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Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly



Brussels, 24th of March 2025

TO: His Excellency Mr. Ambassador Vsevolod CHENTSOV
Head of the Mission of Ukraine to the European Union

RE: The necessity of respecting religious freedom and the rights of association of the Romanian minority, specifically regarding the Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine

Your Excellency,

On 29 February 2024, the European Parliament approved the Ukraine Facility 2024–2027, a specific instrument enabling the EU to provide Ukraine with stable and predictable financial support amounting to 50 billion euros. Among the objectives of the Facility is the following: “strengthening freedom and independence of the media and artistic and academic freedom, as well as fostering a conducive environment for civil society; promoting social dialogue and civil society involvement; promoting non-discrimination, to ensure and strengthen respect for the rights of persons belonging to all minorities.” One of the prerequisites for granting support under this Facility is that Ukraine guarantees human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Once the Commission confirms that the conditions have been met, payments to Ukraine are made quarterly, up to 31 December 2027.

On 25 June 2025, Ukraine’s accession negotiations to the European Union officially began. As you know, Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) provides that any European country which respects the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights—including the rights of persons belonging to minorities—and is committed to promoting them, may apply for membership in the Union.

As a country seeking accession to the European Union, Ukraine must demonstrate that it fully meets the accession criteria agreed upon by the European Council in Copenhagen, June 1993. The Copenhagen criteria refer to the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy, and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.

The Romanian national minority in Ukraine, an indigenous and compact population, represents the largest non-Slavic minority in your country, with over 409,000 people according to the latest census. This community is concentrated in the regions of Chernivtsi (44%), Odesa (30%), Zakarpattia (8%), and other areas (18%). All ethnic Romanians share a common mother tongue, Romanian, and recent decisions by the Ukrainian Government to replace the term “Moldovan language” with “Romanian language” have been positively received.

Most Romanians in Ukraine are Orthodox Christians, though there are also Greek-Catholic and neo-Protestant communities. On 25 August 2024, Ukrainian citizens of Romanian ethnicity and Orthodox faith established the "Religious Association (Administration) Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine", in communion with the Romanian Patriarchate. This initiative complies with Ukrainian legislation and international instruments, including the Constitution of Ukraine (Art. 35), the Law on Freedom of Conscience (Arts. 9, 14), and the European Convention on Human Rights (Art. 9).

On 28 August 2024, this religious association formally requested legal registration from the State Service for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience.

However, the registration of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine has been blocked, despite the law providing a maximum period of 3 months for processing such requests. This delay contravenes Ukraine's international obligations and affects the rights of the Romanian minority. Additionally, Ukrainian authorities are tolerating the abusive confiscation of places of worship belonging to Romanian Orthodox communities, preventing their reintegration into the Romanian Patriarchate.

The Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine has repeatedly requested registration, invoking the European Convention on Human Rights and case law of the European Court. On 29 January 2025, the request was renewed, but the Ukrainian authorities have not acted. On 28 February 2025, an initiative group appealed to President Volodymyr Zelensky, emphasizing the moral and legal importance of this issue.

The current situation creates the impression that Ukraine is trying to discourage Romanian communities from affiliating with the Romanian Orthodox Church, thereby violating the principles of the rule of law and religious freedom. This is particularly concerning in the context of Ukraine's EU accession negotiations, which require the respect for human and minority rights.

I respectfully ask you to convey to President Volodymyr Zelensky and to the Cabinet of Ministers of your country—personally to Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal—my deep concern regarding this matter, as well as an official encouragement to act in accordance with Ukrainian law and to register the Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, thereby demonstrating Ukraine's commitment to European values and standards.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration.

Serban-Dimitrie STURDZA
Member of the European Parliament

