

POSITION PAPER

Moldovan Authorities Fail to Ensure Freedom of Religion and Thought in Moldova, to Combat and Prevent Discrimination on Religious Grounds

Despite undertaken international commitments, the Moldovan authorities continuously fail to fully ensure freedom of religion and thought in Moldova, to combat and prevent discrimination on religious grounds. Over the last year human rights and anti-discrimination civil society organizations recorded a number of cases of discrimination on religious grounds, which point at persisting systemic problems and unwillingness of Moldovan public authorities to address this issue.

In September 2013 NGO Human Rights Information Center (CIDO) received a complaint of a group of Tao followers "Information Center DAO". On 30 May 2013 this groups has submitted the required documents to the Moldovan Ministry of Justice for registration as a non-governmental organization. After a considerable delay in examination of the submission (2,5 months instead of legally established period of 1 month), the Ministry of Justice denied the registration citing highly doubtful procedural grounds (Decision on this case in the original Romanian comes as an Annex to this Position Paper).

Around the same time in September 2013 a video documentation crew of the NGO Human Rights Information Center video-recorded a case of religious group "Russian Orthodox Church Over the Borders / Biserica Ortodoxă rusă din afara granielor INVIEREA DOMNULUI" from the Sagaidacul Nou village of the Cimisia district. The head of this group complained about serious obstacles to the functioning of the group (denial of registration, denial of religious building construction, unjustified imposition of fines, bullying), coming from local and central public authorities on instigation of the Moldovan Orthodox Church (of the Moscow Patriarchate).

On 2 September 2013 the Human Rights Information Center performed monitoring of the first school day in 5 randomly-picked schools across the country. The findings of this monitoring efforts show that in 3 out of 5 monitored schools an Orthodox priest took part in the official opening ceremonies of the new academic year, and performed religious rituals over a wide groups of school students and their parents without receiving their consent for participation in those rituals and ceremonies. In addition to these three schools, in one more school of the five, the school administration employed religious rhetoric, while addressing the participants to the school year opening ceremony. Being interviewed during the same monitoring visits, a good number of parents told the monitors that the selection of the "optional" discipline "The Basics of Orthodoxy" in reality takes place through a majority vote at the parents assembly, and not through the submission of individual opt-in requests.

Cyril, the Patriarch of Moscow and of the Entire Russia visited Moldova on 7-9 September 2013. The Government of Moldova put in place a plan for solemn meeting of the Patriarch, spending public human resources and funds for this visit. To our knowledge, none of the leaders of any other Moldovan religious groups ever enjoyed a similar attention of the Moldovan public figures or reception, employing public resources.

All these facts taken together made the Moldovan civil society to conclude that the **Moldovan authorities do not progress** in implementation of recommendations provided to Moldova by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief in September 2011 / February 2012, and of recommendations provided to Moldova under the Universal Periodic Review in October 2011. The recent findings also reiterate and further strengthen the findings of a 2012 Snapshot Study of the Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion (Fundamental Religious Freedoms and Rights) in the Republic of Moldova ([www.cido.org.md/attachments/article/79/Report EN.pdf](http://www.cido.org.md/attachments/article/79/Report_EN.pdf)).

Hereby CIDO calls upon the public authorities of Moldova to abide by the international - particularly European - human rights / anti-discrimination standards, and to stop supporting and endorsing one religious group to the detriment of other groups, oppressing and discriminating the latter. The Moldovan authorities need to seriously consider its international commitments, to fully adopt and start implementing the recommendations provided by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, and under the Universal Periodic Review with regard to respect and fulfilment of religious freedoms, without discrimination.