



## **Statement by the Communications Service of the Department for External Church Relations on the Expulsion by the Bulgarian Authorities of the dean of the metochion of the Russian Orthodox Church in Sofia.**



**DECR Communication service, 21.09.2023.**

On 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023 the Bulgarian authorities compelled the dean of the metochion (representation church) of the Russian Orthodox Church in Sofia archimandrite Vassian (Zmeyev), the metochion secretary archpriest Yevgeny Pavelchuk and a metochion staff member to leave the territory of Bulgaria within twenty-four hours under the false pretext that their continuing to remain in Bulgaria “constitutes a threat to the state security of Bulgaria.”

The Russian Orthodox Church has protested in the strongest terms against the unjust expulsion of its representatives from Bulgaria. The expulsion of priests, whose calling is service to God and people and the preaching of peace and brotherhood among nations, is an outrageous act dictated by Russophobic

motives and the desire to erase the glorious pages of the common history of Bulgaria and Russia.

The Russian Church of Saint Nicholas in Sofia, which houses the representation of the Russian Orthodox Church, over the past hundred years has been a symbol of the spiritual unity of our fraternal peoples. Its history is intertwined with the most important events in the recent history of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, including the resolution of the Greek-Bulgarian schism and the restoration of patriarchal rule within the Bulgarian Church. The parishioners of the metochion, among whom there are many who represent the Russian emigration, have made a notable contribution to Bulgarian theological scholarship.

Within the crypt of the church is to be found the tomb of the former dean of the metochion Saint Seraphim (Sobolev), who is widely venerated in both the Bulgarian and Russian Churches. Every day a large number of Orthodox Christians from Sofia and other cities come to venerate his relics. Today's decision by the Bulgarian authorities demonstrates their disrespect for the feelings of believers who have now been denied the opportunity of visiting his tomb as a result of the cessation of the activities of the Russian metochion.

The crude measures of police arbitrariness undertaken by the Bulgarian authorities, aimed at undermining the traditionally friendly relationship between the two sister Churches, aim to set fraternal nations against each other, nations who are tied together by a common history and a single faith. We firmly believe that those who initiated these insulting plans will endure defeat. The Patriarchates of Moscow and Bulgaria will preserve their commonality that is rooted in the centuries and will never betray the historical memory of our peoples.

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