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Primates to discuss OCU in Cyprus (Updated)



Update: a communique from the meeting has been released, in Greek, and the issue of Ukraine is mentioned only briefly. This does not mean that the issue was not front and center for the assembled primates and could be considered as simply "another step" on the Ukraine issue, as outlined below. Among other items on the agenda, Patriarch John and Patriarch Theophilos discussed the need for internal unity (readers may know there is a significant difference between these two local churches over the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Qatar). The two primates exchanged gifts, which hopefully is a sign of goodwill and a path for a lasting solution.



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This will most certainly be a closely watched meeting, not only by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Church of Russia, and the OCU, but by and for the entirety of the Orthodox Church.

To date, the Autocephaly granted to the OCU by the Phanar has not been recognized by any of the other local Orthodox churches. There have been a few synodal statements, mostly hedging between the two competing sides – Constantinople and Moscow – but no formal support for Metropolitan Epiphany and

the OCU.

Will the four primates, on behalf, and assuming with the support of, their local synods announce their official recognition of the OCU tomorrow? This scenario seems premature at this point; among other reasons, the participation of Patriarch John, who some have argued has been co-opted by the Church of Russia, makes this development questionable, to say the least.

What is more likely is that this is another step, presumably at the initiative and under the leadership of Archbishop Chrysostomos – who is hosting the meeting – to garner support for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Autocephaly of the OCU.

Recall that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew met with Archbishops Chrysostomos of Cyprus and Anastasios of Albania in Austria at the beginning of March. Since then, a number of letters and responses between Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Anastasios have been published.

Given the significant pressure that Moscow is applying to local churches to not support the OCU, it is likely that local churches will want to band together if and when they recognize the OCU in order to lessen the opposition and pushback that will inevitably come from the Church of Russia.

The contentiousness of this issue in world Orthodoxy will presumably make it difficult for one local church to come out in isolation to support the OCU. Perhaps this meeting of primates is setting the stage to shift the pendulum in favor of Constantinople, which to this point has been alone and somewhat isolated.

If, however, a statement is released that categorically rejects the Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, the regrettable position that the Church finds itself in now will likely only worsen, at least in the short term. All eyes will be watching Cyprus tomorrow … visit The Orthodox World for the latest news and continued exclusive analysis.

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