

Bulgarian Christian Bishop Cyril Found Dead on Beach

Bishop Cyril of Varna, a prominent Bulgarian Orthodox cleric who was ousted last year as a secret police collaborator under Communist rule, was found dead on a Black Sea beach on Tuesday, regional police said.

The body of Cyril, 59, who headed one of Bulgaria's biggest Christian Orthodox eparchies and also served as an interim patriarch, was discovered near his coastal residence. An autopsy showed he had drowned and there were no signs of violence.

About 80 percent of Bulgarians say they are Orthodox Christians—the mainstream religion also in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Greece, Romania and Serbia, but few see churchgoing as important to their lives, recent surveys show.

Trust in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was shaken after an historical commission reported in January 2012 that 11 of its 15 bishops collaborated with the old Communist secret police and maintained a luxurious lifestyle.

Cyril, born Bogomil Kovachev, was among the 11 and his Darzhavna Sigurnost police file showed he provided information of use in repressing dissent from 1976 until the 1989 fall of the Communist regime.

However, Bulgarian bishops are appointed for life and the church has taken no action against any of the 11 prelates.

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