



RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIRs](#) | [Help](#)

9 March 2006

UKR101120.E

Ukraine: Treatment of members of Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox and True Orthodox religions (2004 - March 2006)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

According to Writenet, a network of researchers and writers on human rights, forced migration, ethnic and political conflict, "[r]eligious freedom is not a major issue in Ukraine, although some problems do exist, particularly concerning disputes between confessions" (Writenet Nov. 2004, 17). In an article on religious freedom in states belonging to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Forum 18 News Service, a Christian initiative which is independent of any church or religious group and which reports on threats and actions against the religious freedom of all people, regardless of their religious affiliation (Forum 18 n.d.), commented that Ukraine neither promotes the main Orthodox church, nor does it interfere with the activities of other Orthodox churches in Ukraine (Forum 18 1 June 2005).

Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church

The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) is the smallest of the three main Ukrainian orthodox churches (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004), which include the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kyivan Patriarchate (UOC-KP) (RISU n.d.a). The UAOC has between 1000 and 1200 communities (ibid. n.d.b; ITAR TASS 24 Aug. 2005; Chicago Sun Times 10 July 2005; *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004) located mostly in western Ukraine (ibid.), between 600 and 700 priests (Chicago Sun Times 10 July 2005; *International Religious Freedom Report 2005* 8 Nov. 2005; RISU n.d.b) and nearly 700 churches (ibid.). The UAOC celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of its "revival" in the eastern city of Kharkiv and the western city of Lviv in 2004 (ibid. 28 Aug. 2004).

In 2005, the All-Ukraine Sociological Service conducted a poll on religious beliefs in Ukraine and found that 7.21 per cent of those who identified themselves as "believers" stated that they belonged to the UAOC (*International Religious Freedom Report 2005* 8 Nov. 2005). Citing a similar poll conducted by the Razumkov Center in April 2004, *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* reported that most respondents identified themselves as Orthodox Christians, with 1.0 percent of those polled belonging to the UAOC (15 Sept. 2004).

According to a Ukraine-based UAOC church representative, the local

authorities in Ukraine generally treat UAOC members "with respect" (UAOC 21 Feb. 2006), although isolated cases of mistreatment may occur (ibid.; SPU 21 Feb. 2006). The Acting Director of the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies stated in 21 February 2006 correspondence to the Research Directorate that since 2004, he was not aware of the UAOC encountering problems registering their organization in Ukraine (ibid.).

Concerning societal treatment of UAOC members, the Sheptytsky Institute's Acting Director stated that the general population treats UAOC members "no differently than other denominations" (SPU 21 Feb. 2006). The UAOC church representative wrote in correspondence to the Research Directorate that the attitude of the general population towards UAOC members depends on the degree to which the person from the general population is "cultured, informed and tolerant," as well as on whether they are affiliated with other religious or nationalist organizations (UAOC 21 Feb. 2006).

International Religious Freedom Report 2004 stated that UAOC experienced "difficulties in providing religious services to soldiers," but did not explain the nature of these difficulties (15 Sept. 2004). Such difficulties were not mentioned in *International Religious Freedom Report 2005* (8 Nov. 2005).

According to the UAOC church representative, the "main threat" to UAOC members has been from other members within the UAOC (UAOC 21 Feb. 2006). A UAOC member in Kiev posted the details of his experience in such an incident, in which the church bishop, and others under his leadership, forcefully occupied their church for a "period of time" beginning 4 February 2005 (VSB n.d.). During this time parishioners practised their religion on church property outside of the church (ibid.). The UAOC member who wrote the report believed this incident was political in nature and indicated while his church does not employ security guards, during times of increased tension members volunteer to guard the church (UAOC 21 Feb. 2006).

Regarding relations with other churches in Ukraine, the priests of the three major Orthodox churches jointly conducted a religious service to commemorate the anniversary of "Orange Revolution" in November 2005 (Interfax 20 Nov. 2005). A UAOC archbishop visited the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and seminary in western Ukraine on 22 January 2006 and discussed potential cooperation between their groups (RISU 29 Jan. 2006). The UAOC also resumed a dialogue with the UOC-MP in February 2006 (RISU 17 Feb. 2006) and the UOC-KP in May 2005 (UNIAN 18 Nov. 2005) on the possibility of re-unifying the three main Orthodox churches in Ukraine. However, talks with the UOC-KP collapsed, with both sides citing "unacceptable demands" (ibid.)

True Orthodox Church

The Religious Information Service of Ukraine (RISU), citing statistics provided by the National Committee on Religious Matters of Ukraine, indicated that the "Russian True Orthodox" was the only True Orthodox religious group operating in Ukraine as of 1 January 2004 (RISU Jan. 2004). A 2004 RISU article, however, revealed the existence of "new [Russian True Orthodox Church (RTOC)] communities, the construction of [RTOC] churches and new [RTOC] ordinations and monastic vows" (ibid. 23 June 2004).

