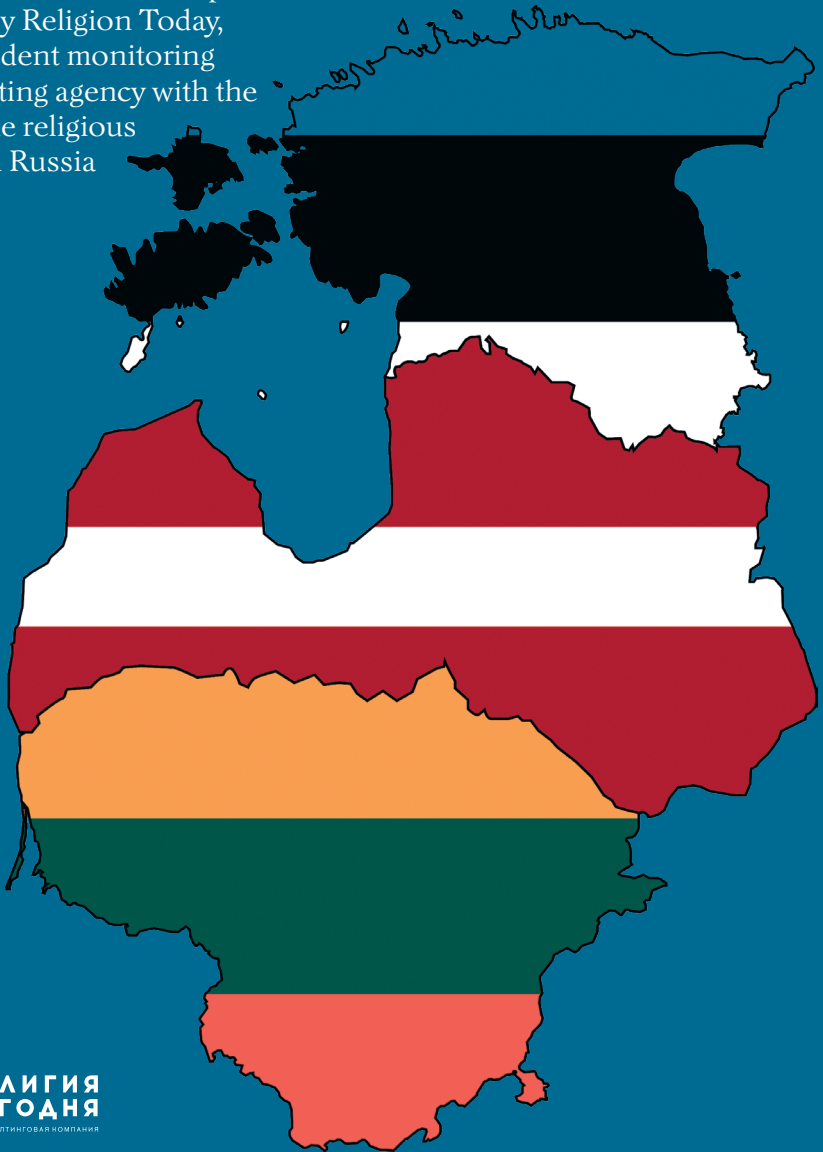


CHURCHES OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE IN THE BALTIC STATES IN TIMES OF THE POLITICAL CRISIS OF 2022

This is the fourth annual report produced by Religion Today, an independent monitoring and consulting agency with the focus on the religious situation in Russia and abroad





CHURCHES OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE IN THE BALTIC STATES IN TIMES OF THE POLITICAL CRISIS OF 2022

The text before you was developed by the independent information and consulting company Religion Today and represents the fourth annual analytical report prepared by our experts. The first and the second issues, *Crisis of modern Orthodox Christianity and Orthodox Church of Ukraine in the Global and Regional Context*, represented an analytical digest of actions leading to legalizing the ecclesiastical schism in Ukraine and the role they played in global politics. The third annual report, *Islamic society in 2021 Russia: Structural changes and internal conflicts*, dissected the Islamic ummah of the Russian Federation. In 2022, we would like to focus our attention on the communities of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Baltic region and the complicated sociopolitical situation that currently facing them. The last year was flooded with news messaging, and this strong current made it challenging to see the full picture and identify development trends for the religious situation across the globe. To show how much things have changed for the Orthodox churches of the Russian tradition in the Baltic states, we have prepared this analytical digest.

