". Address to the residents of Saratov and Saratov region" where he warns: "Be cautious, the action "Feel the force of changes" is conducted with participation of dangerous sects known due to their crimes against human, family and our state!"¹⁷. Kuzmin accuses both specific Protestant church and the whole movement of evangelical churches "Word of life" in Russia: "An organization with quite euphonic name "Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith "Word of life" of Saratov city" is one of participants of the action "Feel the force of changes". Sometimes this organization calls itself "Eparchy of Church of Christians of evangelical faith of Saratov region". Everything seems Christian, everything is nice and there are no suspicions. But in fact the "Word of life" is a terrible destructive sect. Every fourth follower of this organization in Sweden tried to commit suicide. In Russia there were the cases of beating and killing of children in this sect in the guise of casting out Satan. All around boundless spaces of former USSR this sect became notorious due to financial frauds and scandals ...". As a result, local directorate of FSB became interested in Kuzmin's activity¹⁵.

Chairman of Pskov regional state committee of culture Zinaida Ivanova demanded to prohibit the guest performance of rock-opera "Jesus Christ – superstar" late in April quoting the prohibition of local eparchy¹⁶.

¹² <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=29764>

¹³ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=29896>

¹⁴ <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2445>

¹⁵ <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2417>

¹⁶ <http://www.nr2.ru/culture/230994.html>

Law-enforcement bodies follow the same “anti-sectarian course” in some cases. Since 2007 there were attempts to reckon a brochure by Mari priest V. Tanakov “The priest is speaking” among extremist ones. While the first attempt made in 2007 was a failure (the Supreme court of Republic of Mari-El abrogated on September 25, 2007 the corresponding decision of Yoshkar-Ola city court dated August 8 of that year)¹⁷, in 2009 this edition was acknowledged extremist anyway (on March 17 this decision was passed by Yoshkar-Ola city court¹⁸ and on April 29 it was supported by the Supreme court of Republic of Mari-El¹⁹).

Smolensk regional office of public prosecutor, with support of regional court, tried to liquidate the community of Methodist church of Smolensk city in 2008 due to lack of license for execution of educational activity within Sunday school (though the license is not required for this). However the Supreme court of Russian Federation abrogated the decision of Smolensk regional court in June 2008²⁰.

On February 28, 2008 office of public prosecutor of Nizhnekamsk city passed an adduction addressed to local branch of Scientologist church concerning removal of breaches of the Federal Law “On freedom of conscience and on religious associations”. In the opinion of office of public prosecutor, “conduction of public activities by religious group not corresponding to the objectives of creation of the religious group (joint professing and dissemination of faith)” was the breach. Similar warnings were made also in 2002 and in 2007 but they were appealed and withdrawn²¹.

In February 2009 an instruction of first deputy of General public prosecutor of Russian Federation (apparently this was V. Grin) was sent to the public prosecutors of RF subjects on conducting the inspection of legality of activity of Administrative center of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia. The character of formulas in the instruction and tightest timetable of its fulfillment were perceived locally as a guideline for liquidation of this religious organization. As a result, office of public prosecutor of Moscow region accused the Witnesses in its letter dated February 13, 2009 of “breaking the legislation”, “conscription dodging”, committing of “asocial deeds” and “social isolation”. Simultaneously the statement was heard on the part of office of public prosecutor that activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses allegedly “causes negative attitude of population and traditional Russian religions” (such statement is a breach of Russian legislation declaring the secular character of the state). At the same time mass inspections of regional and local organizations of Jehovah’s Witnesses started, and their number reached 500 up to late March 2009²². Public prosecutor of Asbest Alexey Almayev brought a suit to the city court on March 25 on acknowledging the informational materials of

