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SERBIAN CHURCH SIGNS AGREEMENT WITH STATE OF MONTENEGRO



After several years of struggle and tense negotiations, the Serbian Orthodox Church and the state of Montenegro have finally signed a Fundamental Agreement on the Church's rights and responsibilities in relation to the state.

The Agreement was signed by His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije and Montenegrin Prime Minister Dritan Abazović today at 10 AM in the capital city of Podgorica, reports the Metropolis of Montenegro.

The signing was also attended by His Eminence Metropolitan Joanikije of Montenegro and other hierarchs of the Serbian Church and other government officials.

The Serbian Orthodox Church is by far the largest religious organization in the country. The government already signed agreements with the Catholic church and the Jewish and Islamic communities in 2012, but not with the Serbian Church. Rather, the state, led by President Milo Đukanović's coalition, persecuted the Church for 30 years.

Even after a new government took power in December 2020 and amended the previous government's anti-Orthodox law, making all religious organizations equal in the eyes of the law, the path to an Agreement acceptable to both Church and state proved difficult, as nationalist forces remaining in the government and society resent the Church's role in the nation.

"Glory to God!" Pat. Porfirije exclaimed after the signing today.

The PM, in turn, said the government of Montenegro is determined to give all religious communities the same rights, and they are happy if today's act contributes to that.

"May the Lord bless you and give you good health and peace to you and your relatives and to all the people living in Montenegro and in the whole world. We need that more than anything today. May the blessing of God descend upon Montenegro and the people who live there, but also on those who come," His Holiness concluded.

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The Montenegrin government initially approved the text of the Agreement on July 8. According to reports from that time, the Agreement provides for the following:

- The Church is separate from the state
- The SOC is recognized as a legal entity, with continuity from 1219
- The state of Montenegro guarantees the SOC that state bodies can't take security measures at its premises without prior approval from the competent Church authorities
- The SOC is endowed with public legal powers
- The state guarantees the inviolability of SOC property and undertakes to register previously unregistered properties belonging to the dioceses of the SOC in Montenegro
- The introduction of religious education is allowed in state educational institutions

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