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LATVIAN PRESIDENT SUBMITS BILL TO SEPARATE LATVIAN CHURCH FROM MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE



If the Latvian president gets his way, the Orthodox Church in Latvia will be forcefully separated from the Moscow Patriarchate.

Egils Levits, who has served as head of state since July 2019, announced today on the official presidential website that he submitted a draft law, prepared together with the Ministry of Justice, to the Saeima—the Latvian Parliament—to change the status of the Latvian Orthodox Church to make it completely independent from the Russian Orthodox Church.

Saeima factions have voiced their support for the bill, and the Church has “been informed” about its advancement through the government. The Church’s internal statutes will “have to be subject to this law,” the president told tvnet.lv.

The bill will “restore the historical status of the Latvian Orthodox Church,” says Levits, arguing that independence was granted by Patriarch St. Tikhon in 1921.

The bill will therefore prevent the Moscow Patriarchate from influencing the Latvian Church, which is “an important issue for our Orthodox believers” and national security, the president claimed.

According to a sociological survey conducted in 2018, Orthodoxy is the largest religion in Latvia, with every fourth resident identifying as Orthodox.

An independent Latvia requires an independent Church, Levits argued. The president urged the Parliament to consider the matter as soon as possible.

This is not the first time the state has interfered in internal Orthodox matters. In June 2019, the Saeima passed a law requiring Orthodox hierarchs to be Latvian citizens and to have lived in the country for at least 10 years. The Parliament’s Commission on Human Rights and Public Affairs also claimed the measure was aimed at strengthening state and public security.

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