



## **Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia and Activities of Other Orthodox Churches in Its Territory**

*The establishment by the Patriarchate of Constantinople of a parallel jurisdiction in the canonical territory of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia is discussed in particular in an article by Peter Brandtner.*

Our Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia is one of the youngest in the Orthodox world. However, from the moment it received independence it has been in the canonically equal relationships with other autocephalous sister Churches. These equitable relationships already constitute its integral tradition and a constant of its self-perception. Lately this tradition has been subjected to a deliberate untrue interpretation in the mass media with the hardly concealed view of justifying at any cost the notorious uncanonical steps, concerning which the Holy Synod of our Church expressed its judgment at its extraordinary session on December 17, 2019.

In its resolution our Holy Synod expressed its canonical position with regard to an organization called “Holy Patriarchal Stavropegic Monastery of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos” registered as a non-church legal entity (non-governmental association) of the Czech Republic with the number 08502374, which is headed by a metropolitan of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Arsenios (Kardamakis). The Holy Synod of our Church unanimously resolved that the establishment and function in its territory of monasteries and parishes of other autocephalous Local Orthodox Churches without prior consent of our Holy Synod are inadmissible.

At the moment acting in the territory of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, apart from the abovementioned organization whose establishment and activities the Holy Synod considered to be uncanonical, is the Metochion of the Russian Orthodox Church in Karlovy Vary. This Metochion was set up over 40 years ago at the request of the First Hierarch of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Czechoslovakia (at the time of the Metochion’s establishment our country was called Czechoslovakia, hence our Church was named the Orthodox Church of Czechoslovakia), His Beatitude Metropolitan Dorotheos and the Holy Synod of our Church. The Metochion enjoyed support of all our subsequent Primates. In its turn, according to the deep-rooted tradition and the principle of reciprocity, the Metochion of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia has been operating in Moscow for more than 20 years.

Several other Local Orthodox Churches have similar metochions at the Moscow Patriarchal Throne. In fact, such metochions in Moscow are not a new phenomenon – their analogues, including the Metochion of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, existed prior to the Russian Revolution.

The Russian Orthodox Church's Metochion in Karlovy Vary was set up in 1979 in compliance with the wish of our Primate and Synod. Yet, the Russian Orthodox Church dates its presence in our country back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century at least. Back then, in resort towns in the western part of today's West Czechia, three churches were built with the money donated by the Russian Orthodox believers with the view of offering spiritual guidance to the Orthodox Christians in sacrificial gratitude for the healing thanks to the Czech mineral waters. The pastoral and charitable activities of the Russian Orthodox Church's clerics serving at these churches helped many Czech people return to the Holy Orthodoxy and supported the Pan-Slavism movement which played such an important role in gaining state independence by Czechoslovakia in 1918.

Thus, the tradition of good relations between the Orthodox Czechs and the Russian Orthodox Church has centuries-old history, and these relations themselves are of fundamental significance for the Czech Orthodoxy. Stemming from this very tradition is the phenomenon of the autocephalous Church of Czechoslovakia which received independence from the Russian Church. Maintaining and developing relationships between our two Churches in the spirit of mutuality and equality remain to this day the purpose and essential part of the day-to-day activities of the Russian Orthodox Church's Metochion in Karlovy Vary.

So, what difference do we see between the Russian Orthodox Church's Metochion in Karlovy Vary and the non-governmental association "Holy Patriarchal Stavropegic Monastery of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos?" The difference is very important and great: it is in canonicity, in spirit and in purpose.

The canonicity in this case is determined, first of all, by the existence of mutual consent between our Church and another Local Orthodox Church, expressed in the canonical form, that is, through a respective decision of the Holy Synod of our Church. From this point of view the Russian Metochion is absolutely canonical. As for the strange and from the very beginning scandalous non-governmental association created by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, it lacks such agreement, for it was set up without consent and even in some sort of secrecy from both our hierarchy and us the faithful.

The Russian Orthodox Church's Metochion is a church entity registered in compliance with the Law on Churches and Religious Associations of the Czech Republic, and it acts strictly in its spirit and within its framework, while the non-governmental association of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, on the contrary, despite its obvious church principles and purposes, does not have such registration and officially acts as a non-church entity.

The purpose of existence of the Russian Orthodox Church's Metochion has always been the development of good relationships with our Church in unchanging respect for its autocephalous status. The Metochion has never taken any steps to create a parallel jurisdiction in our canonical territory, since it would run counter to the goals of its existence, to its statute and to the sacred canons, while the abovementioned non-governmental association of the Ecumenical Patriarchate – according to its statute – is aimed at creating its own structure in the Czech Republic. It seems as if all this is happening not in the territory of an autocephalous Church, but in some unbaptized country which does not have its own autocephalous Orthodox Church and therefore is seen as a “land of barbarians,” as a territory in need of either evangelization or the preaching of Orthodoxy.

The situation is, in fact, simple and tragic. Firstly, for over half a century we have our own fully-fledged autocephalous Local Orthodox Church recognized all over the world. Secondly, in this we were helped by the Russian Orthodox Church which to this day, at our own request and with our own consent, has its representation – the metochion church in Karlovy Vary. And thirdly, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, acting without our knowledge through the agents who provoke our bewilderment, has created in our territory a structure whose purpose is to bury our autocephaly. Pray tell, who in this outrageous case will win the sympathy of the Czechs?

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