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Georgian metropolitan: Ukrainian autocephaly can come only in canonical way, by request of fullness of Church



Representatives from 11 of the world's 15 Local Orthodox Churches gathered in Moscow on Friday to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in honor of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia's 10th anniversary as the primate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Leading the delegation for the Georgian Orthodox Church was His Eminence Metropolitan Andria of Gori, who offered a brief interview to RIA-Novosti on the Georgian Church's attitude towards the Ukrainian crisis and other questions.

Especially important is his statement that the Georgian Church supports the right of the Ukrainian people to autocephaly in principle, though it must be done properly. Another Georgian hierarch, His Eminence Metropolitan Nikoloz (Pachuashvili) of Akhalkalaki, Kumurdo and Kari, also recently stated that while the Georgian Church is in favor of Ukrainian autocephaly in principle, they cannot serve

with anathematized and self-consecrated bishops.

Met. Andria's interview reads in full:

—Vladyka, how do you assess the actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and state authorities in Ukraine?

—My personal assessment is that the question is very difficult and sensitive for the entire Orthodox Church, and we must approach it with great caution. I also think that this cautious approach includes the need to learn the view of the other Churches on this issue.

Does Ukraine have a right to demand autocephaly for the Church? We believe the Orthodox believers of Ukraine have this right, but it should be the fullness of the clergy, the fullness of the hierarchy, and the faithful of the Church, and it all absolutely must develop in a canonical way, and not otherwise.

—It is known yet when the Synod of the Georgian Church will take place that will make a decision on this issue?

—I can't say anything about that because I don't know.

—The Patriarchate of Constantinople also recently decided to allow priests to remarry. How do you see this decision?

—My opinion on this is that if canonical law is absolutely immutable in some questions and in other questions it can be violated—I don't understand such an approach...

—How do you feel about the idea of gathering a pan-Orthodox council or meeting on the Church situation in Ukraine with the participation of all the primates?

—It's difficult for me to answer this question because it should be decided by the primates of the Churches, and I don't want to express my view before them.

—The current situation has dealt a blow to the reputation of Orthodoxy in the eyes of the rest of the world, especially for non-Church people. How can we improve it now, in your view?

—By striving for unity.

The Georgian Patriarchate also released a statement on January 29, just before His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II of Georgia met with a delegation from

Constantinople, emphasizing the need for Church unity and restraint in responding to the Ukrainian issue. His Eminence Metropolitan John of Rustavi of the Georgian Orthodox Church has noted that “The unity of the Orthodox Church is based not on the sole, Papist principle, but on conciliarity, which is reflected in the Nicene Creed.”

Following the meeting with the Constantinople delegation it was announced that the Georgian Synod would meet to address the issue at its regular session sometime in the spring.

The Georgian Church also posted a statement in late September saying that the situation in Ukraine is very delicate and thus it needed to be worked out between the Patriarchates of Moscow and Constantinople. While the Georgian Synod has not taken a formal stance on the issue, it is known that His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II strongly opposes Constantinople’s interference in Ukraine.