Religion Today Annual Report №4 is titled *Churches of the Moscow Patriarchate in the Baltic states in times of the political crisis of 2022* and consists of three parts. In the Foreword, Religion Today gives an overview of major political and religious trends of the last year that have to do with ongoing overt and covert efforts to split the global Orthodox community and marginalize the Russian Orthodox church. It is followed by the Chronology that delineates major events of 2022 that have to do with Orthodox communities of the Moscow Patriarchate in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, as well

as commentaries provided by official speakers. Chronology does not provide any expert or subjective evaluations of the events, relying on the reader to draw their own conclusions about the conditions Orthodox communities are facing and the way the Baltic states form their policies regarding the Moscow Patriarchate. The report is concluded with an annotation of To Leave or not to Leave: The Dilemma Facing the Orthodox Communities in the Baltic states, an article written by Anastasiya Koskello that you can find on our website reltoday.com. Using an evidence-based approach, the author contemplates the crisis of Orthodoxy in the Baltic states and possible ways to resolve it, which serves as a useful addition to the materials of the present annual report.

FOREWORD BY RELIGION TODAY: PARADE OF AUTOCEPHALIES

For the last several years, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been consistently pursuing the fundamental change in the structure of the global Orthodoxy. This can be observed both in vigorous theological efforts of Greek scholars who offer new ecclesiological models – and in practical policies implemented by Constantinople, e.g., granting autocephaly to the “Orthodox church of Ukraine.”

In the past, autocephalous church division was correlated to respective ethnicities: Greek, Serbian, Russian, etc. Nowadays, however, the Ecumenical Patriarchate is seeking to tie the ecclesiastical concept of autocephaly to the secular concept of statehood, so that each independent state has its own independent autocephalous church. Pavel Yermilov, modern scholar of canon law, describes this logic in the following way: “The principle of national autocephalies should be juxtaposed against autocephalies of the territorial nature, so that jurisdictions of regional church entities becomes contained within rigid geographical borders, and the extraterritorial jurisdiction is left to the Ecumenical Patriarchate alone¹.”

The first step towards implementing this new ecclesiological vision of Constantinople started in 2019, when the “Orthodox church of Ukraine” was granted autocephaly. The institution of more than questionable past was deemed to satisfy the requirement of “an autocephalous church for an independent state.”

It should be noted that new autocephalies that the Ecumenical Patriarchate is planning to distribute will be much inferior in their legal standing, and thus, the “structural reform” of the church that

¹ Priest Yermilov P. Ukrainian autocephaly: The Start of regional restructuring of the church. <https://pravoslavie.ru/119831.html>

Constantinople is overseeing, will likely affect the churches that have been autocephalous for decades or even centuries: “One can assume that the model that is being tested in Ukraine now, will affect other autocephalous churches as well, both existing ones and those that will form in the countries on the path to joining the European Union (UN). If this assumption is correct, then it is highly likely that the now existing autocephalies will need to conform to the new “Ukrainian” model that would limit their autonomy from total independence to externally dependent regional exarchates, while all newly formed autocephalies will align with the “Ukrainian” model from the start.”² Thus, the Ecumenical Patriarchate plans to start the so-called *parade of autocephalies*, in a large extent to strip the Russian Orthodox Church of its influence in the UN and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with their abundance of organizations and communities of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Before 2022, Constantinople was receiving strong political support from the USA and a number of the notorious anti-Russian agents in Europe, and the situation has become even more drastic since the start of the Special Military Operation. Playing on the widespread anti-Russian sentiments, Western actors have been pressing the Moscow Patriarchate organizations abroad to first strongly denounce the political and church leadership of Russia, and then to actively seek creation of autocephalous churches that would be independent of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in their respective states.

