



Metropolitan Hilarion: Religious legislation of Ukraine in its current form does not ensure the adequate defence of believers' rights and can be regarded as discriminatory

In his commentary to TASS News Agency, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, focused on the decision of the Supreme Court of Ukraine on illegibility of the renaming of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

This year the Metropolia of Kiev filed a suit with the District Administrative Court of Kiev against the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, demanding the annulment of the Ministry's decree on the forced renaming of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. That decree had officially prohibited the canonical Ukrainian Church, its dioceses, communities and monasteries from calling themselves "Ukrainian."

The declared purpose of the renaming is to force the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to indicate in its name affiliation to the Moscow Patriarchate, that is, to admit that it is a foreign, "non-Ukrainian" religious organization. The real purpose is to steal and give its name to the so-called "Orthodox church of Ukraine," as it would make it easier to illegally seize churches of the canonical Church in Ukraine and to re-register their statutes.

For the sake of appearance, added to the list of organizations to be renamed were some entities of other confessions. Yet, the major target is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Making no secret of it were the authors of the renaming law, on which the Ministry's decree was based, and officers of the Ministry of Culture themselves. Most of the organizations on the list belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Presumably, the Administrative Court is aware that until the dispute is considered in its essence, the local authorities can begin the renaming without preliminary permission. It can provoke another wave of church seizures and a new cycle of inter-confessional confrontation in Ukraine. That is why, by way of a temporary interlocutory injunction, the court put a ban on introducing to the national register of Ukraine any amendments pertaining to religious organizations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, or rather those of its officers who are left of Poroshenko's regime, filed appeals and made efforts to annul this ban, but the Supreme Court refused. Now we have no other choice but to wait for a decision of the Administrative Court on the suit.

Probably, in future it will be necessary to revise the religious legislation of Ukraine, because in its current form it does not ensure the adequate defence of believers' rights and can be regarded as discriminatory. It is my sincere hope that the Ukrainian authorities will find the political will to amend the discriminatory legislation and to keep their country from further aggravation of the inter-confessional confrontation and from the division of their own citizens based on "us vs. them" principle.

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Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/45818/>