

Prime Minister meets with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, visiting Lithuania for the first time



On 21 March, Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė met with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, who is on a visit to Lithuania for the first time at the invitation of the Head of Government.

“We sincerely welcome Your All-Holiness’ first visit to Lithuania and are grateful for the attention you are paying to the Lithuanian Orthodox community and the issues of concern to it,” said Prime Minister Šimonytė.

Ms Šimonytė emphasized that the decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to uphold the appeal of five Lithuanian Orthodox priests, to restore their religious status and to accept them into the Mother Church after the decision of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow to expel them from the clergy, is an important step ensuring religious freedom in Lithuania.

Lithuania, which has been historically open and tolerant to the diversity of beliefs, will do its utmost to protect and guarantee the freedom of faith, conscience and religion to every citizen and resident of Lithuania, as enshrined in the Constitution,

Prime Minister stressed.

Ms Šimonytė stressed that the decision on the return of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to Lithuania can only be taken by the Ecumenical Patriarchate itself – this is a matter for the Church and the faithful. However, she pointed out that the possibility to practice one's faith without conflict with one's conscience is important not only for Orthodox Lithuanian citizens, including those of Greek or Ukrainian origin, but also for Ukrainians who have fled the war launched by Russia and for Belarusians who have moved to Lithuania because of the repressions in their home country.

After the meeting, Prime Minister Šimonytė and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew signed an agreement between the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which aims to further strengthen and develop cooperation in the areas of mutual interest to facilitate the exercise of the freedom of conscience and religion for the Orthodox believers in Lithuania.

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