

Monthly report from Helsinki committee for human rights for July 2002

The schism in MOC

In July, the events with Metropolitan John, until recently the head of the diocese of Veles and Povardarje, continued. At his request, he was admitted for a discussion at the Helsinki Committee, and on this occasion he complained that his civil rights had been violated. Namely, he claims that during the incursion of the representatives of the Macedonian Orthodox Church for the repossession of the building of the Veles and Povardarje eparchy, on 6 July, the police illegally assisted them as a) they refused to present identification, b) they did not present an injunction, c) they did not make a record of the incursion and the search d) the bishop John himself and the rest of the people in the building were treated rudely and with insults, e) the clergymen were not allowed to take their personal belongings with them, and a few days later, when they were allowed to, f) they noticed the absence of several valuable objects and a larger sum of money.

On 20 July, the bishop John was evicted from the monastery "St. George" in Negotino as well. This time the eviction was carried out by furious citizens using violent methods, and the police, although present there - did nothing to prevent them.

For these reasons, the Helsinki Committee has addressed the Ministry of Internal Affairs in order to check the statements and to ask for an explanation of their actions. In their reply, the Ministry of Internal Affairs emphasizes that they treated the case as "an assistance, that is, a legal entrance of the owners" and "retrieving of the violated governing over the building". Also, having treated this case as "a violation of the public peace and order", the Ministry of Internal Affairs found it unnecessary to have had an injunction.

The Helsinki Committee neither wants nor does it have a mandate to interfere with the internal affairs and turbulences in the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Still, the Committee is interested whether the state and its agencies, particularly the Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, act in accordance with the rule of the law and respect the Constitution, the laws, the ratified agreements for human rights and freedom. Therefore, we can not agree with the qualifications according to which the Ministry of Internal Affairs acted. Namely, the violated governing is part of the court competence in Macedonia and it was necessary for the competent court to have been involved. Moreover, as the Ministry of Internal Affairs agrees in its letter, the Metropolitan John lived there at that time, that is, his home was in the church premises. The Committee once again appeals for a consistent and impartial police interference.