

CONTROVERSIAL MONTENEGRIN CHURCH BILL PASSED ON FOR DEPUTIES' CONSIDERATION, DESPITE MASSIVE CHURCH PROTESTS



The controversial draft law on Church property in Montenegro, which has provoked large-scale opposition from the Metropolis of Montenegro of the Serbian Orthodox Church over the past several months, continues to move ahead. Most recently, the bill was recognized by the Parliamentary Committee on Lawmaking as corresponding to the Montenegrin constitution and has been sent for general consideration by Parliamentary Deputies, reports RIA-Novosti.

Seven deputies from the committee approved of the bill, with only two from the opposition voting against it.

The Parliament's Human Rights Commission also previously approved the bill "On Freedom of Religion and Belief and the Legal Status of Religious Communities." The initiators of the bill, the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists and its coalition, have 42 of the 81 mandates.

On Tuesday, December 24, the clergy of the Serbian Church in Montenegro marched through the streets of Podgorica to the Parliament building. The hierarchs, together with hundreds of monks and priests repeated the demands of the Serbian Church voiced on December 21 at a council in Nikšić. His Eminence Metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro called on the deputies “not to allow this shame and disgrace.”

“Well aware of the consequences that the adoption of such a law may have, we call on the Deputies of the Assembly of Montenegro to listen to the voice of the hierarchy and the faithful of our holy Church, as clearly expressed at the two Church-people’s councils, and not to vote for this draft law,” the Synod stated.

About 6,000 faithful previously gathered at the Church of St. Basil of Ostrog in Nikšić on December 21, demanding that the state sign an agreement with the Serbian Church refusing to take its property and promising to return or compensate for previously-seized property. The relics of St. Basil were brought to the church specially for the event. It was the first time they’d left the Monastery of St. Basil in Ostrog since 1996.

“The law that they want to adopt now, in the 21st century, is actually a continuation of Leninism, Stalinism and Titoism... it is a weaning not only of Church property, but also of churches and monasteries,” Met. Amfilohije said.

Meanwhile, President Milo Đukanović says there is no room for compromise or concessions to the Serbian Church, and that the adoption of the law shows the country’s European development and renewal of its statehood. He characterizes the Serbian Church’s stance as an “attempt to blackmail and independent and European Montenegro from the great Serbian nationalism...”

The state favors the miniscule and schismatic “Montenegrin Orthodox Church” and has subjected the canonical Serbian Church to other forms of persecution, considering it hostile to the country’s independence.

According to the draft law, “All religious buildings that were property of the State of Montenegro before the loss of its independence and merging into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, and which subsequently did not become the property of a religious community in the proper legal way, will be recognised as state property,” the Secretariat-General of the Montenegrin government earlier said.

The hierarchs of the Serbian Church understand the law as a means to seize

Serbian property to be handed over to the miniscule and schismatic “Montenegrin Orthodox Church.”

A vote on the final adoption of the bill is expected today.

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