DECR chairman attends official opening of an exhibition on interior decoration of St. Sava Church in Belgrade



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On December 19, an exhibition entitled ‘The Beautification of the Cathedral of St. Sava in Belgrade’ opened at the Museum and Exhibition Complex of the Russian Academy of Arts in Moscow.

The exhibition, organized by the Russian Academy of Arts in partnership with the Moscow International Foundation for Support to UNESCO, occupies an area of over 600 square metres, offering insight into the general artistic concept behind the interior mosaic decoration of the Cathedral of St. Sava in the Serbian capital and showing design drawings and sketches of its various elements. It is an unprecedentedly large-scale project carried out by a team of Russian and Belarusian mosaicists under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, attended the exhibition opening with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'.

Mr Nikolai Mukhin, academician, member of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Arts, People's Artist of Russia, who was the author of the project and supervised the interior decoration works, showed Metropolitan Anthony exhibits on display, giving him an overview of various stages in his team's work.

The exhibition was opened by the President of the Russian Academy of Arts, Zurab Tsereteli. In his opening address, he spoke of an important role of the academic artistic school and its representatives – the mosaicists who had created the mosaic decoration for St. Sava Church, thus carrying out the major project in the history of monumental art.

The DECR chairman read out **greetings from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'**.

His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije of Serbia also sent a message of greetings to the artists and exhibition visitors, in which he noted that the interior decoration of the Church of St. Sava in Belgrade opened a new page in the history of Christian art and became a visible symbol of Russia-Serbia friendship.

"A magnificent work of art created for the Church of St. Sava in Belgrade by a team led by Nikolai Mukhin, People's Artist of Russia, will go down in history as part of the centuries-old traditions of friendship and brotherhood between Russia and Serbia," Mr Sergei Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, wrote in his message.

"It is a wonderful thing that such splendid exhibition has opened in our capital today, allowing Muscovites and tourists to get at least some idea of how beautiful the recently constructed St. Sava Cathedral in Belgrade is, to learn more about its interior decoration and see fragments of the beautiful mosaics adorning the magnificent church," Metropolitan Anthony said to journalists covering the exhibition opening.

"The Cathedral of St. Sava is a remarkable church. First of all, it is a house of God – a place of worship and prayer for Orthodox Christians living in Belgrade and pilgrims. Its great importance also lies in the fact that it is a visible symbol of centuries-old friendship between the peoples of Russia and Serbia and between the two sisterly Local Orthodox Churches – the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. The history of our relations goes back centuries," the DECR chairman added, "To us, it is symbolic that the interior decoration works in the church have been completed today. Right from the

start, the Russian Orthodox Church was directly involved in the project. Crucial assistance came from the Russian authorities, which helped carry out the project. As His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' noted in his message of greetings, this church and the project in general is an offering from Russia and the Russian Church to Saint Sava of Serbia – the most venerated saint of the Serbian Orthodox Church – and to all pious Serbian Orthodox people."

Opened on December 20, 2023, the exhibition will last till February 4, 2024.

Address: Museum and Exhibition Complex of the Russian Academy of Arts, Tsereteli Art Gallery (19 Prechistenka street, Moscow).

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The Cathedral of St. Sava in Belgrade was designed as the major cathedral of the Serbian Patriarchate and the largest Orthodox church in Europe. Construction works began back in the 1930s in Vračar area in Belgrade. The site was chosen as it had been there that the relics of St. Sava of Serbia – the founder and first Primate of the Serbian Orthodox Church – had been burned on the Turkish authorities' orders. The work stopped to be resumed only in 1985.

On March 16, 2012, a **protocol on Russia's participation in the interior decoration of the Church of St Sava in Belgrade** was signed in Moscow by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov and Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vuk Jeremić.

In 2013, in compliance with the protocol, a Russian-Serbian Working Group was set up to coordinate further joint work. The Working Group chose members of the jury for a contest in which the best interior decoration design for the church was to be determined. Acting as the jury co-chairpersons were Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and Mr Ivica Dačić, Frist Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia.

In the summer of 2014, an **All-Russian Competition for Designing the Interior Decoration of the Cathedral of St. Sava in Belgrade** was announced. On October 6, 2014, the contest jury chaired by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and Mr Ivica Dačić **chose winners**. The first prize was awarded to a project of the International Foundation for Assistance to UNESCO, designed by a team led by Nikolai Mukhin, People's Artist of the Russian Federation. The second prize went to a project of the Belarusian mosaicists designed by a mural painting workshop of the Convent of St. Elisabeth in Minsk.

On February 22, 2018, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk attended a ceremony held in the Cathedral of St. Sava in Belgrade after the **mosaic decoration for the cathedral's main dome had been**

transferred to the Serbian Orthodox Church. The mosaics were made between 2016 to 2017 by the team of the Russian mosaicists led by Nikolai Mukhin.

On March 23, 2019, an agreement was signed at the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Belgrade on Russia's further participation in the mosaic decoration works for the Cathedral of St. Sava.

On December 18, 2019, an acceptance commission, which met at the Russian Science and Culture Centre in Belgrade, accepted the mosaic decoration for the sanctuary and the central part of the church.

On December 15, 2020, a ceremony took place in Belgrade, marking the **completion of the mosaic decoration works at the Church of St. Sava**. Among those who attended the ceremony was Mr Sergei Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In an interview to Politica Serbian newspaper published in 2019, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' said, in particular, "The Church of St. Sava is a magnificent building. Its construction took a very long time due to disruptions created by the godless authorities. However, as it often happens in spiritual life, that which is sown in dishonor, is raised in glory; which is sown in weakness, is raised in power (cf. 1 Cor 15:43). The Church of St Sava is a shrine of nation-wide and pan-Orthodox importance. Often, it is a work for several generations to create such holy sites. The fact that Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church are taking part in the decoration of this magnificent church serves as a manifestation of the deeply rooted unshakeable ties between our two Churches and people under their spiritual omophorion."

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