

Montenegro expelling 50+ clerics and monastics of Serbian Church as president aims for autocephaly



Montenegrin authorities have refused to extend the residency permits for more than 50 monastics and clergymen of the Serbian Orthodox Church, although they have been in the country with temporary permits for the past two years, reports the Belgrade newspaper [Politika](#).

News of the decision comes in the wake of President Milo Đukanović's declaration that the state will take on the responsibility of achieving autocephaly for the "Montenegrin Orthodox Church," a group that splintered from the Serbian Church and is unrecognized by the Orthodox world.

"I believe it is necessary to continue work on restoring the autocephalous Montenegrin Orthodox Church, and the state will deal with this and bear responsibility for it," Đukanović explained in a recent television interview.

According to Archpriest Velibor Jomic, the coordinator for the Metropolis' legal

counsel, the Montenegrin Ministry of Internal Affairs has already given 30 monastics, clergymen, and family members of the Montenegro-Littoral Metropolis one month to leave the country. It is assumed that a similar decision will be made in regard to the rest in the near future.

“This is a continuation of illegal activities, aimed at persecuting clergy and monks, in particular, from the Montenegro-Littoral Metropolis of the Serbian Orthodox Church,” Fr. Velibor noted, adding that the authorities’ decision is more political than juridical.

Fr. Velibor also noted his surprise at the decision, as the Ministry of Internal Affairs had always extended the monastics’ and clerics’ permits without problem before, on the basis of the performance of clerical duties. He also noted that the regulations in Montenegro have not changed, thus this is more a politically than legally-motivated decision.

The Metropolis’ legal team has appealed the decisions but has been denied every time. Moreover, those being evicted are not even given enough notice to appear and be involved in the process before the decision is already made.

“As a person who knows this matter, I am convinced and certain that the Ministry of the Interior acted illegally,” Fr. Velibor said.

A statement has been posted on the website of the Metropolis of Montenegro-Littoral, under the His Eminence Metropolitan Amfilohije, that reiterates the words of Fr. Velibor, saying: “There is no legally justified reason and strong grounds for continuing the persecution of the clergy and monastics. Met. Amfilohije also appeals to the Ministry to act in a legal manner and extend the Serbian Church representatives’ residency permits.