
SERBIAN PATRIARCH FACES CALLS TO APOLOGISE IN MONTENEGRO

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Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarch Irinej on Monday said on a visit to Montenegro that Serbs and Montenegrins were one nation, if divided politically □ as Montenegrin officials continued to demand an apology for his previous claims.

We are one nation, although we are divided ... and we need to help each other and be the people that God and our history expect, the Serbian Orthodox Church official website quoted him as saying.

The Patriarch was visiting Montenegro together with Patriarch John of Antioch, who was visiting the country for the first time.

The two patriarchs, accompanied by Montenegrin Bishop Amfilohije, are visiting monasteries and holding a liturgy in the old Montenegrin capital of Cetinje.

On Monday, the Montenegrin Prime Minister, Dusko Markovic, thanked Irinej for the invite to the liturgy but repeated that he still wanted him to apologize.

In a letter [of thanks], I said I expected Irinej to withdraw the statement and apologize to the citizens of Montenegro, Markovic said on Monday.

In a visit in July, the Serbian Patriarch compared the treatment of the Serbian Church and Serbs in Montenegro to the time when Muslim Ottoman Turks ruled most of the Balkans.

He also claimed that Serbs are treated as they used to be in the Independent State of Croatia □ a wartime Fascist state that murdered hundreds of thousands of Serbs, Jews, leftists and Roma.

Markovic told the media that Irinej had abused the country's hospitality and needed to apologize.

Serbs in Montenegro make up about a third of the total population but have long complained of being politically marginalised by the pro-independence ruling parties.

Most Serbs opposed Montenegro's restoration of independence in 2006 following a referendum. [The former kingdom was forcibly united to Serbia after World War I]

The bishops' visit is happening days after the leader of global Orthodoxy, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, announced that he wishes to grant the Ukrainian Orthodox Church independence,

or autocephaly, from Moscow.

Orthodox Churches in the Balkans have remained officially silent on the dispute for now.

Monday's visit was preceded by speculation that the Montenegrin authorities might not allow Irinej to enter the country.

Some media reported on Sunday that police had drawn up a list of Serbs who posed a danger to Montenegrin security and to whom entry would be denied.

Markovic dismissed the report on Monday, saying there was no such list. The same reports also said Irinej's name was on the list for his July statement.

Montenegrin Bishop Amfilohije called the media reports of unwanted Serbs list fake news on Monday, and asked the media not to create divisions.

Meanwhile, the pro-Serbian opposition Prava Crna Gora [Real Montenegro] party on Sunday said that the people of Montenegro welcomed the Patriarch, even if the government did not.

Prava Crna Gora wants to say to Patriarch Irinej that he is welcome in Montenegro and to people of this country, and that is what is most important, and it is less important that he is not welcome at the top of the government, the press release said.

Another issue for Irinej in Montenegro is the likely independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which could open up the same prospect for the unrecognised Montenegrin Orthodox Church, which dispute the rights of the Serbian Church in the country.

Suppressed after Montenegro lost its independence after World War 1, it was refounded in 1993 and has regained some influence since the country declared independence in 2006.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbs-and-montenegrins-are-one-nation-serbian-patriarch-said-10-15-2018>

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