

Serbian church warns Montenegrin authorities about backlash from new religious law



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The Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral of the Serbian Orthodox Church has pinned the blame for the adverse effects of the newly-approved law on religious freedom on the Montenegrin authorities.

"Lawmakers, Montenegro's government and the country's president Milo Djukanovic are fully responsible for the fallout from passing the law," the Metropolitanate said in a statement on Friday. It believes that the detention of opposition lawmakers opposed to that law has sparked "an unprecedented rift and loathing in society," where everyone loses.

It stressed that the Montenegrin authorities were guided by the desire “to create a state-controlled autocephalous Montenegrin church obedient to the regime.”

In the early hours of Friday, Montenegro’s parliament passed a controversial law on freedom of religion and the legal status of religious communities amid mass protests throughout the country. Forty-five out of 45 lawmakers present voted for the law, which infringes upon the interests of the Serbian Orthodox Church. No one voted against or abstained, since the bill was considered after the police had detained all opposition MPs.

Huge protests were held in several cities in Montenegro against the new law. More than 55 people, including opposition lawmakers, were taken into custody.

Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic earlier accused the Serbian Orthodox Church of trying to maintain a religious monopoly in the country. He also said that he would seek autocephaly for the “Montenegrin church” based on Ukraine’s model. For his part, a Serbian Orthodox Church bishop, Metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro and the Littoral, noted, commenting on Djukanovic’s remarks, that the president was “trying to be the head of the church himself,” adding that “this is the first time in history when an atheist is creating a church.”

As part of the project to create a new church, Montenegro’s cabinet pushed a law through the parliament on religious freedom in the country, providing for the seizure of property from the Serbian Orthodox Church. The issue at hand is more than 650 holy sites, including the renowned Ostrog Monastery.

— Source: tass.com