

Protests continue in Montenegro in anger over stepped up persecution of Orthodoxy; Bishop remains jailed



Peaceful but determined protests are continuing in the small Adriatic country of Montenegro over the continued incarceration of the Bishop of Niksic, His Grace Ioannicus, along with another seven Orthodox clerics.

Thousands of protesters gathered on Thursday evening outside the monastery of St. George, the seat of the Bishop of Niksic, to demand the clerics' release. In the city of Niksic, protesters gathered outside the police station where their bishop is being held, singing hymns and handing roses to police officers surrounding the precinct.

In the Montenegro capital of Podgorica, 73 university academics signed a petition

expressing their support for the Bishop and pastoral shepherd.

The offensive behavior on the part of Montenegro law enforcement comes months the government there legislated and ratified an utterly controversial law that allows the state to confiscate religious institutions' properties and relics, unless the latter can provide ownership deeds and titles prior to WWI.

The Bishop and Niksic and the clerics were detained by police after a litany on the feast day of St. Basil of Ostrog.

In a related development, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Serbian President Alexander Vucic spoke by phone on Thursday, with the main topic of discussion being the tense situation in Montenegro and the state persecution against the Orthodox Church there.



Similarly, the Russian Orthodox Church's Metropolitan of Volokolamsk,

His Eminence Hilarion, stressed that the Moscow Patriarchate was deeply concerned with the arrest of the Bishop of Niksic and the other priests.

His Eminence Hilarion is the chairman of the Department of External Church Relations and a permanent member of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Moscow.

