



## **Patriarch Kirill completes his visit to Bulgarian Orthodox Church**



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia has been on a visit to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church from March 2 to 4, 2018, for the celebrations marking the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman yoke.

In conclusion of his visit, Patriarch Kirill answered questions from mass media reporters at the Sofia airport. 'I have not been to Bulgaria for a long time. Much has changed in the life of Bulgaria and these changes are obvious', His Holiness noted.

'I have got many positive impressions of my visit to Bulgaria, but there is something I am disappointed with', His Holiness said to journalists, 'I am disappointed by the fact that according to the official rhetoric of representatives of the state, it turns out that Poland, Lithuania and Finland played an equal role with Russia in liberating Bulgaria. When I asked where this strange historiosophy comes from, I understood it: it turns out that the Finland Life Guards took part in the liberation struggle! But actually it was a

regiment of the Russian Guards, just as a regiment of the Volhyn Life Guards. Neither in the history of Poland nor in the history of Finland there is such a page linked with the liberation of Bulgaria. It was written in bloody letters in the history of Russia. Therefore, I would very much like that this historiosophy would leave the Bulgarian political usage. No political correctness can justify the false historical interpretation. And it is a principal message that the Patriarch addresses to Bulgaria, her leadership and people today.

The brightest remembrance of mine is a visit to Shipka Pass. We saw no flags of Finland or Poland or Romania but only flags of Russia and Bulgaria. And with what an enthusiasm the Bulgarian people received the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia on Shipka! It is impossible to experience without tears the people's enthusiasm expressing Bulgarians' true attitude to Russia and to the Russian Church and to the great memory of the sacrifices of our people who liberated Bulgaria.

I am confident that this negative political aspect will pass while the values linked with our common history, with the liberation struggle the Russian people waged with a heavy toll to make Bulgaria free, will be preserved for good in the memory of our nations.

God grant that it could be realized by politicians as soon as possible and, regardless of political expediency, they would always protect what is held so dear by the absolute majority of the Bulgarian people.

I would also like to refer to the special relations between the Russian and Bulgarian Churches. I thank His Holiness Patriarch Neophyte for fraternal love and mutual understanding. Our two Churches are the only real spiritual and historical bridge uniting our peoples today. And it is important that this bridge may never rupture. God grant that all that has happened in the history of Russia and Bulgaria may serve today not only the good of our peoples but also the consolidation of relations between our countries'.

Answering the question from the press about what united His Holiness with Bulgaria, Patriarch Kirill said, 'All my life is linked with Bulgaria. I came to Bulgaria for the first time in 1969, as a young hieromonk. I had many friends here, colleagues, with whom we worked for bilateral relations between our Churches on international platforms. Especially warm relations I have with many representatives of the episcopate, with His Holiness Patriarch Neophyte. I believe these relations are very important for maintaining our bilateral church relations and relations between our two nations'.

The mass media reporters were also interested in His Holiness' impressions of his meeting with the President of Bulgaria. 'The President made a good impression: an intelligent, Orthodox man who loves his Motherland. It seems to me that he is open to dialogue and relations with Russia', Patriarch Kirill answered, 'God grant that such politicians may gain strength in Bulgaria because, after all, foreign inter-

state relations are always personified. And it is very important that on the Bulgarian side there should be people with whom it would be pleasant to communicate in Russia and to build mutual relations’.

The visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church began on March 2, 2018. During his trip he was accompanied by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR), Archbishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate administrative secretariat, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman, Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations, Archpriest Andrey Bondarenko, acting head of the Patriarchal Protocol Service, and Rev. Alexander Volkov, head of the Patriarchal Press Service.

During the first day of the visit, Patriarch Kirill met with Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria and members of the Holy Synod at the residence of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

On March 3, when Bulgaria marks the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its liberation from the Ottoman yoke, Patriarch Kirill and Patriarch Neophyte celebrated a thanksgiving at the church of the Nativity of Christ on Shipka. The service was attended by Bulgarian President Rumen Radev and Parliament Chair Ms. Tsveta Karayancheva, as well the Russian Orthodox Church delegation, bishops and priests of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, diplomats, guests from other countries, numerous people of the country.

After that, on the summit of Mountain Shipka, which used to be named after St. Nicholas, there were celebrations devoted to the Bulgarian national holiday. Patriarch Kirill said a lity for the repose of Emperor Alexander Nikolayevich of the eternal memory, all the commanders and troops, both Russian and Bulgarian, and all the Most Reverend archpastors, pastors, monastics and laity who gave their lives for the faith and liberation of the Bulgarian land. Then the Primate of the two Churches visited the Monument of Freedom at the summit, where they laid flowers at the burial place of the participants in the defense of Shipka Pass.

On the same day, March 3, Patriarch Kirill met with the chairperson of the Bulgarian Parliament, Ms. Tsveta Karayancheva, and Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov.

In conclusion of the national celebrations, on March 3, a solemn military ceremony took place at the Monument to the Tsar Liberator – Russian Emperor Alexander Nikolayevich at the National Assembly Square in Sofia.

On March 4, Patriarch Kirill and Patriarch Neophyte celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky in Sofia.

On the same day, Patriarch Kirill and Patriarch Neophyte met with the President of the Republic of Bulgaria Rumen Radev.

That same day, His Holiness Kirill visited the Sofia Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Among the bishops and clergy who saw Patriarch Kirill off at the Sofia airport were the head of the directorate for religions under the Bulgarian Council of Minister Mr. Emil Velinov, Russian ambassador to Bulgaria A. Makarov, head of the Bulgaria representation of Rossotrudnichestvo P. Zhuravlev and Russian embassy councilor V. Gusev.

*DECR Communication Service*

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