

Ukrainian rector says state security services watching him

OXFORD, England – The U.S.-born rector of Ukraine's Catholic university said his country is "living in dark times" and accused state security services of placing him under surveillance.

"Our telephones are tapped – the stationary ones probably, the mobile ones certainly. Lists of my telephone conversations have been shown to colleagues, and an assistant was followed through the city," said Father Borys Gudziak, rector of the Lviv-based Ukrainian Catholic University.

"I have seen fundamental change some in hopeless situations – from communism to an independent Ukraine, from growing authoritarianism to the Orange Revolution. Although I believe we're living in dark times, I'm convinced the spirit and human dignity will prevail," he told Austria's Die Presse daily June 16.

He said the university students and faculty were "not a nest of radical revolutionaries. But we do try to be free."

The priest told the daily that other university staffers had received calls from the state security services asking about his activities.

"These are the occurrences I know about – I'm also certain some UCU colleagues are under pressure to collaborate with the security services out of fear," said Father Gudziak, whose university has around 1,400 full- and part-time students.

In a May 2010 memorandum, Father Gudziak said he had identified "planned actions to circumscribe civic freedom, democracy and the basic dignity of human beings" in Ukraine, adding that he had "reliable testimony and audible evidence" of efforts to intimidate staff and students at the Catholic university, using "methods well-known in Soviet times."

However, the claim was rejected by the security services director, Valeriy Khoroshkovsky, and criticized by Bishop Marian Buczek, secretary-general of

Ukraine's Catholic bishops' conference, who said two months later that there was no evidence of an anti-Catholic campaign.

In his Die Presse interview, Father Gudziak said current government reforms were undermining university autonomy in Ukraine, adding that he believed other rectors had received "visits" from the security services and were afraid to speak out.

"In view of these developments, one has to ask whether the Orange Revolution hasn't been ineffective," the priest said, in a reference to December 2004 mass protests that helped bring a pro-Western president, Viktor Yushchenko, to power.