¹⁷ <http://www.blagovest-info.ru/index.php?ss=2@s=3@id=16075>

¹⁸ <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=263995>

¹⁹ <http://www.civitas.ru/news.php?code=6938>

²⁰ <http://www.ombudsmanrf.ru/doc/ezdoc/08.shtml>

²¹ http://ombudsman.n.gov.ru/doc/vistup11/p18_08_08.shtml

²² <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2201>

Jehovah's Witnesses extremist. Simultaneously Ordjonikidzevsky district court of Yekaterinburg acknowledged the warning of office of public prosecutor issued earlier and addressed to the leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses in Asbest on inadmissibility of executing the extremist activity illegal²³. Speaking on April 29 at the conference in Yekaterinburg devoted to counteraction to extremism, deputy general public prosecutor Viktor Grin stated that possibility of penetration of followers of non-traditional religious orientation movements became a consequence of illegal migration. The educational system becomes most vulnerable for them"²⁴. On May 25 at the meeting of the Committee of the State Duma on legal and judicial problems V. Grin rated Jehovah's Witnesses and Christians of Evangelical faith among extremist organizations²⁵.

It became known on March 11 that the office of public prosecutor of Udmurtia confiscated books on Scientology from several libraries; they were discovered after receiving information that unknown persons brought 15 boxes of religious contents books to the central district library of Krasnogorsk region²⁶.

On April 14 investigatory bodies of the Investigatory committee of office of public prosecutor (ICOPP) of RF for Tomsk region rejected instituting criminal proceedings against the head of missionary department of Tomsk eparchy Maxim Stepanenko after application of the head of Tomsk Society for Krishna Consciousness Enver Izmailov. The reason for application to law-enforcement bodies was M. Stepanenko's statement during February public hearings in Kandinka village concerning the project of constructing the Krishnaite settlement, as the press service of Tomsk ICOPP informed "Interfax" agency. Simultaneously the directorate of Federal service for veterinary and phyto-sanitary supervision (Rosselkhoz nadzor) for Tomsk region acknowledged the construction of Krishnaite settlement near Kandinka illegal²⁷.

The chief of psychological department of Directorate of home affairs of Perm Larisa Shilova spoke in St. Trinity Stefanov monastery of Perm eparchy of ROC MP late in April with report on the problems of counteraction to "sects". L. Shilova named Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses among the dangerous sects²⁸.

On May 8 the Collegium of First appellate arbitration court in Vladimir approved the decision of Vladimir regional arbitration court dated February 12 about impoundment of four temples in Suzdal from Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church being alternative to ROC MP. The decision about impoundment of three temples else was made earlier²⁹.

On May 22 2009 Ivanovo regional court examined the case based upon application of American missionary Chris Willack concerning acknowledgement

²³ <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2223>

²⁴ <http://www.tass-ural.ru/news/?id=45872>

²⁵ <http://deita.ru/?news,,,130431>

²⁶ http://www.gazeta.ru/education/2009/03/11_n_2956174.shtml

²⁷ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=29752>

²⁸ <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2342>

²⁹ <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2380>

the decision on undesirability of his staying in Russia to be illegal. The court rejected the suit despite the application of law-enforcement bodies just vaguely stated: his “staying on the territory of Russia is a POSSIBLE threat for security of Russian Federation”³⁰.

A series of criminal proceedings can be noted instituted by law-enforcement bodies at the insistence of pseudo-Orthodox activists. It became known on April 3 that the Tagansky court of Moscow would resume the criminal proceedings against former director of the Center named after A.D. Sakharov Yuri Samodurov and former head of department of modern trends of Tretyakov’s gallery Andrey Yerofeyev accused of inciting hatred and religious hostility (it dealt with the exhibition of modern art the radical pseudo-Orthodox organizations didn’t like). The proceedings were suspended due to illness of A. Yerofeyev³¹. On May 29 the hearing of these criminal proceedings started. Earlier, in 2005, criminal proceedings were instituted concerning similar exhibition “Watch out – religion!” conducted in Sakharov’s center (the organizers escaped with large penalty then). On April 13 conduction of inspection of activity of a fashion designer Alina German was announced by office of public prosecutor of Primorsky district of St. Petersburg; pseudo-Orthodox activists saw an insult and breach of rights of believers in her collection demonstrated in October 2008³².

