Russian Church Synod expresses strong disagreement with decision to establish “Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine”

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On 12th March 2024, members of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church had under consideration (Minutes No. 29) the resolutions of the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church of 29th February 2024, which had established the “Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine” and declared invalid any canonical punishments imposed on the clerics of the Orthodox Church of Moldova who had been received without letters of release into the “Metropolis of Bessarabia” of the Romanian Patriarchate, patriarchia.ru **reports**.

On 29th February 2024, the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church resolved “to bless, encourage

and support the initiatives of Romanian Orthodox communities in Ukraine to re-establish communion with the Mother Church – the Romanian Patriarchate – through their legal organisation in a religious structure called the Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine; and "to reaffirm that all Romanian Orthodox clerics… from the Republic of Moldova who return to the Metropolis of Bessarabia are canonical clerics.., and any disciplinary sanction directed against them on the grounds of their membership of the Romanian Orthodox Church is considered null and void, according to synod decision no—8090 of December 19, 1992."

Similar deeds of the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church had repeatedly received rightful canonical appraisal from the Bishops' Councils and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, for instance:

in the resolution of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of 22nd December 1992 (Minutes No. 105), adopted in response to the establishment of the "Metropolis of Bessarabia," with subsequent approval of the viewpoint of the Primate and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on that matter by the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1994;

by the Bishops' Council in 2004, which expressed its concern over the reported "attempts to expand the activities of the 'Metropolis of Bessarabia' beyond Moldova, which can only heighten the existing inter-church tension;"

in the resolution of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of 7th November 2007 (Minutes No. 108) that came in response to the establishment of the dioceses within the "Metropolis of Bessarabia" in the territory of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine with centres in the cities of Bălți, Cantemir and Dubăsari regardless of the fact that those territories already had lawfully consecrated Orthodox bishops and the names of those cities were part of the titles of the diocesan bishops of the Orthodox Church of Moldova. In its statement of 7th November 2007, the Synod of the Russian Church also pointed out that the Diocese of Southern Bessarabia included "'former Diocese of Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi and Izmail' – the area which is part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and has its bishops whose titles contain the names of those cities;"

by the Bishops' Council in 2008, which expressed concern over the unilateral actions of the Romanian Patriarchate that undermined traditional principles underlying the relationships between the Orthodox Churches and jeopardized the Orthodox unity in general.

On 25th October 2023, the Synod of the Orthodox Church of Moldova (Minutes No. 11) defrocked six clerics who without permission had joined the "Metropolis of Bessarabia" of the Romanian Patriarchate and had been received without canonical letters of release. The decision was based on the following

canonical rules: Apostolic Canons 12, 15, 32, 33; Canons 11, 13, 20, 23 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council; Canon 17 of the Council in Trullo; Canons 3, 6, 7, 8, 11 of the Council of Antioch; Canons 41, 42 of the Council of Laodicea; Canon 9 of the Council of Sardica; Canons 23, 106 of the Council of Carthage; Canons 15, 16 of the First Ecumenical Council.

Several other clerics of the Orthodox Church of Moldova who later transferred without permission to the "Metropolis of Bessarabia" were suspended from service pending their contrition.

Much to their sorrow, the members of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church stated that the aforementioned resolutions of the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church were in direct contravention of the holy canons, in particular, Apostolic Canons 11, 12, 31, 32, Canon 2 of the Second Ecumenical Council; Canons 5, 8 of the Third Ecumenical Council; Canon 13 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council; Canon 17 of the Quinisext Council (in Trullo); and Canons 13, 22 of the Council of Antioch.

Having expressed strong disagreement with the said resolutions, the Synod of the Russian Church cautioned that their further enforcement would inevitably have grave ramifications for the bilateral relations between the Russian and the Romanian Orthodox Churches and for the unity of the Orthodox Church as a whole.

As was also noted, "Romanian Orthodox clerics… who return to the Metropolis of Bessarabia," mentioned by the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, have, in fact, never been its clerics, nor do they belong to the Romanian Patriarchate. They were ordained in the Russian Orthodox Church and were punished for violating their priestly oath and for other canonical crimes, not in the least "on the grounds of their membership of the Romanian Orthodox Church," to which they cannot belong since they have no letters of release.

As the participants in the meeting also pointed out, Canon 17 of the Council in Trullo states that "no cleric, of whatsoever grade he be, shall have power, without letters dimissory of his own bishop, to be registered in the clergy list of another church." It also says that "whoever in future shall not have observed this rule… let him be deposed together with him who also received him."

The Synod instructed the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, to look more closely into the actions of the Romanian Patriarchate and in due course submit his suggestions on the matter to the Holy Synod for consideration.

The Synod members expressed their support to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church of Moldova, their First Hierarchs, bishops, clergy, monastics and laity in view of the uncanonical encroachments from the Synod of the Romanian Patriarchate.

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