Thus, Latvian Saeima, on the initiative of president Egils Levits, amended Law On Latvian Orthodox Church. Violating the principle of separation between church and state, the secular government unilaterally declared the Latvian Orthodox Church independent from the ROC.

At the same time, Lithuanian minister of foreign affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis together with prime minister Ingrida Šimonytė started openly discussed transferring the Russian Church to the jurisdiction

² Priest Yermilov P. Ukrainian autocephaly: The Start of regional restructuring of the church. <https://pravoslavie.ru/119831.html>

of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Same as in Ukraine, this seems to imply limited autocephaly with Constantinople exerting extensive control over the local church and its life.

In Estonia, since mid-1990s, there exists the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church of the Ecumenical Patriarchate that was founded right after the collapse of the Soviet Union as the first Constantinople experiment in destabilization of the religious situation in the Baltic region and containment of the ROC influence in Europe.

Other regions across the globe are also turning into hotspot of religious tension related to Orthodoxy. Thus, in Moldova and Transdnistria a feud is brewing between the Chişinău and all Moldova metropolis of the Russian Orthodox Church and the metropolis of Bessarabia of the Romanian Patriarchate, “restored” in 1992. Anti-Russian politicians of both Moldova and Romania are taking an active role in fueling the conflict.

Traditionally friendly relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Georgian Orthodox Church may grow tense in the nearest future due to the advanced age of Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia: even today, there is a party in the Georgian episcopate that with active support from Constantinople is planning to dispute Abkhazian and South Ossetian Orthodox communities that are currently under the jurisdiction of the ROC.

The situation is somewhat more advantageous – though still challenging, due to meddling from the West – in the Serbian Orthodox church. This church is one of the closest to the ROC. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, in three states – Croatia, Montenegro, and Macedonia – there appeared communities that desired to break away from the Serbian church.

Currently, in Croatia Orthodox supporters of autocephaly do not represent a majority, and the secular government do not promote separation from Belgrad as an ecclesiastical centre.

At the same time, in Montenegro, it is the secular government with the Communist and criminal background are actively suppressing the Serbian Orthodox church while supporting the schismatic “Montenegrin

Orthodox Church” led by Mikhail Dedich. The situation is somewhat mitigated by the personal conflict between Mikhail Dedich and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: in the past, the latter expelled Dedich from the Ecumenical Patriarchate governance for financial fraud.

In Macedonia, Constantinople once again attempted to implement the “Ukrainian” scenario by single-handedly granting autocephaly to the Macedonian Orthodox Church. However, thanks to the foresight exhibited by Patriarch Porfirije, the Serbian Church anticipated the move and granted autocephaly to Macedonia first, thus preserving the religious balance in this part of the Balkans.

The situation is precarious for the Czech and Slovak Orthodox Church. In 2015, Constantinople tried to prevent metropolitan Rostislav from being elected its head, while supporting schismatics. Up until now, the Ecumenical Patriarchate continues to found so-called ‘hermitages’ on the territories canonically belonging to the Czech and Slovak Orthodox Church. Registering such hermitages as secular organizations, Constantinople secures ways to control the religious situation in case a crisis erupts.

Thus, the already existing tension in the global Orthodoxy ridden with schisms, has been exacerbated by the geopolitical crisis that has erupted in Ukraine. The clergy and the communities of the Moscow Patriarchate abroad have to confront both behind-the-scenes politics of Constantinople and upper echelons of the Greek clergy that support schismatic groups, but also at times openly repressive actions of secular governments as well as citizens with strong anti-Russian or nationalistic sentiments.