In Russian regions teaching of “Fundamentals of Orthodox culture” (FOC) is introduced on a mass scale. This is actually a camouflaged “Scripture”. The story of the family of Protestant pastor Perov from Voronezh shows what may be the result of introducing such lessons. In September 2007 his 6-year-old son who came to the 1st form was beaten by his classmates when he refused to kiss a cross. At the same time both district and regional courts dismissed the suit of Perovs concerning satisfaction of moral damage (despite the district office of public prosecutor and the educational department acknowledged the breach of constitutional rights of the child for freedom of conscience and religion and that of secular character of education)³³. The obligatory introduction of FOC in September 2008 in Zasechnoye village of Penza region caused a scandal as most part of its population is Moslem. As a result it was found out that the teaching was introduced at personal initiative of the head of district educational department Ye. Kadalov, and the order on compulsory studying of FOC was revoked³⁴.

However on March 12 the acting president of Russian academy of education David Feldshtein stated that studying of fundamentals of religion culture would not become compulsory in Russian schools. “In the draft new educational standards the teaching of fundamentals of culture of Russian religions is envisaged basing upon voluntary choice of one of them or of secular ethics”, he said³⁵.

³⁰ <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2425>

³¹ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=29578>

³² http://news.km.ru/prokuratura_proverit_modelera_za

³³ <http://www.hro.org/node/4698>

³⁴ <http://www.hro.org/node/3150>

³⁵ <http://www.hro.org/node/4826>

“Non-traditional” religions (that actually include also Islam in most Russian regions) face the difficulties with acquisition of permissions for construction of buildings for public worship, allotment of land for cemeteries etc. The recent example of this kind is the Moslem community of Odintsovo city of Moscow region that is striving for allotment of land for cemetery for 10 years³⁶. Moscow community of Christians-Molokans is in similar situation – since 2002 it is striving for allotment of land for construction of a building for public worship³⁷.

Interference of ROC into politics

On its part ROC aspires to participate actively in political life of the country even breaking the legislation. Early in 2009 the fact of participation of suffragan bishop of Smolensk eparchy of ROC MP Ignatij in election of city mayor in support of one of candidates - V. Razuvayev - was recorded (bishop’s portrait even appeared on pre-election posters though this is prohibited by the law), and the leaflets inspired that only Orthodoxy is the “true faith”. At the same time a newspaper was disseminated in the city titled “Special issue of Russian Union of evangelical Christians-Baptists for Smolensk” where the Baptists allegedly stood for the candidate Sergey Maslakov being the general director of SC “Smolensk communal systems”, and Mr. Maslakov himself allegedly promised to turn Smolensk into a Russian center of Baptism³⁸. Late in February S. Maslakov was withdrawn from election. Valery Razuvayev came third to a finish and received 17,56%³⁹.

Religious xenophobia on the part of ROC representatives

ROC representatives and pseudo-Orthodox activists regularly speak with abrupt statements against “sectarians” meaning most of non-Orthodox religions and denominations available in Russia, propaganda of tolerance etc.

In April 2008 in Tyumen state oil and gas university the associate professor of chair of social work of Institute of humanitarian sciences and member of Missionary department of Tobolsk-Tyumen eparchy of Russian Orthodox Church Svetlana Shestakova delivered a lecture within the course “Fundamentals of religious culture” for those willing to teach FOC at schools. Speaking about Judaism, S. Shestakova stated that “the blood of Orthodox people who were tortured as martyrs is available in small amount” in matzo. According to the lecturer, the Jews allegedly steal children, pump the blood out of them and “then collect the blood on rags, these rags are burnt and these ashes are strewed on a dead human or put into matzo”. This was followed by accusation of ritual murder

³⁶ <http://www.hro.org/node/5673>

³⁷ <http://www.ombudsmanrf.ru/doc/ezdoc/08.shtml>

³⁸ <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2172>

³⁹

http://www.smolensk.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/smolensk?action=show&root=1&tvd=467422067366&vrn=467422067362®ion=67&global=&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=467422067366&type=234

of the family of Nicolas II by the Jews: “they were stabbed through and through, they need stabbing an alive human their until he would die, and while he is torturing all the blood would pour out. This was the way they tortured prince Alexey, in front of his parents, then killed the tsar and tsarina”.

