Фото: Andriy Dubchak / RadioSvoboda.org (RFE/RL)

The Parliament of Ukraine has delayed hearings on the draft laws #4128 and #4511 about religious organizations issues.

The draft laws if approved might influence the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (of Moscow Patriarchate) as well as other denominations' activities and they called some wide public reaction, the Institute for Religious Freedom reports.

At the same time, MP **Oleksiy Honcharenko**, Deputy to the Chairman of the Block Petra Poroshenka political party's fraction, informed journalists that the members of the Parliament

would not consider the draft laws soon.

As the IRF has informed earlier, the **draft law #4128** treats a procedure of changing the religious centers when a religious community (parish) leaves one church jurisdiction to join another one. The Parliamentary Committee while considering the draft law has suggested its own version of the procedure.

"The draft law #4128 about religious organizations that brought a wave of protests from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (of Moscow Patriarchate) does not contradict the Constitution of Ukraine. Its main purpose is to provide a specific mechanism to change membership of parishes in church bodies," explained his initiative MP **Viktor Yelenskyi**, the author of the draft law.

Meanwhile the Chief Scientific-Expert Office (CSEO) of the Parliament recommends to reject the draft law #4128. Experts point at the threat of the unwarranted state intrusion into autonomy of the religious congregations and new conflicts emerging because of the confusion caused by ways the churches' statutes are changed.

The draft law #4128 presupposes that a person belongs to a religious congregation by his self-identification with the parish and his participation in its religious life. The CSEO believes, however, it is not clear from the suggested amendments what should one understand by notions of "self-identification" and "religious life".

Taking into consideration the fact that membership is not fixed in a big part of religious parishes, the suggested wording about expressing agreement to change the church body membership by a bare majority of gathered citizens at the meeting is unproductive. In fact, number of the present persons at the meeting can be much smaller than number of members of the religious congregation in general, mention Parliament experts.

Furthermore, the CSEO does not rule out incidents "of making alternative and legally equal yet contrary decisions by different people who "self-identify" themselves with the religious congregation.

It is worthwhile to mention that it was not only the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (of Moscow Patriarchate) concerned, but also other denominations expressed their public concerns about the proposed changes, including the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, the Union of the Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine.

As for the **draft law #4511**, it forestalls a special status for the religious organizations that have their governing centers in Russian Federation as the state-invader.

The essence of the status, which is evidently and in particular prescribed for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (of Moscow Patriarchate), is in the duty of all the religious parishes to make a treaty (agreement) with the state that will include additional obligations to their activities. The draft law also has suggestions to appoint the central and regional church leadership only after the clergy candidates will be approved by the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine.

It is necessary to mention that the Chief Scientific-Expert Office of the Parliament has criticized the draft project #4511 as well and called the MPs to reject it for many reasons. One of them is a direct violation of the article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine that establishes the principle of no intrusion and separation of the state and church in Ukraine.

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