Chronology gives an overview of the dramatic events that Orthodox Christians of the Baltic states faced last year.

CHRONOLOGY



LATVIA



Metropolitan Of Riga And All Latvia Alexander

SEPTEMBER 5

Latvian president Egils Levits introduced an amendment to the Law on Latvian Orthodox church that would declare it independent from any ecclesiastical power outside Latvia.

Latvian president Egils Levits:

“When the law comes into effect, our Orthodox church will be free from any power or influence of the Moscow Patriarchate. Rejection of any connections to the Moscow Patriarchate is an issue that concerns our Orthodox community, the whole Latvian society, and national security.”



<https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2022/09/05/18489595.shtml>
<https://rtvi.com/news/prezident-latvii-vnes-zakonoproekt-o-nezavisimosti-mestnoj-pravoslavnoj-cerkvi-ot-moskovskogo-patriarhata>

SEPTEMBER 7

Ambassador-at-large Gennady Askaldovich, Special Representative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation for Cooperation on Freedom of Religion:

“Once again we witness the Baltic states put the eradication of everything Russian above the principles of protecting their national interests, and the interests of their citizens, churches, and religious communities. Latvia once again is demonstrating the Russophobic orientation of its policy, now seeking to break spiritual ties that our compatriots living there have with Russia. This is a dangerous precedent of state pressure put not only on the ROC but on other religious communities as well. We categorically reject such a policy.”



<https://embassylife.ru/%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%8F%D0%B2%D0%B-B%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5-%D1%81%D0%B-F%D0%B5%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%B-D%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B4%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-2>

SEPTEMBER 8

Spearheaded by president Egils Levits, an amendment to the Law on Latvian Orthodox Church was approved by the Saeima.



<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/08/09/2022/6319f9629a79472e338f1167>

“The Law prescribes that the Latvian Orthodox Church together with all its diocese, communities, and organizations is fully independent and does not depend on the power of any church outside Latvia.

It also prescribes that the church shall give written notice to the president’s office regarding any assignment and dismissal of ecclesiastical leaders, metropolitans, archbishops, and bishops. Following the notice, the president’s office will announce the changes in an official statement and forward the information to the agency responsible for registering religious organizations and their units.

The annotation to the proposed legislation clarifies that this regulation procedure will give an opportunity to make sure that the elected meet all the requirements of normative acts and national security. The church needs to notify the president’s office of the acting ecclesiastical leader, metropolitans, archbishops, and bishops before October 1.

The Latvian Orthodox Church is expected to amend its charter by October 31 to make it compliant with the amendments to the Law on the status of the church.”



<https://www.interfax.ru/russia/861290>

SEPTEMBER 8

The head of the human rights and community affairs Artuss Kaimiņš:

“Amending the law strengthened the historical autonomy and independence of the Latvian Orthodox church by removing the influence and power of the Russian Orthodox church over our Orthodox church.”



<https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2022/09/08/seym-latvii-otdelil-latviyskuyu-pravoslavnuyu-cerkov-ot-moskovskogo-patriarhata>

SEPTEMBER 8

Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, advisor to Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia:

“So, the president of a secular state upon consulting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and security forces – the agencies apparently comprised of experts on Orthodox canon law, passes legislation regarding ‘autocephaly’ ... The secular parliament is now to deal with issues of inner workings of the Orthodox church in the country. How does it fit together with Article 99 of the Latvian constitution stating that the church is separated from the state? How does it fit together with international human rights legislation

signed by Latvia? It does not. At this point, it should not surprise anyone that our Western neighbors are overtaken by this spirit of legislative nihilism. The only thing that matters to them is the current political agenda as it is understood by the leaders of the country or their curators. It no longer matters how such decisions are going to affect citizens of Latvia. It is only recently that the same president set the goal of “dealing with” the wrong part of his nation. How is he going to deal with them? That’s an easy question. “They need to be isolated.” That’s it.”



