# Metropolitan Hilarion meets with President Milorad Dodik of the Republika Srpska

[gallery]

November 16, 2012 – Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, while on his visit to the Serbian Orthodox Church with the blessing of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, arrived in the capital of the Republika Srpska Banja Luka on personal invitation from its president Milorad Dodik.

He was met at the airport by Bishop Efrem of Banja Luka, Serbian Orthodox Church, and Russian Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina A. Botsan-Kharchenko.

Metropolitan Hilarion had a talk with president Dodik at his residence. Welcoming his guest, President Dodik expressed gratitude to the Russian Orthodox Church for her invariable support of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian people. He spoke about the development of partnership between the Church and the state in Republika Srpska, mentioning that the basics of Orthodox faith are taught in general schools in the republic and the plans to extend these classes. 'We are struggling to preserve our identity, and in this struggle we link our hope with Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church', the president noted.

Metropolitan Hilarion thanked President Dodik for the invitation and stressed the importance of close bilateral contacts between the Russian and Serbian Orthodox Churches in maintaining fraternal relations between the two nations under their pastoral care. The president and the metropolitan exchanged their thoughts about cooperation between Slavic nations and their relations with the world around them. 'The Serbian people have found themselves divided by political borders but there is a common language and common faith which unite people across all the borders, Metropolitan Hilarion said.

In conclusion of the meeting, Metropolitan Hilarion presented President Dodik with a copy of his book 'You Are the Light of the World' in Serbian and a disk with a film about Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

After that, President Dodik and Metropolitan Hilarion made brief statements to the local press. Metropolitan Hilarion said that during his talk with Mr. Dodik he continued to discuss the topic which had been initiated at the meeting he had had that morning with Serbia's President T. Nikolic, namely, the present and future of the Serbian people:

'The Serbian people are divided today by political borders. The Serbs live in Serbia, in Republika Srpska and other territories, and many Serbs have found themselves dispersed around the world. This situation is a direct consequence of the tragedy that befell the Serbian people in the 20th century. The political frontiers which have been established today are consequences of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, just as the political frontiers established today in the space of the former Soviet Union are consequences of its disintegration.

'However, there is a unity that transcends political borders – the unity of people based on the unity of faith and language. The Serbian people, in the hardest of times including of the time of the Turkish occupation, have preserved their faith and their language. And this desire to preserve their religious and ethnic identity by all means would save the Serbian people in the hardest critical times of their history.

'The Russian people and the Russian Orthodox Church have always been with the Serbian people and the Serbian Orthodox Church, and will be. And my visit to Republika Srpska today is only one of the signs of solidarity between the Russian Church, the Russian people with the Serbian people who are experiencing a hard time today'.

Metropolitan Hilarion wished President Dodik God's help in his important and not easy service.

Later that day, Metropolitan Hilarion visited the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Banja Luka, which was destroyed by Hilter’s aircraft in 1941 and has been restored in our days with the support of Republika Srpska authorities.

*DECR Communication Service*

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