S. Shestakova’s husband – K. Shestakov stated that “infants are regularly missing here, here is the case that took place in Krasnoyarsk not long ago” and also noted that in the notorious “Beylis case” Beylis was found not guilty because the whole jury was frightened by the Jews, and after overthrowing of autocracy all the jurors who voted for conviction of Beylis, were killed. When in June 2008 the lecture transcript was published on website of Slavic legal center and faced abrupt response on the part of FEOR (Federation of Jewish communities of Russia), K. Shestakov published an article on one of pseudo-Orthodox websites where he stated that everything his wife told (including accusation of ritual murders) “is a part of Doctrine and Holy tradition of the Orthodox Church, a part of Orthodox tradition”. K. Shestakov also stated that “to deny the existence of ritual practice of using Christian blood in Judaism means to renounce the Orthodox Tradition and defame the memory of saints”.

Simultaneously the information appeared in some mass media concerning patronage of Shestakov on the part of Tobolsk and Tyumen bishop Dmitry, brother of metropolitan Kliment (Kapalin) who was the chartered secretary of the Patriarchy then. It should be noted that the bishop never responded to the scandal that flared up in his eparchy despite the special address to him adopted by representatives of Protestants, Moslems and Hebrews on August 13 with request to clarify whether the claims of Shestakovs that they spoke on behalf of ROC were rightful, and what did the attitude of the authorities mean being neutral at the minimum towards the views confessed by spouses Shestakovs.

In autumn 2008 the Murmansk eparchy of ROC MP started a campaign against non-Orthodox Christians due to building of a prayer house of the Church of Christians of evangelical faith (CEF) “On Murman”. In particular, Internet-newspaper “Orthodoxy at the Northern land” published an insulting article addressed to the Protestants the author of which, citing the head of department of religious education and catechization of Murmansk and Monchegorsk eparchy Anton Tuchkov, accused the Church CEF “On Murman” of “proselytical extremism”. Tuchkov noted that “among other totalitarian sects operating in Murmansk region, the neo-Pentecostals are most numerous. At present more than hundred religious organizations and charismatic orientation groups operate in the region. They all hide themselves under harmless names “Church of Golgotha”, “Bethany” etc. Together with Jehovah’s adherents, the charismates form a nucleus of anti-Orthodox policy in the region”. As a result, on April 8, 2009 Pervomaisky district court of Murmansk acknowledged the resolution on rejection of instituting criminal proceedings against Anton Tuchkov illegal and obliged the Investigatory

committee of office of public prosecutor of RF for Murmansk region to eliminate the available breaches of the law⁴⁰.

On February 10, 2009 the bishop of Perm and Solikamsk Irinarch published an open letter where he spoke abruptly against dissemination of a notion of tolerance announcing that “under a plausible pretext of combat against extremism and alleged support of civil society development in Russia, it is tried to impose some tolerance on us ... and consequently to transform gradually our domestic Orthodox culture according to Western patterns and ideas”⁴¹. The Commissioner on human rights in Perm region Tatyana Margolina stated responding to Irinarch’s letter in her interview to the newspaper “Izvestia” that tolerance is the active social behavior, and the person comes to it voluntarily and consciously but the position of the bishop is connected “with denial of some new standards concerning those human manifestations that were once not typical for Russian reality”⁴².

The bishop’s position was supported by acting secretary for relationship of the Church and the society of the Department of external church relations priest Georgy Ryabykh who stated on February 11 that Russia has its own spiritual values and long-term experience of cooperation of different faiths and peoples and needs no borrowing, including that in educational system, of such notions as tolerance. He also identified tolerance with indifference towards various vices without any grounds⁴³.

The line of bishop Irinarch was continued by some “Regional society of Orthodox pedagogues” that disseminated an address on March 24 where conduction of a conference “Libraries and tolerance in informational society” in the city was named a “campaign against traditional foundations that were formed in our society for centuries ..., for substituting the traditional notions of love towards our neighbors, friendship and cooperation between the people of various nationalities and religions”. And the head of press service of Perm eparchy Nikolay Gogolin, speaking at the meeting of religious-philosophical Orthodox club that took place during conduction of the international conference, called the idea of tolerance a kind of utopia”⁴⁴.