<https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2022/09/08/seym-latvii-otdelil-latviyskuyu-pravoslavnnuyu-cerkov-ot-moskovskogo-patriarhata>

SEPTEMBER 9

An official statement by the Latvian Orthodox Church:

“On September 8, at the initiative of the President of the Latvian State, sir Egil Levits, the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia amended the Law on the Latvian Orthodox Church. This decision is of legal nature, and the amendments deal with the legal status of the Church. The state set the status of our Church as autocephalous. The state established that the Latvian Orthodox Church, while keeping spiritual, prayer, and Liturgical communication with all canonical Orthodox Churches across the globe, is in the legal sense independent from every church center outside of Latvia. This change of status does not change the Orthodox faith, dogmas, or the Liturgical life of the Church, as well as the calendar, the Liturgical language, rites, traditions, and the inner life of the Church. The Synod of the Latvian Orthodox Church lovingly calls its clergy and community to keep the peaceful spirit and the unity of our Church and to strictly abide by the laws of our State of Latvia. Staying in unbreakable spiritual and prayer unity with the Orthodox world,

let us preserve our faith unsullied and strengthen Holy Orthodoxy in the lands of Latvia. We ask all the faithful to pray ardently for our Holy Church so that our Merciful Lord keeps her in peace and prosperity.”



<http://www.pravoslavie.lv/index.php?newid=9660>

SEPTEMBER 11

Leonid, Metropolitan of Klin, Patriarchal Exarch of Africa:

“There are no questions left about Latvian limitrophe politicians: they are nothing but Western doormats. What I did not quite understand was the position of the Latvian Orthodox Church. I read their official statements several times. A toothless, infantile claptrap. I have always said that this reaction will lead to nothing but more trouble. It will be followed by another attack order: go against Istanbul orders; start a schism, whatever! Anything to oppose the ROC and Russia. Take Ukraine, for example. The time to sit this out in silence is over. There will come another push.”



<https://t.me/exarchleonid/1833>

SEPTEMBER 16

Jānis Bordāns, Latvian Minister of Justice, met with Metropolitan of Riga and All Latvia Aleksandrs to discuss the issue of non-citizen clergy. Bordāns stated:

“The state of Latvia is fulfilling its constitutional duty to protect the freedom of thought, conscience, and the religious freedom of every Latvian resident.”



https://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2022-10-04/9_538_variants.html

SEPTEMBER 20

The Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia authorized minister of justice Jānis Bordāns to address Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill with a request to issue an autocephaly tomos to the Latvian Orthodox Church. The head of the Ministry of Justice is to inform the head of the Russian Orthodox Church about the amendments adopted by the Saeima that define and enshrine in legislation the independence of the Latvian Orthodox Church.



<https://www.interfax.ru/world/863054>

OCTOBER 27

In accordance with the amendments to the Law on the Latvian Orthodox Church, Latvian president Egils Levits rubberstamped as is the current composition of the Latvian Orthodox episcopate.



https://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2022-10-04/9_538_variants.html

OCTOBER 1

Anthony, Metropolitan of Volokolamsk:

“We are expecting an appeal to the Department for External Church Relations from the minister of justice of Latvia demanding autocephaly

to the Latvian church. So far, no such appeal has arrived. However, if it does, it will put us in a precarious situation: autocephalies are granted to the petitioner. I do not think that the ministry of justice needs a tomos stating that the ministry is independent from the Moscow patriarchate.”