Another RISU article reported that on 18 April 2004, UOC-MP clergy "attacked" True Orthodox Church (TOC) priests during a memorial service

in the eastern town of Dzerzhynsk who were forced to leave the cemetery (RISU 26 April 2004). The electricity and telephone service of the TOC church were disconnected the next day (ibid.). TOC dioceses argued that these actions, as well as the delay in their registration by the Department on Religious Matters, are the result of a Dzerzhynsk city council instruction "to stop the activities of the TOC community" and "the desire of the UOC-MP to preserve a pastoral monopoly in the region" (ibid.). Further information on the treatment of TOC members in Ukraine could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Chicago Sun Times. 10 July 2005. "Breakaway Church." (Factiva)

Forum 18 News Service [Oslo]. 1 June 2005. Felix Corley. "Eastern Europe: OSCE Conference on Intolerance Regional Survey." <http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=574&printer-Y> [Accessed 1 Mar. 2006]

_____. N.d. "Forum 18 News Service's Mission Statement." <<http://www.forum18.org/F18NewsMission.php>> [Accessed 6 Mar. 2006]

Interfax News Service. [Moscow]. 20 November 2005. "Lviv Marks Anniversary of 'Orange Revolution'." (Factiva)

International Religious Freedom Report 2005. 8 November 2005. United States Department of State. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51588.htm>> [Accessed 1 Mar. 2006]

International Religious Freedom Report 2004. 15 September 2004. United States Department of State. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35491.htm>> [Accessed 1 Mar. 2006]

ITAR-TASS [Moscow]. 24 August 2005. Vitaly Matarykin. "Yushchenko Calls for Creating United Ukrainian Orthodox Church." (Factiva)

Religious Information Service of Ukraine (RISU). 17 February 2006. Institute of Religion and Society, Ukrainian Catholic University. "Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Leader Welcomes Revival of Dialog with UOC-MP." <<http://www.risu.org.ua/eng/news/article;9157>> [Accessed 21 Feb. 2006]

_____. 29 January 2006. "Autocephalous Orthodox Archbishop of Kharkiv Visits Greek Catholic Seminary." <<http://www.risu.org.ua/eng/news/article;8870>> [Accessed 21 Feb. 2006]

_____. 28 August 2004. "Autocephalous Orthodox Church Celebrates 15th Anniversary of Revival." <<http://www.risu.org.ua/article.php?>

sid=1424&offsets=&1=en> [Accessed 2 Mar. 2006]

_____. 23 June 2004. "Rusyn True Orthodox Synod Approves Statement on Church History." <<http://www.risu.org.ua/article.php?sid=1365&1=en>> [Accessed 6 Mar. 2006]

_____. 26 April 2004. "True Orthodox Church Persecuted by Authorities, Orthodox (UOC-MP) in Dzerzhynsk." <<http://www.risu.org.ua/article.php?sid=1271&1=en>> [Accessed 2 Mar. 2006]

_____. January 2004. "Number of Religious Organizations as of 1 January 2004 broken down according to regions of Ukraine." <http://www.risu.org.ua/content.php?menu=190607&page_id=167&1=en> [Accessed 2 Mar. 2006]

_____. N.d.a. "A Survey of Major Religions in 21st Century Ukraine." <http://www.risu.org.ua/content.php?page_id=43&1=en> [Accessed 2 Mar. 2006]

_____. N.d.b. "Autocephalous Orthodox Church." <<http://www.risu.org.ua/eng/major.religions/autocephalous.orthodox/>> [Accessed 21 Feb. 2006]

Saint Paul University (SPU) [Ottawa]. 21 February 2006. Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies. Correspondence from Acting Director.

Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) [Poltava, Ukraine]. 21 February 2006. Correspondence from church representative.

Ukrainian Independent Information Agency (UNIAN) [Kiev]. 18 November 2005. "Reunification Talks Between Two Ukrainian Orthodox Churches Collapse, Officials Say." (Factiva)

Ukrainian News. 8 October 2005. Volodymyr Kuzyk. "Police Detains Priest During Armed Attack on Bar Workers in Ternopil." (Factiva)

Vseukrains'ke Stavropigiynt bratstvo sv. ap. Andriya Pervozvanogo (VSB) [Kiev, in Ukrainian]. N.d. Evgen Sverstyuk. "Oskvernennya khramu." <<http://www.uaoc.kiev.ua/bratstvo/statut.php?File=statti/statti/120720080205.txt>> [Accessed 2 Mar. 2006]

Writenet [United Kingdom]. November 2004. Nadia Diuk. *Ukraine: Situation Analysis and Trend Assessment*. <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=RSDCOI&id=419333064>> [Accessed 21 Feb. 2006]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources, including: Forum 18, Keston Institute, Religious Information Service of Ukraine (RISU), Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Kiev.

Internet sources, including: Amnesty International (AI), Council of Europe (COE), Freedom House, Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), Keston Institute, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Transitions Online (TOL) [Prague], Ukraina Pravoslavna, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Kiev, United Kingdom Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND).

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.