

IN BANNING PILGRIMAGES, ROMANIAN GOV'T TREATS THE FAITHFUL LIKE PANDEMIC RISK FACTORS, SAYS CHURCH SPOKESMAN



Civil authorities effectively canceled this year's St. Parascheva pilgrimage, banning anyone from outside Iași, where her relics are kept, to come celebrate her feast yesterday, provoking sorrowful statements from a number of Romanian Orthodox hierarchs and dioceses, including His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel.

Adding insult to injury, the Prime Minister announced on Monday that the annual pilgrimage for St. Demetrius the New, the patron saint of Bucharest, whose feast is celebrated on October 27, is also canceled this year. Traditionally, the St. Parascheva and St. Demetrius pilgrimages are the largest of the year in Romania, drawing tens of thousands Orthodox faithful from throughout the country and abroad.

Commenting on these drastic measures taken by the authorities, Vasile Bănescu, spokesman for the Romanian Patriarchate, reminded that pilgrimages are a

manifestation of religious freedom and emphasized that the pilgrims and the Romanian Orthodox Church deserve more respect and trust from the state and local authorities, reports the Basilica News Agency.

Romania-Insider.com characterizes the new statement as one of the harshest reactions the Romanian Church has had to a government decision in the last 30 years, coming against the background of rising tensions between the Church and state over pandemic restrictions.

“The rigorously organized pilgrimage, under exceptional conditions of compliance with drastically applied rules and whose violation (now imaginary) can be sanctioned at any time by the authorities, is not only a profound expressions of responsible religious freedom, but, in the current context, also a beneficial form of trust and respect towards the majority of good and faithful people of this country,” said Vasile Bănescu.

He lamented the treatment of pilgrims as pandemic risk factors and the government’s lack of confidence in the Church’s institutional capacity.

“Negative exercises of imagination at the highest level regarding the behavior of believers (declared a priori suspicious), the organizational capacity of the the Church (otherwise an exemplary social partner of the authorities) and the importance of the presence and manifestation of religion in society can be quite offensive,” the Church spokesman said.

The decision to cancel the St. Parascheva and St. Demetrius pilgrimages violates religious freedom, he said, compounded by “the lack of interinstitutional dialogue,” revealing “contempt for the immediate social reality,” Bănescu said. The Church was not consulted in the decision regarding either pilgrimage.

“The community body functions naturally only in a state of balance springing from discernment and dialogue, which the Church constantly pleads for... Arrogance, decisional autocracy and moral solipsism have not honored and will never honor anyone,” the spokesman concluded.

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