<https://ria.ru/20221001/latviya-1820876873.html>

OCTOBER 4

Political scientist Aleksey Makarkin:

“Most likely, we will see the Ukrainian scenario play out in Latvia in the nearest future. [...] The clergy itself won’t unilaterally announce autocephaly. All mentions of the Moscow patriarchate and Russia in general will be erased from the charter. For civil offices, it is going to be an independent church, and for the local Orthodox communities the Latvian Orthodox church will still fall under the ROC jurisdiction. This ambiguous situation will not last forever. The secular government will insist on further steps in addition to the formal changes to the charter. It is likely that the Latvian church could move closer to Constantinople.”



https://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2022-10-04/9_538_variants.html

OCTOBER 20

Formal statement by the Latvian Orthodox Church:

A Council of the Latvian Orthodox Church took place in the church of All Saints in Riga. The Council was presided by His Eminence, Most Eminent Alexander Metropolitan of Riga and all Latvia. In accordance

with the amendments to the Law on the Latvian Orthodox Church, initiated by president of the Republic of Latvia Egil Levits and adopted by the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia on September 08, 2022, the Charter of the Latvian Orthodox Church shall be updated to reflect the above-mentioned amendments before October 31 of the present year. In compliance with the Latvian legislation, the Council of the Latvian Orthodox Church by an absolute majority voted to introduce the appropriate changes into the charter of the Latvian Orthodox Church. Due to the fundamental changes introduced to the Law on the Latvian Orthodox Church regarding its autocephalous status and the appeal the Cabinet of ministers of the Republic of Latvia sent to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, delegates of the Council of the Latvian Orthodox Church signed an appeal to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill regarding the canonical status of the Latvian Orthodox Church.



<http://www.pravoslavie.lv/index.php?newid=9700>

OCTOBER 20

Anonymous priest of the Latvian Orthodox Church:

“Good afternoon! The Council took place. As I had been saying, it was decided to comply with the law and amend the charter. Also, to appeal to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for help in making a canon-appropriate resolution of the situation at hand. No other decision was made. Out of 161 present, 160 voted for; 1 voted against; 0 abstained.”



<https://bb.lv/statja/kultura/2022/10/20/sostoyalsya-sobor-latviyskoy-pravoslavnoy-cerkvi-my-v-raskole-ili-net>



LITHUANIA



Metropolitan of Vilnius and Lithuania Innocent

MARCH 17

Metropolitan Innokentiy of Vilnius and Lithuania:

“I address my word to all people of good will; to everyone eager to hear us out; to all the flock of our Church in Lithuania. [...] As you might have noticed, Patriarch Kirill and myself have diverging political views and opinions about the current situation... [...] I would like to openly say that we, the Lithuanian Orthodox, are free to resolve our local issues independently and are going to strive for increased canonical independence, trusting that the Lord will grant it to us when the time is ripe. We live in a free, democratic country. Lithuania is no Russia. It is a different state, with a different spiritual and ethical climate. The Orthodox of Lithuania represent a small (there are hardly 3000 active churchgoers throughout the country), but an essential part of this society, and are full citizens of the country that are free to practice this traditional religion. Our community are honest and humble people who have been toiling for years for prosperity of the Lithuanian state and have contributed to building the free Lithuania.”



<https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3615-obrashenie-mitropolita-vilensko-go-i-litovskogo-innokentiya>

APRIL 15

By decree of Metropolitan Innokentiy of Vilnius and Lithuania priests Georgiy (Gintaras) Sungayla and Vitaliy (Vitalis) Dauparas were voluntarily declared supernumerary. Priest Vitaliy Motskus was relieved from his service as a diocese chancellor.



<https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3636-zayavlenie-press-sluzhby-pravo-slavnoi-cerkvi-v-litve>

APRIL 18

Metropolitan Innokentiy of Vilnius and Lithuania:

“It is absurd to consider the Orthodox Church in Lithuania an agent of some foreign state. [...] In the bosom of the Orthodox Church in Lithuania there have been emerging a group of clergy that have been for long harboring aspirations to transfer to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

They have been conspiring in secret, but now, since the start of tragic events in Ukraine, they have started to talk about it openly. Who are these priests? Their names are known. They present themselves as heroes and martyrs, but in fact they are nothing but schismatics and grave sinners against God and the Church. They have stepped upon the path of schism and are now leading the clergy and the community astray.”



