

Ukrainian government renews backing for Independent Church



Ukraine's head of government has renewed pledges of support for the country's independent Orthodox church, as Russian Orthodox officials continued to heap scorn on its survival chances.

"The Orthodox Church of Ukraine will now have a chance to extend its activities, not just in temples but also in administration", said Volodymyr Groysman. "The process of launching the church is still underway, and we must prolong our support from the side of the state".

The 41-year-old premier, appointed in April, spoke during the handover of a new central Kiev headquarters to the church's elected leader, Metropolitan Epiphanius Dumenko. Meanwhile, the transfer of the building, agreed at a mid-July government session, was praised by the Metropolitan, who said it signified a "long partnership between state and church" in Ukraine, which would help resolve "problems facing not only the church but also the state as whole".

However, a senior Russian Orthodox official said the new Ukrainian church, created last December, had failed to bring "political advantages" for its supporters, adding that the transfer of parishes previously loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate, currently put at 520, had now given way to a "quiet reverse process".

"It's obvious that all forces of the state's administrative apparatus and special services were deployed in exerting maximum pressure to join this new church", Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, the Russian church's deputy director of external relations, told the Interfax agency. "But from what's since happened in Ukraine, the impression emerges that this was all a premeditated action by the Constantinople Patriarchate to cut off, weaken and restrict an overgrown daughter.... People now see its decree was unlawful and hasn't brought the promised freedom".

Russian Orthodox leaders cut all ties with Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople after his "tomos of autocephaly" formally established the Ukrainian church on 6 January, and are campaigning against its recognition by other Orthodox churches.

On Monday, Ukraine's National Bank issued a commemorative coin, depicting Bartholomew handing the decree to Metropolitan Epiphanius, who is to lead commemorations of the baptism of medieval Rus in Kiev next week, alongside rival procession by Ukraine's rival Moscow-linked Orthodox church.

- Source: thetablet.co.uk