Serbian Orthodox Church formulates its official position on ecclesiastical situation in Ukraine

The Press and Mass Information Bureau of the Serbian Orthodox Church spread a statement emphasizing, in particular, that the only Church known to and recognized by the Serbian Patriarchate in Ukraine is the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church led by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine. The document characterizes the encroachment of the Patriarchate of Constantinople on the territory of the Russian Church as uncanonical and calls the "unification council" convened with the participation of Constantinople a disuniting and dividing false-council that "deepened a ditch of alienation and societal disintegration in the unhappy country of Ukraine." The Serbian hierarchs and clergymen are recommended to refrain from liturgical and canonical communion not only with the "primate" of the newly-created OCU and "others of that ilk," but also with those bishops and clerics who con-celebrate and enter into communion with them. The Serbian Orthodox Church also asks the Patriarch of Constantinople to reconsider his decisions in order to restore the "blessed peace and unity of the Local holy Churches of God."

The text of the document is given below.

Last November the Serbian Orthodox Church was the first among the autocephalous Orthodox Churches to officially react at the highest level (Bishops' Council) to intentions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople arbitrarily and autocratically, as "the first without equals" (*primus sine paribus*), and not as "the first among equals" (*primus inter pares*), to "rule" and "resolve" ecclesiastical problems in the Ukrainian land, and asked not to do so, but to really help resolve the crisis in the fraternal dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church and in consultation with the rest of the Churches.

Regrettably, the voice of the Serbian Church was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness:" no response came from Constantinople – only deathly silence. Later the Holy Synod of the Serbian Church appealed to Constantinople, asking it again not to hasten, but to act in the spirit of conciliarity, brotherly love and responsibility not only for the Church in Ukraine, but also for the unity of the Orthodoxy as a whole. The reaction was the same – deathly silence. Then in Thessaloniki His Holiness the Patriarch of Serbia personally implored the Patriarch of Constantinople to do so – regrettably, the result was the same. It should be noted that each time the Serbian Church informed all the local sister Churches about its position and steps.

After everything that the Patriarchate of Constantinople has done in Kiev – and Kiev, as is widely known, is the "Mother of the Russian cities" – the Serbian Orthodox Church takes the following position, of

which all the Local Orthodox Churches were also officially informed.

1. The Serbian Orthodox Church does not recognize the uncanonical “encroachment” of His Holiness the Patriarch of Constantinople on the canonical territory of the Most Holy Russian Church, since the Metropolia of Kiev by no means can be identified with today’s “Ukraine,” which includes dozens of other ecclesiastical dioceses. It was transferred to the Moscow Patriarchate in 1686, as can be concluded on the basis of the documents of Patriarch Dionysius IV of Constantinople, of the decisions of his successors, of the “Taktika,” “Syntagmatia,” “Diptychs,” ‘Calendars” and ‘Annuals” that have been issued since then not only by the other Churches, but also by the Patriarchate of Constantinople itself, as well as even on the basis of personal statements and utterances of the current Patriarch of Constantinople made right up to last April.
2. Concurrently, the Serbian Orthodox Church does not recognize as the “Autocephalous Church of Ukraine” the proclaimed, but non-existent from the canonical point of view, imposed by force and artificial “confederation” of the Ukrainian schismatic groups which are again fiercely fighting with each other and uncontrollably moving towards division. The schismatics have remained schismatics. Once a schismatic, always a schismatic, unless there is sincere conversion and deep repentance. The only Church that the Serbian Church knows and recognizes is the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church led by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine.
3. The Serbian Church also does not recognize the Kiev “council,” wrongly called “unifying,” in which none of the hierarchs of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church took part (since the day before His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew had accepted into his Church Alexander Drabinko and Metropolitan Simeon of Vinnitsa without the canonical letter of release from their Church). The scenes, the setting and the backstage of this strange gathering, to say the least, are known to almost everyone. In fact, it is an anti-unifying, disuniting and dividing false-council that deepened a ditch of alienation and societal disintegration in the unhappy country of Ukraine. For all these reasons the Serbian Church regards its decisions as anti-canonical, void and therefore by no means binding.
4. The Serbian Church does not recognize the schismatic episcopate as Orthodox episcopate and the schismatic clergy as Orthodox clergy, inasmuch as those belonging to Denisenko’s wing received “existence” from a defrocked, excommunicated and anathematized hierarch (the fact that Patriarch Bartholomew himself officially recognized at some point), and those belonging to Maletich’s group have neither apostolic succession nor priesthood in general. No document, no, as they say, stroke of a pen can make undone what was done, can turn things non-existent into things existent. Therefore, the Serbian Church does not recognize that Mr. or citizen Dumenko (Yepifany) is even a hierarch, let alone the primate of an autocephalous Church (even his “spiritual father,” Mr. or citizen Denisenko, “actual primate” and “patriarch” for life, does not recognize him in his latter office).
5. Finally, the Serbian Church expectedly has to recommend its eminent hierarchs and honourable clerics to refrain from liturgical and canonical communion not only with the aforementioned Mr. Yepifany (Dumenko) and others of that ilk, but also with those bishops and clerics who con-celebrate and enter into communion with them, in accordance with the principle of the sacred canons that persons who enter into communion with the excommunicated ones shall be excommunicated themselves.

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The Serbian Orthodox Church asks and implores His Holiness the Patriarch of Constantinople to

reconsider his decisions taken up to this day and to restore the blessed peace and unity of the Local holy Churches of God, because nothing is as necessary and precious as love, peace and like-mindedness among brothers.

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