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News in Brief



Today, February 15, is the feast day of St. Onesimus the Apostle, for the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Concerns were rampant within the Church hierarchy and among the faithful on Friday, a day after a razor-slim vote in Greece's parliament conditionally approved revisions for the Greek constitution's article 3,

which delineates Church-state relations in the predominately Orthodox country of 11 million.

A second vote on the proposed revisions is set for March 13.

If again passed by a simple majority, which is 151 deputies out of 300 in Parliament, then the next Parliament plenum to arise from a general election must pass the revisions by an extended majority of 180 deputies.

Church sources that spoke to the Orthodoxia news agency on Friday referred to the possibility of initiatives by high-ranking ecclesiastical leaders and other Orthodox clergymen to lobby their local deputies – the ones that voted in favor of the revision – to change their vote in the second round.

According to reports, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Ieronymos is not expected to request the convening of the Holy Synod to discuss the matter, although he may reconsider, if reactions and pressure from within the Church's ranks continue.

In a related development, a new meeting, probably on Tuesday, is expected to take place between members of the Church of Greece's standing Holy Synod and the Greek education and religious affairs minister.

Indications from the dialogue between the two sides, so far, shows that the Church is not willing to back down from its positions regarding the payroll regime for clergymen, which it considers as inalienable.

Members of the Holy Synod committee have also underlined that they were not given a copy of the draft law by the minister, but instead, only handed an implementation plan.

Displeasure has been expressed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, both in terms of the ongoing dialogue over Church-state relations in Greece, as well as attempts to change article 3 of the constitution.

In a related development, a delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate met with Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras at this Maximos Mansion office.

In other news from around the world, reports out of Iran cite almost daily arrests of Christians in Iran, along with the jailing of priests.

According to reports, such instances of religious intolerance come amid the 40-year anniversary of the Islamic revolution in Iran.

There have also been instances where Christians have been arrested or mistreated because they took part in the Holy Communion, with the ostensible reason being that alcohol is strictly forbidden in the country.

Meanwhile, in an announcement on Friday, the Holy Metropolitan Archidiocese of Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon expressed its joy at the pending arrival of Archbishop of Alexandria and All Africa Theodore II, who will remain in the area until Feb. 19.

Back in Greece, an agreement signed between the municipalities of Corinth and Kavala, aimed at promoting a pilgrimage initiative entitled "In the footsteps of the Apostle Paul" is being readily implemented.

The Metropolitan of Maronia and Komotini, His eminence Panteleimon, on Friday

received – at the offices of the Holy Metropolis – Russia’s general consul in the northern city of Thessaloniki.