

## **‘Orthodox Church of Ukraine’ project is purely political – Putin**



The creation of the so-called Orthodox Church of Ukraine is a purely political project aimed at driving a wedge between the peoples of Russia and Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with Serbia’s Vecernje Novosti newspaper in the run-up to his visit to Belgrade.

“The new religious organization is a purely political, secular project. Its main goal is to drive a wedge between the peoples of Russia and Ukraine, to incite not only ethnic tensions, but also religious ones. Kiev’s words of ‘regaining independence from Moscow’ are of no coincidence,” he said.

Putin reiterated that on December 15, the Kiev government, with active support of the United States and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople hosted the so-called ‘unification’ council to announce the creation of the so-called Orthodox Church of Ukraine (PCU). On January 6, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople signed the Tomos of Autocephaly for that religious organization. Therefore, an attempt has been made to legalize Ukraine’s schismatic groups

under the jurisdiction of Constantinople, in breach of the existing Orthodox canons.

The canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church refused to attend the 'unification council' and dubbed the Tomos as a legitimized schism, which had existed in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church for 30 years.

Putin stressed that those facts were largely ignored by the Ukrainian and US leadership due to the practical political goals that the Ukrainian autocephaly is intended to achieve.

"Let me stress it once again: this issue has absolutely no relation to religious life, it's just dangerous and irresponsible politicking. Besides, there will be no religious autonomy of the 'Orthodox Church of Ukraine,'" he said, adding that the new religious organization will be de-facto fully dependent from the Constantinople Patriarchate.

### **No Russian interference**

"On the contrast, the biggest religious organization in Ukraine - the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which sought no autocephaly from Patriarch Bartholomew, remains totally independent in its actions. It only preserves a purely canonical link with the Russian Orthodox Church, but even this fact has been provoking the ill-disguised ire of the present-day Kiev government," Putin said.

He added that this fact was enough "to launch persecutions of priests and followers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, to try to seize its churches and monasteries and to deprive it of its official name, further increasing tensions and deepening the rift in the Ukrainian society."

According to the Russian president, the Ukrainian leadership is fully aware that those moves will entail serious consequences.

"At the same time, they are ready to sacrifice the religious accord in the country to the goals of the incumbent president's political campaign, based on the search of enemies, and to stay in power regardless of the costs," he said.

Putin said Russia had no plans to interfere into the religious processes currently under way in Ukraine, but will keep expressing its concern by attempts to legitimize a religious schism.

"Certainly, Russia has no plans to interfere into religious processes, especially on the territory of a sovereign neighboring state. However, we can understand the danger that such experiments and the state's flagrant interference into religious

matters pose to the global Orthodoxy, among other things,” he said.

### **Church crisis in Ukraine**

Since the February 2014 coup, Kiev has sought to create an independent church in Ukraine that would sever ties with the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In April 2018, Ukrainian President Pyotr Poroshenko wrote a personal letter to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople asking for autocephaly for the Ukrainian church.

On December 15, Kiev hosted the so-called ‘unification’ council held under the supervision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and brokered by the Ukrainian authorities. The canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church refused to take part in the event, stressing that both the ‘unification council’ and Poroshenko’s newly founded ecclesiastical establishment were illegitimate. Nevertheless, after the council, the Ukrainian president announced the establishment of this new church in the country.

(Source: TASS)