The famous deacon A. Kurayev stated late in March in his interview to the portal “Regions.ru” that political correctness and tolerance – this is a “toothy, self-confident totalitarian censorship” that allegedly “broke more than one hundred fates of Western journalists, writers and thinkers” and “leads to prohibition of classical monuments of culture, to emasculating of memory and history”. The priest Dimitry Lin, an employee of department of religious education and catechization of Moscow patriarchate and executive director of Christmas

⁴⁰ <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2287>

⁴¹ http://www.echoperm.ru/article.php?class=news&id=19853&part_id=2

⁴² <http://www.izvestia.ru/perm/article3125683/>

⁴³ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=28789>

⁴⁴ <http://www.aanews.ru/news/detail.php?ID=180538>

educational readings, stated that tolerance “is a kind of bludgeon used for beating their own creed from the people: this is no good”⁴⁵.

Hieromonk Macarius (Markish) stated in his interview to the portal “Regions.ru” that political correctness and privileges for minorities “lead to the fact that common people start hating each other” and called the program of tolerance “anti-upbringing”⁴⁶.

On March 31 acting press secretary of Nizhniy Novgorod eparchy archpriest Igor Pchelintsev, during the round table “Tolerance as an obligatory condition for stable development of Nizhniy Novgorod region”, accused “the representatives of the West” of the fact they tried to impose somewhat distorted vision of tolerance on the Russians. I. Pchelintsev himself considers it possible to have the tolerance based upon some “traditional moral notions being common, for example for representatives of various religions and ethnic groups”⁴⁷.

On April 9 Chuvash eparchy of ROC addressed the State council of Chuvashia with a proposal to restrict the activity of new religious movements in the republic legislatively⁴⁸. On April 23, 2009 the Council for cooperation with religious associations of the government of Penza region stood for restriction of access to “pseudo-religious literature” recommending the commercial organizations involved into dissemination of books in the region to cooperate actively with religious organizations and attract their representatives as experts during forming of range of book produce⁴⁹.

ROC supported in public the proposal of one of deputies of St. Petersburg Legislative assembly to turn the Orthodox Easter into all-Russian holiday (during the meeting of St. Petersburg parliament on April 29 the Easter was included into official list of holidays of the Northern capital⁵⁰). At the same time the head of Department on relationship of the Church and society of Moscow patriarchate Vsevolod Chaplin cited the fact that in some “Moslem” regions “some Moslem holidays” are the days off (“forgetting” to mention the Orthodox Christmas that is already included into the list of days off)⁵¹.

Speaking on May 27 in Lille at the meeting of European council of religious leaders, representative of Department of external church relations of ROC Fr. G. Ryabykh pounced upon “non-traditional religions” that “would try by all means to assert themselves in the society at the expense of traditional religions” and accused them of establishment of “dictate of minorities”. He also mentioned the policy of notorious “proselytism” that was announced “deliberate and planned strategies for conversion based upon manipulations with the people’s conscience”⁵².

⁴⁵ <http://www.regions.ru/news/2204426/>

⁴⁶ <http://www.regions.ru/news/2204761/>

⁴⁷ <http://www.nta-nn.ru/news/item/?ID=150297>

⁴⁸ <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2265>

⁴⁹ <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2316>

⁵⁰ <http://www.blagovest-info.ru/index.php?ss=2&s=3&id=27191>

⁵¹ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=29753>

⁵² <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=documents&div=899>

Statements of high-ranking clergymen are accompanied by public actions of radical nationalists. Thus, on April 4, 2009 an “anti-sectarian” meeting took place in the center of Ulyanovsk participated by members of a branch of nationalistic Russian national union, movement “People’s council”, and youth regional organization “73rd region” (totally a little more than 30 persons). The principal demands of the meeting participants were the appeals to prohibition of “sectarian groups and associations” on the region territory⁵³.

Use of pseudo-human rights rhetoric

Simultaneously during recent half year the statements were heard from representatives of ROC and organizations under its control about allegedly starting attacks on Orthodoxy and Christianity in general. Early in May 2009 information was published in some electronic mass media quoting the Director of Human rights center of the World Russian people’s council Roman Silantyev that in Tuva “anti-Russian, anti-Orthodox and separatist moods increase”. To “confirm” these points, everyday crimes taking place in the republic were passed for manifestations of nationalism, and the leaders of Tuva were accused of attempts of pressing Russian officials out. Naturally, this couldn’t go without mentioning the hand of USA that allegedly aspired to separate Tuva from RF⁵⁴. Actually, judging by the text of the article, it dealt with attempt of discrediting a part of Tuvinian elite and current leader of the republic Sholban Kara-ool. Two principal sources of information for the article were the deputy of Tuvinian parliament S. Safrin for whom an accusation of his adversaries of nationalism were a way to reject the accusations (including those on the part of republican authority) that the company affiliated with him misused dozens million rubles allotted for construction of an Orthodox temple in the republican capital Kyzyl⁵⁵), and S. Konviz, assistant of the parliament speaker V. Oyun against whom the criminal proceedings were instituted concerning misapplication of funds.

