

Ecumenical Patriarch arrives in Thessaloniki for closely watched visit; day after latest reax by Moscow Patriarchate



The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, His All Holiness Bartholomew I, arrived in the northern Greece city of Thessaloniki on Friday, at the invitation of the city's Metropolitan, His Eminence Anthimos, in order to attend the Byzantine Thessaloniki Organization's cultural and events and Church services. The Ecumenical Patriarch was welcomed at the city's Macedonia Airport by His Eminence Anthimos and the Metropolitan of Philippi, Neapolis and Thassos, His Eminence Stefanos, along with other hierarchs and local officials.

His All Holiness was later welcomed at the new regional government office building by Central Macedonia Governor Apostolos Tzitzikostas.

Bartholemew praised the governor for the eco-friendly design and operation of the building.

The Ecumenical Patriarch's visit to northern Greece comes in the wake of major developments this past week regarding the issue of the Tomos of Autocephaly for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and the continued sharp reactions on the part of the Moscow Patriarchate.

According to an announcement by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, on Saturday His All Holiness will hold an Archi-eratical con-celebration with the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, His Beatitude Ieronymos, at the Cathedral of the Panaghia Acheiropiitou, in the presence of Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos.

A day earlier, the Moscow Patriarchate's Holy Synod sharply condemned recent decisions by the Church of Greece's hierarchy regarding the Tomos of Autocephaly for the Ukrainian Church, warning that it will break communion with Ieronymos if the latter proceeds with recognition, although a spokesman later clarified that the Russian Church will maintain relations with individual Greek Orthodox hierarchs who decline to recognize the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's autocephaly.

The Tomos of Autocephaly was granted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople last November to the Ukrainian Church, a move bitterly opposed by the Moscow Patriarchate.

A statement issued by the Russian Church in Moscow read:

"The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Russia authorizes His Holiness, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill, to break the prayerful commemoration for His Eminence, the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Ieronymos I, in case the Primate of the Church of Greece begins to commemorate, in the Divine Liturgies, the head of one of the Ukrainian schismatic factions or assumes other initiatives that will testify to the recognition, by him, of the Ukrainian ecclesiastical schism.

Nevertheless, in a later statement, the high-profile spokesman for the Moscow Patriarchate, Vladimir Legoida, said the Russian Church will maintain relations with clerics of the Church of Greece who do not recognize what he called the Ukrainian schismatics.

Halfway around the world, however, **in Washington D.C. news of the Church of Greece's position regarding autocephaly for the Ukrainian Church was welcomed by members of the US House of Representatives and US Senate.**