European Parliament holds seminar on Discrimination of Christians in Europe

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A seminar on the Discrimination of Christians in Europe was held on October 2, 2012, in the European Parliament in Brussels.

Organized together by parliamentarians from the European People's Party, the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists and the Catholic Commission of Bishops' Conferences, the EU seminar gathered together several hundred participants from among European deputies, experts in the religious and legal field, politicians, public figures and clergy.

Participants and experts acknowledged an evident growth in the number of manifestations of intolerance towards Christians that have taken place in the recent years. They asked themselves a question whether the cases of discrimination, violence, vandalism, outrage against believers, blasphemy, coercion to sinful actions and anti-clerical hysteria in the press, which are growing in number from year to year, are in fact a chain of mere coincidences or standing behind it all is a conscious movement of political and public structures aimed to marginalize and discredit Christianity generally and the institute of the Church in particular.

Numerous examples and statistical data collected in the report of Mr. M. Kugler, Austria, showed that anti-Christian tendencies in Europe have acquired a dangerous scale to present already now a real threat to freedom of conscience and human rights. 'The statistics are not full but animosity is in the air', he concluded.

Here are examples cited by participants as reflecting common European tendencies:

- Parents have lost their right to refuse certain forms of children's sexual education in schools;
- 'A cultural revolution' against the family as subjected to persecution are expressions of the traditional vision of the family as the union of man and woman, not of two persons of any sex; subjected to legal persecution are statements concerning homosexuality as a sin and vice even made in a soft form; harassment by the LGBT and the use of the term 'homophobia' as an instrument for excluding disagreeing groups from pubic space; in Great Britain, Catholic adoption agencies have been forced to close after 200 years of work because of a new law obliging to offer children for adoption by same-sex couples;
- It has become obligatory for medical personnel and students to participate in administration of abortions, euthanasia and use of biotechnologies unethical from the Christian point of view;
- The right of assembly has been violated as rallies against abortion have been banned;
- There is an already established practice of imputing to Christians the so-called crimes on the grounds of hate (hate crimes) when they wish to come out against the propaganda of homosexuality, Islamic extremism or abortion;
- Publication of images insulting believers does not merit censure.

European deputy Konrad Szymanski said that the threat to religious communities in the European Union is becoming more and more tangible, especially when social hatred is consciously redirected to the Christian community. He noted with regret that in the European Union there is a lack of real dialogue on problems under discussion.

Italian Parliament Vice-president Rocco Buttiglione remarked that in spite of everything the number of active parishioners who attend services weekly in churches in Europe has continuously grown. He believes it is necessary to take into account the gap between the active minorities who influence the decision making process and the silent majority of Christians who are afraid to take centre stage in the boiling of the political agenda. He also called for a return to the understanding of law based on clear certainty and agreed with European Court of Human Rights Justice Borrego-Borrego who stated that the ECHR is guided in its work not by objective criteria but by ideological purposes.

Participants pointed to the dangerous tendency of substituting the notion of tolerance. If originally tolerance was understood as respect for others' opinion which is still not shared, nowadays tolerance presupposes that disagreement cannot be expressed. This understanding affects the fundamental freedom of expression while legally imposed additional restrictions of the freedom of speech can have unpredictable negative consequences. Therefore, restrictions imposed on freedom of expression should be as few as possible.

During the public discussion, one of the European Commission workers described as shameful the proposal of some members of the European Parliament to nominate to the 2012 Sakharov Prize the punk band who, as he said, had defiled the Church of Christ the Saviour in Moscow and called to appeal against this ‘absolutely shocking’ proposal. Deputy Jan Olbrycht, in his response, described this nomination as destructive and noted that many parliamentarians took it as a mockery.

Among the participants were workers of the Russian Orthodox Church Representation to European international organizations, Archpriest Andrey Yeliesyev and the Rev. Artemy Alimarin. Father Andrey stressed during the closing discussion that an absolute majority not only in Russia but also in European countries are against the defilement of holy places. However, the tendency to present religious organizations as a threat to freedom of conscience and human rights remains a matter of concern.

He also draw the participants’ attention to the attempts of the European Parliament to silence the facts of discrimination and humiliation of Christians and other believers in the EU countries and expressed hope that the problem discussed by the seminar would be brought to the level of plenary session. Father Andrey also pointed to the need for joint efforts to protect the natural rights of adopted children to a full family as this right is not considered in case of adoption by same-sex couples and to monitor what happens to the European school education with regard to moral guidelines. He called for monitoring anti-Christian trends in the European political system and for creating conditions of full transparency in making decisions affecting the basic principles of societal life, the website of the Russian Orthodox Church Representation to European international organizations reports.

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Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/53619/