Representative of Moscow patriarchate in the European Council Father superior Philaret (Bulekov), speaking on May 14 at the forum “Dialogue of civilizations” in Prague, announced allegedly growing “Christian-phobia” in the European countries including allegedly “insult to fellow citizens who still profess the Christian faith despite anything and revere the Christian shrines”⁵⁶. In fact this deals with an attempt to protect ROC from criticism announcing any criticism a “Christian-phobia”.

Situation in Moslem regions

⁵³ <http://www.rons.ru/sim-sek.htm>

⁵⁴ <http://www.rus-obr.ru/days/2792>

⁵⁵ http://www.tuvaonline.ru/2009/03/22/2200_obrschenie.html, <http://ria-sibir.ru/viewnews/33367.html>

⁵⁶ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=documents&div=892>

On the contrary, in republics of the North Caucasus it deals with “creeping Islamization” of mode of life. Chechnya occupies the first place here: its leader R. Kadyrov seemingly aspires to get the better of Islamists on their known playing field. Except ban for sale of alcohol during the month of Ramadan, the leaders of Chechnya connive at the minimum at murders of women who “behave immorally” (the most famous of such stories took place in November 2008 when the bodies of seven killed women at once were discovered)⁵⁷. The prisoners of Chernokozovo colony are dressed in the clothes stylized as Islamic ones. And all the women working in public offices of Chechnya must wear headscarves during duty hours⁵⁸.

This all is accompanied by combat against “non-orthodox Islam”. In Daghestan even the law on prohibition of Wahabit activity on the territory of republic is in force since 1999. Actually this law and the term “Wahabit” itself became a tool for struggle of various clans of clergy for influence and persecution of dissident Moslems. In fact these are those persecutions that push many people to go to the militants. The president of Daghestan M. Aliyev stated several times his readiness to admit the existence of adherents of Wahabism “under condition that the bearers of this ideology would not create a national Wahabit front and fight against the state” and would dissociate themselves from militants-Islamists. He stressed that the problem of “non-orthodox Islam” can’t be solved in a coercive way. The position of traditional religious authoritative leaders proved to be much tougher: they think that “Wahabits are not subject to correction”. According to some data, it was the belonging of long-term minister of home affairs of Daghestan A. Magomedtagirov to murids of one of Sufi sheikhs that made his “combat against Wahabits” tough and uncompromising⁵⁹. Perhaps due to this Magomedtagirov was killed on June 5, 2009.

On March 8, 2009, during the religious holiday Mavlid (birthday of the prophet Mohammed), some bookstores in Makhachkala were subject to attacks of youth groups of adherents of influential Sufi sheikhs. They burst into the shops and eliminated the religious literature including modern translations of the Koran into Russian. It is reported that several dozens people participated in the attacks⁶⁰.

Resident of settlement Shamkhal-station of Kirovsky district of Makhachkala Abdurakhman Abakarov spent several hours early in April in one of the stations of Sovetsky Directorate of home affairs of Makhachkala due to availability of a beard. On April 3 the residents of Buynaksk city professing Salafism (orthodox trend of Islam) informed they couldn’t conduct the Friday collective namaz. According to them, the mosque where they planned to do this was closed, and the territory was surrounded by employees of local militia⁶¹.

