



## Moscow-Kiev video bridge before Patriarch Kirill's visit to Ukraine

On July 19, 2010, a Moscow-Kiev video bridge took place at the RIA-Novosti press center about His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia's visit to Ukraine.

Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, head of the Synodal department for church-society relations; V. Legoida, head of the Synodal information department, and Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman, participated. The participants in Kiev were Archbishop Mitrofan of Belotserkovsk and Boguslavsk, chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Archimandrite German, dean of the Pochayev Laura of the Dormition, and V. Anisimov, head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's press service.

Mr. Legoida opened the meeting, speaking about the program of the Patriarchal visit to Ukraine. 'It is the second primatial visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine. It will take place from July 20 to 28, on the invitation of the Holy Synod and dioceses of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. This year His Holiness Kirill will visit the dioceses of Odessa, Dnepropetrovsk and Kiev', he said. He indicated that the purpose of the visit is to meet with the flock, to venerate shrines, to celebrate in Odessa, Dnepropetrovsk and Kiev. There will also be a meeting with the public in Odessa, a visit to the state-run Makarov Machine Building Plant in Dnepropetrovsk and a foundation ceremony for a church to be built in the territory of the plant and other events.

Archbishop Mitrofan spoke from the studio in Kiev about the expectations placed on the patriarchal visit. 'The Orthodox Ukraine is looking forward to the arrival of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill. We remember his visit last year. It showed how strong the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is today in spite of the existing problems of schism. Everybody – all the episcopate, clergy and the faithful who assembled to pray together with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill showed that our people have an enormous spiritual potential. The last year's visit of His Holiness culminated in the service on the Day of the Pochaev Icon of the Mother of God at the Pochaev Laura of the Dormition', he said.

He also expressed hope that this year's visit of His Holiness Kirill to Ukrainian dioceses will contribute to the consolidation of the Orthodox Ukraine. 'I believe we will identify possible ways for us to move forward in the efforts to overcome the sad phenomenon of schism. At the same time, we expect to settle some problems existing in the church-state relations. But the most important thing is that people will have an opportunity for praying together with their Primate', he said, adding that an enormous number of people were calling to the metropolia these days, asking about the program of the visit and how to take part in events together with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill. 'People are looking forward to meeting His

Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia in Ukraine, and we hope that just as last year this visit will be beneficial for both the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and our state and those who unfortunately is still out of the canonical communion with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church and the Universal Orthodoxy', he said.

Mr. Anisimov pointed to a number of publications which had appeared in the Ukrainian mass media before the visit, especially an interview given by His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine about the program of the Patriarchal visit. His Beatitude said, 'The visit of His Holiness the Patriarch is discussed as a feast for the Orthodox in Ukraine. Last year, His Holiness visited over ten monasteries, and this year he will focus on meetings with the youth and intellectuals'. Metropolitan Vladimir noted that His Holiness the Patriarch is an outstanding preacher, and many would like to talk with him. In every city he will visit, meetings and discussions are planned. Mr. Anisimov also stressed that the Patriarchal visit to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church will be mostly of missionary significance.

He also said the Patriarch will give special attention to the social service of the Orthodox Church in visits to charities, meetings with youth and public figures. 'I believe, during these meetings the conceptual attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church to the most burning problems of today will be voices, and this, to my mind, will be the most interesting and important thing', he said.

Recalling the visit of Patriarch Kirill to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church last year, Archbishop Mitrofan stressed that the visit made tangible the unity of the episcopate, clergy and the faithful around the Primate of the Church. 'At the same time, the problems existing in relations between church and state got moving. The words His Holiness the Patriarch addressed to the leaders of our state and ordinary believers show that the Church realizes first of all the mission commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ to lead people to salvation. The visit showed that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in spite of all the problems she has to settle, successfully carried on this mission under the leadership of His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir', he said.

According to Archbishop Mitrofan, the visit of Patriarch Kirill gave a new impetus to searching for ways of overcoming the schism among the Orthodox in Ukraine. 'Even those who are outside the church fold have a different attitude today to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church and the personality of His Holiness the Patriarch', he noted.

Asked by the Ukrainian journalists about the significance of the Patriarchal visit last year for the whole of the Russian Orthodox Church and about the attitude to it in Ukraine's western regions, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov said, 'We all in this RIA-Novosti's studio in Moscow and those who talk to us from Kiev participated in the last year's visit of His Holiness. Having the honour to work with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for many years, we know how dear Ukraine is for him, what a great place it occupies in

his heart and his life. And the visit last year, the first one after the Patriarchal enthronement, convinced us very vividly that it is mutual love. Many thousands of people came to pray together with His Holiness the Patriarch, to hear his word of preaching. These thousands sometimes merged into a sheer human sea, and it was especially memorable on the last day of the Patriarchal visit to the Pochaev Laura of the Dormition. We are looking forward to our new meeting with Ukraine, its shrines, its faithful. And we know that even if this kind of trip can be somewhat tiresome physically, it strengthens the Patriarch's heart spiritually as Primate of one Church of All Russia, which began in Kiev, for which Kiev will always be its main sacred city, its heart and the font of its baptism. These feelings of unity, which no forces will ever destroy, accompanied us during the visit last year. We are confident that in the new conditions of the Ukrainian society's life today this feeling will be even more tangible and strong'.

Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin remarked that in case of a Patriarchal visit to Ukraine, it is actually a coming home. 'We normally use the word "visit" and we are accustomed to it. I myself use it with regard to a Patriarchal trip fairly often. But it seems to me it is more correct also linguistically and essentially to speak about a coming, not a visit. It is not a trip of the head of one state to another; it is not a trip of the Primate of one Church to another Church. It is an archpastor's coming to see his flock, the Primate of a Church coming to see his archpastors and his dioceses', Father Vsevolod said, adding, 'His Holiness Patriarch Kirill seeks to feel at home both in Kiev, Odessa and Dnepropetrovsk. It was the same in Lutsk and Rovno a year ago. His Holiness the Patriarch is coming home to see his people – this should be understood clearly'.

He also said, 'Our Church is a multinational one. Belonging to it are people of various nationalities, people of various walks of life, people of various cultures including those who sometimes have arguments about political matters. The Church is always beyond it, beyond the state interests of any country including the Russian Federation and Ukraine. But it is close to all peoples in its fold, all those who make up its flock, and treats them all equally. Certainly, the Ukrainian flock of our unified Church is one of its strongest parts. Father Nikolay was quite right in saying that His Holiness the Patriarch was welcomed with genuine religious enthusiasm. Scores of thousands of people came without any special organization... This spiritual enthusiasm is very inspiring. We already have reports that in Odessa, Dnepropetrovsk and Kiev many thousands of people will come, which is very gratifying. It certainly inspires His Holiness the Patriarch who always experiences a tremendous fit of energy when people come not just to look at him but to pray together with him and to express their good feelings. And for all our faithful in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan and in the far-abroad countries, it is a tremendous inspiration and great joy to know that people love their Patriarch so much and love their Church so much. We have a common spiritual space in which there are many centers and in which there must be no competition as to what center is more important. We have something much more important than political and administrative centers – we have common saints, common spiritual traditions... We have a mentality in common. We are such because we have come out of the Kiev baptismal font, and I

believe we have every reason to preserve this unity, fearing nothing, being ashamed of nothing and remaining as we are'.

After these statements, the participants in the Moscow-Kiev video bridge answered questions from Russian, Ukrainian and European mass media people.

*DECR Communication Service*

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Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/56953/>