

## **Russia Moves Against the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine**



Recent news reports from Ukraine indicate that the Russian government is moving against the new autocephalous Orthodox Church in Ukraine in the areas of Ukraine under its control.

The Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group reported on February 14, 2019 that “the Orthodox Church of Ukraine has been ordered to vacate the Cathedral of Vladimir and Olga in occupied Simferopol by the beginning of March, with this likely to lead to eight parishes in rural areas also being forced to close.”

The Cathedral and these parishes are under the jurisdiction of Metropolitan Epiphanius of Kyiv and All Ukraine, who was elected by bishops from Ukraine’s three divided Orthodox Churches at a unity council on December 15, 2018. On January 6, 2019, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew signed the

Tomos of Autocephaly for the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, formally establishing the world's fifteenth autocephalous Orthodox Church. The Moscow Patriarchate has strongly opposed this pastoral initiative.

His Eminence Archbishop Kliment of Simferopol and Crimea "received a writ ordering that he leave the Cathedral," terminating an agreement concluded between the Church and the Crimean Property Fund in 2002. This move is likely linked to the fact that on February 5, 2019, "Kliment was appointed the head of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's Mission to help victims of rights abuses and illegal imprisonment in Russia and occupied territories."

Ominously, an official from the Russian government occupying Crimea informed His Eminence that "the Church had not re-registered as a legal entity, under Russian legislation," and that "lack of such registration has meant that the Church is not considered to be a legal entity at all."

His Eminence is unbowed, saying: "If there is a choice between the Church, religious services and people (and the stand on registration), then I choose the Church."

The Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group noted that in Crimea, "only five priests now remained against 25 in 2014," and "while the Cathedral is not the only remaining church in Crimea, it is the main cathedral and eparchial centre of the Church. It is also the only Ukrainian Orthodox place of worship in Simferopol and for many believers, it would simply not be possible to travel to other parts of the peninsula for services."

It is clear, as the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection group states, that "the new moves to drive the Church out of Crimea are probably also retaliation for the creation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine with autocephaly or independent status."

Meanwhile, Interfax has reported that on February 12, “unidentified persons threw a bottle bomb in the building of the church of St. Elijah the Martyr in the village of Zelenyi Bor, Ukraine’s Nikolayev Region on Sunday night.” The Ukrainian Orthodox Church explained in a statement: “It emerged that a window was smashed in the church and a bottle bomb was thrown in. It’s a miracle that the fire did not engulf the entire church, the fire went out. Windows were broken and smashed in the church, a curtain burned down and two carpet strips on the floor were damaged, the walls are covered in soot, icons and cloths on the icons were blackened with ash.”

Interfax added: “Before setting the church on fire, the wrongdoers cut off electricity thus turning off the alarm and video surveillance in it, it said. They also attempted to pull out the wooden cross installed in front of the church.”

At a press conference in Kyiv on the same day, Archbishop Kliment, according to the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, “called on the international community, on the ambassadors of European countries, the USA and Canada in Ukraine to take the situation under their personal control.”

[\(\[Source: archons.org\]\(http://archons.org\)\)](http://archons.org)