⁵⁷ <http://www.blagovest-info.ru/index.php?ss=2&s=7&id=26041>

⁵⁸ <http://chechnya.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/150430>

⁵⁹ <http://www.assalam.ru/assalam2009/334/01-s.shtml>;

<http://www.novayagazeta.ru/data/2009/060/17.html>

⁶⁰ <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/150786>

⁶¹ <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/152549>

It became known on May 28 about the address of Moslems of Karachai-Circassia to the UN commission on human rights, Public chamber of RF and human rights organizations with request to help. According to them, those professing Islam are persecuted in the republic as “Wahabits”. “Unfair attitude towards Moslems, non-observance of elementary human rights, calumny, persecutions, arrests, humiliations – this is all above our patience, the letter states. – Every day since morning till night the mass media cast aspersions on people professing Islam presenting them as terrorists and extremists, incite interethnic and inter-religious dissension. Due to almost total censorship they present the facts one-sidedly the way the special services need this. Frank lie is often broadcast, and we have no chance to refute it and bring the truth about real situation to the public”⁶².

The head of Coordinating center of Moslems of the North Caucasus I. Berdiyev, in his interview to the portal “Interfax-religion” in May 2009, pounced upon the Protestants calling them “sectarians who appeared in Russia after collapse of the Soviet Union, who deceive people that know nothing about religion”⁶³

The Islamist underground operating in the North Caucasus directs its blows in its turn both against “official Islam” (10 attempts at least at imams and muftis were committed in 2007-2008) and against Christianity. On January 1, 2009 an Orthodox church was set on fire in Karabulak (Ingushetia)⁶⁴.

In autumn 2008 the Moslem activists started a campaign against the journal “Russian Newsweek» for re-publication of one of Danish caricatures of the prophet Mohammed as an illustration to information about “caricature scandal” of 2006. The matter finished with warning addressed to the journal by Rossvyazcomnadzor.

One can speak that religious objects often become the objects of attacks of Russian nationalists. Here are several examples just for recent months. On the night of January 1, 2009 the inscription of fascist contents were put on the walls of Moscow temple of St. Nicolas in Otradnoye and nearby houses⁶⁵. On January 15 the windows of rehearsal hall were broken in the Prayer house of evangelical Christians-Baptists of Zelenograd (Moscow)⁶⁶. On January 27 the vandals drew a swastika on the Roman Catholic church of St. Apostles Peter and Paul in Velikiy Novgorod⁶⁷.

On February 1 the Sunday school of the temple in the name of St. Simeon Verkhotursky was burnt in Yekaterinburg⁶⁸. The incendiaries left the inscriptions: “Host of Rod. Squad of Svyatoslav”, “Glory to Russian gods”, “Urals BTO” (BTO – militant terrorist organization)⁶⁹. Early in March it was found out that the arson

⁶² <http://www.hro.org/node/5621>

⁶³ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=interview&div=213>

⁶⁴ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=2814>

⁶⁵ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=28150>

⁶⁶ <http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2109>

⁶⁷ <http://www.rosbalt.ru/2009/01/27/613069.html>

⁶⁸ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=28637>

⁶⁹ <http://roizman.livejournal.com/773967.html>, <http://roizman.livejournal.com/774305.html>

of this church, like the arson of church of St. Nicolas the Miracle-Worker committed on December 8, 2008, was committed by former members of the skinhead group “Volkssturm” who took vengeance for arrest of their fellows⁷⁰.

On the night of March 31 – April 1 in Kaluga unknown persons drew the expressions and pictures being insulting for the believers on the walls of temple of Nativity of the Virgin (Nikitsky temple) located in the city center, not far from the building of regional administration⁷¹.

Recommendations

First of all it should deal with clear and unequivocal confirmation of the Constitution provisions concerning freedom of conscience, including elimination or change of preamble to the Law “On freedom of conscience and on religious associations”, abolition of 15-year “residential qualification” during registration of religious organizations and cessation of separating the religions into “traditional” and “non-traditional” ones with provision of any preferences to the former.

The practice of liquidation of the religious organizations with farfetched grounds should be stopped as well as the practice of refusals to allot the land for construction of buildings for public worship and cemeteries for “non-traditional religions”.

Events of recent months also showed the importance of expert examination by the students of religion for normal development of religious life in Russia. So it looks necessary to form the expert council from among scientists – students of religion (but not pseudo-religious experts) who can estimate the situation after careful consideration.

⁷⁰ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=29151>

⁷¹ <http://www.blagovest-info.ru/index.php?ss=2&s=3&id=26710>