<https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3639-zayavlenie-mitropolita-vilensko-go-i-litovskogo-innokentiya>

APRIL 20

Vilnius mayor Remigijus Šimašius held a meeting with priests Vitaliy Motskus, Vitalis Dauparas, and Gintaras Sungayla. Afterwards, he declared:

“As a Lithuanian citizen, I take no pleasure in knowing that churches reminding us about the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania belong to an illegal organization. [...] I suggest we return to the state of affairs before 1686 when the Moscow Patriarchate took over Orthodox churches. We have all the prerequisites for this to happen.”



<https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/kultura-i-istoriya/20220510-ne-vedayut-chto-tvoryat-pravoslavnyim-litvy-grozit-tserkovnyy-raskol>

APRIL 21

Ambrose, Bishop of Trakai:

“The Orthodox Church in Lithuania strongly protests against inflammatory statements by Vilnius mayor Remigijus Šimašius that incite religious and national discord. [...] The mayor has said that our churches do not legally belong to us and made several other insolent statements. By impudently meddling into church affairs without knowing anything about them, he has done everything to incite hatred against one of traditional religious communities of Lithuania. This is particularly irresponsible given the current charged atmosphere. The Orthodox Church lives by canonical rules, and, obviously, comparing the clergy changing one regional church for another to changing employers, is blatantly misleading. One cannot compare our canonical connection to the Moscow Patriarchate to administrative chain of command. Our Church is no embassy or branch office of the Moscow Patriarchate; we do not think in such categories. [...] We are Orthodox Christians, happy to suffer for Christ. Yet, since we live in a state governed by the rule of law, please tell us which law we have broken. And if we have broken none, then this smear campaign against the Orthodox Church in Lithuanian should cease immediately.”



https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3646-episkop-trakaiskii-amvrosii-o-vmeshatelstve-svetskikh-vlastei-vo-vnutrennie-dela-religioznykh-obshin№.YmG7XyB__qSq.facebook

APRIL 22

Metropolitan Innokentiy of Vilnius and Lithuania:

“It is hard to believe that these arrogant, provocative words were ut-

tered by a government official and politician of such high rank [Vilnius mayor Remigijus Šimašius – Religion Today] and not some attention seeker. Whose influence is he under? It is yet to be determined.”



<https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3649-mitropolit-vilenskii-i-litovskii-innokentii-radikalno-provokacionnye-zayavleniya-v-adres-pravo-slavnoi-cerkvi-v-litve-nesut-opasnost-dlya-stabilnosti-obshestva>

APRIL 24

Lithuanian Minister of foreign affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis offers to put Patriarch Kirill on the EU sanctions list. He also stated that the change in ecumenical jurisdiction in Lithuania would be welcome, and that the government is seeking advice on the matter.



*<https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/news/2022/04/24/919506-patriarha-kirilla>
<https://www.15min.lt/video/gabrielius-landsbergis-15min-studijoje-sake-neatsimenantis-kito-mg-baltic-atstovo-su-kuriuo-susitiko-136090>*

APRIL 27

Ambassador-at-large Gennady Askaldovich, Special Representative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation for Cooperation on Freedom of Religion:

“Even if we factor out the fact that the words of the mayor [Remigijus Šimašius – Religion Today] could be viewed as incitement to crime: unlawful taking of property or even racketeering, this is in principle yet another act of pressure the state puts on the canonical Orthodox church in Europe; an act of open state involvement in religious affairs.

We categorically disagree with this policy and demand that legal regulations regarding separation of church and state and freedom of thought for all citizens and faiths in Lithuania be observed.”



