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GEORGIAN CHURCH CONDEMNS POLITICAL STATEMENTS FROM CLERGY, CALLS FOR PEACE AND UNITY



Both state institutions and society need to be careful and work hard to maintain peace and unity if the country hopes to progress, says the Georgian Orthodox Church in a statement published yesterday against the background of the unrest in Tbilisi.

The Patriarchate also distances itself from the radical political statements that circulate from individual clerics.

Thousands of people took to the streets in protest in Tbilisi this week after the “On Transparency of Foreign Influence” draft law passed in its first reading in Parliament. The law would require any organization, such as media outlets, that receives more than 20% of its funding from abroad to register as a foreign agent.

While other nations, such as the United States, have their own foreign agents laws, many in Georgia are protesting what they characterize a “Russian” law. The protests have turned violent and dozens have been arrested. President Salome Zourabichvili has promised to veto the law.

The EU, which Georgian authorities hope to join, called the passing of the bill “a very bad development for Georgia and its people.”

Amidst this tense atmosphere in Georgian society, the Patriarchate states:

We want to respond to the developments in Parliament. Our country is going through the most difficult path of becoming a strong state, for which we need to be extremely careful both on the part of state institutions and society.

The Church, as the greatest unifier and protector of our nation and country, fervently prays for peace and unanimity.

We believe that due to the difficult situation in our neighborhood, maintaining a peaceful course and the country’s independence is the only starting point for the country’s progress. We consider polarizing radical statements as an attempt to disturb the peace, whichever side they come from, especially from clergy.

The sermons and speeches of individual clergymen are circulated on social networks, in which they touch on political topics, whether it be excessive “sympathy” for the northern neighbor or radical criticism of the state.

We unequivocally state that such attitudes are alien to the official vision of the Church and, in general, the Christian spirit, which has been repeatedly observed and voiced in the official positions of the Patriarchate and in the personal statements of the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia about the path of European integration.

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