# Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission completes its work

The Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, meeting in Chambesy, Switzerland, closed its work on December 16 with a thanksgiving.

The Commission, whose task is to elaborate the agenda of a Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, continued to consider the problem of autocephaly and ways of declaring it – the discussion which began in 1993, and prepared proposals on autonomy and ways of declaring it.

The documents prepared by the Commission will be submitted to a Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference. They stipulate in particular that the ecclesiological, canonical and pastoral prerequisites for granting autocephaly to a particular church region, if requested, are to be assessed by the Mother Church at her Local Council. If the Council's decision is favourable, the Mother Church is to notify it to the Ecumenical Patriarchate which is in its turn to inform other Local Autocephalous Churches in order to find out whether there is a pan-Orthodox consensus expressed in the unanimity of Councils or Synods of the autocephalous Churches. Expressing the consent of the Mother Church and the pan-Orthodox consensus, the Ecumenical Patriarch is to declare the autocephaly of a petitioning Church by issuing a Tomos of Autocephaly to be signed by the Ecumenical Patriarch and verified by the signatures of the Primates of Orthodox Churches invited for it by the Ecumenical Patriarch.

The question of the contents of the Tomos and the signing procedure will be considered additionally by the next meeting of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission.

The Commission has also prepared a document expressing a common position of Orthodox Churches on autonomy and the ways of declaring it, describing the notion of autonomy, the procedure to be observed in declaring autonomy and its consequences.

It was agreed that the initiation and completion of the procedure for granting autonomy to a certain part of its canonical jurisdiction is exclusively under the competence of the respective autocephalous Church. It is noted that in church practice there are different degrees in which an autonomous Church depends on the autocephalous Church that has granted autonomy to it. A petition for autonomy is considered by the autocephalous Church which, having assessed the prerequisites and reasons for this petition and taken a favourable decision, issues an appropriate Tomos defining the territorial boundaries of the autonomous Church and its relationships with the autocephalous Church to which it belongs in accordance with the established criteria of church Tradition. Then the primate of the autocephalous

Church notifies the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other autocephalous Orthodox Churches on the declaration of an autonomous Church.

The draft document also provides for measures to find a canonical settlement of an issue in case of differences arising from two autocephalous Churches' granting the autonomous status to church communities in the same geographical church region.

The question of Diptychs of the Primates of the Local Churches will be considered by the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission at its next meeting.

*DECR Communication Service*

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Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/58017/