

## Archbishop Yevstraty (Zoria), Representative to the European Institutions, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate

Ladies and Gentlemen!

In continuation of my yesterday's speech, I would like to emphasize once again the urgent need to work on a more balanced system of a secular state, benevolently neutral with regard to religion and non-religious beliefs.

In my opinion, in connection with the growing threats of religiously motivated extremism and terrorism, we see attempts to fight not with causes, but with external signs or consequences of the problem. Instead of dialogue with the religious community and a joint decision mutually acceptable to all interested parties, measures to restrict freedom of religion are often suggested.

On the one hand, in some countries of the European Union, we see attempts to strengthen the secularism not only of the state, but of society itself, of increasingly displacing religious activity in the sphere of personal and even marginal.

On the other hand, we see in the countries of the former USSR, especially in Russia, an attempt to return to the model of favoritization of one, the so-called traditional Church, and to strengthen restrictions on so-called non-traditional Churches. A striking example of this is the laws from the so-called Yarovaya package, sharply limiting the opportunities for teaching and missionary work, as well as the injunction of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Regular persecutions and pressures on the part of the state are inflicted on Orthodox churches that do not obey the Moscow Patriarchate, such as the Russian Autonomous Orthodox Church, the Russian True Orthodox Church and our Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate. The only temple of our Church in the Moscow region by decision of the court is under threat of destruction.

Yesterday, the opinion was voiced that the fight against extremism and terrorism, the defense of citizens justifies the state, which restricts freedom of religion. Reasonable and necessary restrictions are indeed inevitable. But the facts say that very often under the guise of fighting extremism in Russia and some other countries, there is a systematic pursuit of those whom the state considers to be objectionable.

Against this background, as mockery sounds statements from Russia and the Moscow Patriarch about the persecution in Ukraine. Our Church, which they often accuse, and the Ukrainian state, constantly offer different models of dialogue, including with the participation of the OSCE. So far, we have not heard any constructive steps from the other side in response to these proposals.

We understand how important dialogue is, especially in conflict situations. Therefore, we recommend that the OSCE continue its efforts to support and expand dialogue in two areas: the creation of a balanced, neutral system of implementation of the freedom of religion and belief and security issues that should not be used to unlawfully restrict the freedom of religion.