

Mass service held in Montenegro in defense of Serbian Church



Thousands of Orthodox faithful flocked to the Serbian Orthodox Cathedral of the Resurrection in Podgorica, the capital city of Montenegro, on Saturday to show their support for the rights of the canonical Serbian Church and to pray to God to help protect the Church there.

The parishioners gathered at the call of His Eminence Metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro and Littoral, the head of the largest Serbian diocese in Montenegro.

The service was part of a national assembly called by Met. Amfilohije, with the participation of a number of hierarchs and clergy, according to the Metropolis of Montenegro-Littoral. According to Balkan Insight, the Church had called on the people to maintain a three-day fast leading up to the assembly “for the healing of hatred between brothers.”

The Orthodox faithful gathered in protest of the ongoing persecution being faced by the canonical Church in Montenegro, especially concerning the new bill according to which the state can seize properties from the Serbian Church and transfer them to the schismatic “Montenegrin Orthodox Church,” currently headed by “Metropolitan” Mihailo Dedeić, who was defrocked, excommunicated, and anathematized while serving as a priest of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in

Italy.

The state has also refused to grant or extend visas to a number of clergy and monastics of the Serbian Church, forcing them to leave Montenegro, and is also aiming to destroy certain Serbian Orthodox sites. The recent measures are part of President Milo Đukanović's ambitions to acquire a recognized autocephaly status for the miniscule "Montenegrin Church," in the same vein as President Poroshenko did for the Ukrainian schismatics.

At the end of the service, His Grace Bishop Joanikije of Budimlja-Niksic read out the Serbian Church's appeal to the Montenegrin authorities, in which he noted that the authorities do not even hide the fact that the bill is aimed against the Serbian Church, whose parishioners make up 95% of the population of Montenegro.

The bill is aimed exclusively "against the Church" and "the rights and freedoms of Orthodox priests and believers," Bp. Joanikije said, asking the authorities to withdraw the draft law and prepare a new one that would correspond to both Montenegrin law and international standards of freedom of religion.

"If the government does not do this as soon as possible, we will resolutely speak out in defense of our sacred sites and legal rights," the bishop stressed.

"Today, before the Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ, we promise and we swear that we will keep, restore, and defend our sacred places, the lives of our saints, our churches, monasteries, cemeteries, and the graves of our ancestors! May the God of love, St. Peter of Cetinje, and St. Basil of Ostrog help us!" the Serbian hierarch proclaimed.

And speaking with a local television station, His Grace stated: "Do not expect us to go peacefully. We will not arm ourselves but we will defend our property with our very lives. When it comes to that, there are no rules. I'm not scaring anyone, that's just so."

President Aleksandar Vučić of Serbia has also called on the Montenegrin authorities to abandon the bill, citing concern for the Serbian population in Montenegro and the desire to maintain good relations between the states.

