



Serbian intellectuals called the silence of Western institutions on the persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church a 'double standard'



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The silence of international institutions for the protection of human rights on the persecution launched against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its believers is alarming. This was stated by the participants of a conference held on 21 September 2023 in Belgrade, the Serbian news agency SRNA **reported**. The **meeting**, which was attended by Serbian scholars, touched upon the protection of the rights of Orthodox believers in Ukraine and also considered the developments in this area that took place after the publication of an **appeal by representatives of Serbian intellectuals to the Ukrainian authorities and international organisations**.

In June of this year, more than one hundred representatives of the academic community, as well as cultural figures from the Republic of Serbia and countries with a Serbian population, signed a call to stop the persecution of the canonical Church in Ukraine. Among the signatories were 5 academicians, 49 professors, 25 doctors of science, as well as well-known cultural figures. Later, the number of signatures under the appeal increased by two hundred and twelve, and the document was additionally supported by, inter alia, 3 generals, 9 professors and 5 doctors of science. At the beginning of August, the appeal was submitted to the Embassy of Ukraine in Serbia, the UN Mission in Serbia, the European Union Delegation to the RS and the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

"The Ukrainian authorities are persecuting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and especially the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, flagrantly violating the universally recognised rights of believers and religious organisations. The goal is the liquidation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church," said Slobodan Antonić, professor of sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. At the same time, he called the silence of international organisations about what is happening astonishing. Those who constantly talk about human rights do not pay attention to the documents that guarantee the right to freedom of religion, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and the position of the UN Human Rights Committee. Slobodan Antonić explained that those documents clearly show that everyone has the right to freedom of religion and that cannot be derogated from even in times of emergency, and any coercion of believers to change their beliefs or religion is categorically prohibited.

"What is happening in Ukraine is part of global processes, that is, [the] affirmation of the anti-Christian ethos of the Western world," said Miloš Ković, professor of history at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. He noted that the current events show that an anti-Christian world is being created on a large scale. "What we see in Ukraine is the most radical expression of this world," the scholar emphasised.

Archpriest Darko Djogo, a professor at the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Foča, Bosnia and Herzegovina, said that the struggle for holy places in Ukraine is a struggle for the souls and identity of the people who live there. "We are living in an era of state terror against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which continues, and there is no end in sight, because there are no institutions of international protection that are interested in the fundamental rights of the UOC believers. This dynamic will continue further".

He said that the "tomos on autocephaly", which schismatics in Ukraine received from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, is used by them to justify their aggressive behaviour towards the faithful of the canonically recognised Church. "The 'Tomos' serves new violence and legitimisation of what was stolen," the speaker said.

Zoran Kindić, a professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade, stated that the initiators of the

appeal of Serbian intellectuals in defence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were guided by the need for intellectuals to always point out the truth regardless of the possible consequences due to the fact that today the world is dominated by Western institutions and Western media, which do not approve of such activities. "The West, which formulated the ideology of human rights and religious rights, is now pretending to be deaf and blind to what is happening to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Ten years ago, everyone in the West would have jumped up and down if someone committed some act against a small Christian community, but today, when the majority of the Ukrainian population belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is being persecuted, there is no reaction. This demonstrates double standards," said Z. Kindić.

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