

Schismatic Ukrainian church head to receive autocephaly decree on Jan. 6



ANKARA, December 15. /TASS/. Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople plans to hand over the Tomos (decree) of Autocephaly to the head of Ukraine's newly established church, a spokesperson for the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople told TASS on Saturday.

"The patriarchate welcomes the success of the unification council in Ukraine. Patriarch Bartholomew invited Metropolitan Epiphany [to Istanbul] on January 6 to give him the Tomos of Autocephaly," the spokesperson said. "In a phone conversation, the patriarch congratulated Epiphany on his election [to the post]."

'Completely dependent' church

Ukraine's new church will be completely dependent from the Constantinople Patriarchate, said Vasily Anisimov, the chief spokesman for the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

"There will be no autocephaly at all. According to the charter, the new church will be fully dependent from Constantinople," he told TASS.

The official said Metropolitan Epiphany, who will head the new religious

organization, will be subordinate to both the Ukrainian president and the Constantinople Patriarchate.

“His candidacy was approved due to the fact that the Kiev Patriarchate has the majority at the assembly. Epiphany is the right-hand man of [Kiev Patriarch] Filaret, he has chosen him as his successor long ago,” Anisimov said. “But no matter who is chosen as the new leader, his main task will be to follow orders.”

He described Ukrainian autocephaly as “an entirely political project and a PR campaign of Ukrainian President Pyotr Poroshenko.”

“Poroshenko constantly denies his interference into church affairs, but, at the same time, we all see that all those events take place with his participation, under his leadership. He will even go to Istanbul to get the Tomos of Autocephaly with the new church leader,” the spokesman said.

“The canonical church believes that the ‘unification’ council is illegitimate and will not recognize its results,” he added.

Difficult to explain

Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine remains the only head of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, a senior Russian cleric has told TASS.

“Metropolitan Onufry still heads the church, and I can say that present-day Ukraine has only one metropolitan, as it should be according to church canons. Now Patriarch Bartholomew [of Constantinople] will have to explain to other national churches where another church head came from,” Chairman of the Russian Orthodox Church’s Synodal Department for Relations between the Church and Society Vladimir Legoida said.

According to Legoida, today’s decision of the so-called unification council has no legitimacy from the canonical point of view.

“This assembly is canonically null. It demonstrated that there were no unification, and it was not even supposed to take place. How would Patriarch Bartholomew explain to other national churches where did another metropolitan come from, or what is his canonical status, or what kind of relations they should have with the canonical church. It seems to be that it would be hard to give a credible answer to those questions,” he said.

The Russian cleric added that the autocephaly project was a political idea of Ukraine's secular leader, President Pyotr Poroshenko.

"The fact that no one is even trying to conceal the political subtext is very illustrative. Imagine a church assembly taking place, people speaking about establishing a new church... and then the president has the floor and delivers a passionate speech in which he does not even mention Christ, the Gospel or faith, but instead dwells on his favorite subject of Moskals [a derogatory term for Russians in Ukraine] and the aggressor state. What relation does this all have to church affairs? None at all," Legoida said.

The canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)'s decision not to take part in the unification council that proclaimed the creation of a new independent church in Ukraine makes this gathering illegal, the senior Russian cleric said.

"It would be very interesting to find out how they would explain the legitimacy of their assembly, held without the participation of the only canonical church [in the country]. It will be really interesting to hear how they are going to wiggle out of this situation," he said.

"There was no unification, because, in fact, it was a gathering of two schismatic groups whom [the Patriarchate of] Constantinople attempted to legalize some time ago," he said. "The canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church was not present, so all claims of unifying the three branches of Orthodoxy, made before and after the council, are nothing but lies."

"The Ukrainian church [reporting to Moscow Patriarchate] did not attend. There were reports of two hierarchs taking part, but they were not officially confirmed. But even if they did attend, this does not mean the official participation of the Ukrainian church," he said.

Political ambitions

Religion and faith have been employed in Ukraine not even as instruments of politics, as a means to match ambitions of President Pyotr Poroshenko, Frantz Klintsevich, a member of the Russian Federation Council's Defense and Security Committee, said.

"It was meant to undermine the basics of church traditions. In Ukraine occurred something that cannot be whitewashed under any circumstances, since religion and faith were made to serve not even politics but ambitions of an individual,

namely Ukraine's President Pyotr Poroshenko," said the senator cited by his press service.

"No-one must break up the things which have been built over centuries," he added.

"I do not doubt that in the near future the Eastern Orthodox Church will recognize the decisions of this so-called 'unification' council as invalid," he concluded.

On Saturday, the St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kiev hosted a so-called 'unification' council held under the auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and brokered by the Ukrainian authorities. After the council, Pyotr Poroshenko, the president of secular Ukraine who had attended the schismatic assembly, declared the establishment of a new church. Metropolitan Epiphany of Pereyaslav and Belaya Tserkov, who had earlier served as a bishop of the non-canonical Kiev Patriarchate, was elected its head.