<https://tass.ru/politika/14489817>

APRIL 27

Deputy chairman of the Security Council of Russia Dmitriy Medvedev:

“It is not only by supplying lethal weapons and intelligence information that the Western world is supporting the wobbly Kyiv regime. NATO leaders are trying to bring hierarchs of different branches of Christianity to their side. [...] Overtaken by anti-Russian hatred, Baltic leaders demand sanctions against the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.”



https://t.me/medvedev_telegram/59

MAY 18

Ričardas Degutis, Lithuanian ambassador to Turkey, met with patriarch Bartholomew, where the Ecumenical patriarch was handed a letter from the prime minister of Lithuania. The letter spoke of the possibility of “restoring” the activity of Constantinople parishes in Lithuania and of the support the government was willing to offer regarding the process.



<https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3893-komentarii-vilensko-litovskoi-eparkhii-po-povodu-vstrechi-predstavitelei-pravitelstva-litovs-s-patriarkhom-konstantinopolskim-varfolomeem>

MAY 27

The Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church

Journal, Issue 36

HEARD:

The Report by Metropolitan Innokentiy of Vilnius and Lithuania regarding the change of status of the Vilnius and Lithuania episcopate.

RESOLVED:

1. To examine the issue of the change of status of the Vilnius and Lithuania episcopate, to establish a committee consisting of:

- a) Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia
- b) Paul, Metropolitan of Krutitsy and Kolomna, head of the Moscow Patriarchate Directorate on Episcopates in Near Abroad
- c) Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Department for External Church Relations
- d) Metropolitan Dionisius of Voskresensk, executive officer of the Moscow Patriarchate
- e) Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, deputy director of the Department for External Church Relations
- f) Archpriest Vladislav Tsy-pin, professor of the Moscow Theological Academy.

2. To submit results of the Committee's work for the Holy Synod's approval.



<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5930293.html>

MAY 21

Metropolitan Innokentiy of Vilnius and Lithuania:

“To Her Excellency Ingrida Šimonytė, Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania.

It is with great bewilderment that we have read the statement published on the official website of the Patriarchy of Constantinople. The statement conveyed that on May 18 Ričardas Degutis, Lithuanian ambassador to Turkey, met with patriarch Bartholomew. According to the statement, the Lithuanian ambassador passed a letter from the prime minister of Lithuania to the Patriarch, and then they ‘discussed issues of mutual interest.’ Elaborating on the subject of the meeting, Lithuanian minister of foreign affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis conveyed to the press that a change in ecumenical jurisdiction in Lithuania would be desirable and that the government is negotiating the matter. It is known that deputy minister of foreign affairs Mantas Adomėnas is also working towards this goal and has recently had a meeting with the pseudo-archbishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Eustratius (Zorja).

Orthodox clergy of our Church are openly talking about their desire to transfer to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. With their open admission to a schism, they have embroiled the Orthodox community and created a threat to stability of the Lithuanian society. In short, this concerns all the Orthodox Church in Lithuania. It is an issue of fundamental importance. However, the record shows that this issue is being solved without even consulting us. I feel justified in asking you: what is happening behind our backs?! You will have to agree with me, most respected prime minister, we have a right to know. We represent thousands and thousands of Lithuanian citizens who identify as Orthodox. The overwhelming majority of these people except for a handful of schismatics and those tempted by them have not even once considered changing the jurisdiction. At the same time, we have received no clarification from the Lithuanian government. Moreover, we have not even heard of the meeting itself, not to mention the letter and its contents. It is a matter of utmost importance and possible unforeseen repercussions. [...] It is deeply regrettable that there are powers in Lithuania that are so short-sighted that they are willing to sacrifice societal stability in their pursuit of short-term political goals. Secular meddling in religious affairs has never led to positive results and always resulted

in disappointment. We need a dialogue. An open, honest, and well-intentioned dialogue. And we are always ready to have it.”



<https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3724-otkrytoe-pismo-mitropolita-vilensko-go-i-litovskogo-premer-ministru-litovskoi-respubliki-ingride-shimonite>

JUNE 1

An online petition in support of the Vilnius and Lithuania diocese is launched.

*“We, the community of Orthodox churches in Lithuania, are deeply concerned with the unfounded attacks on the Orthodox church in Lithuania. We fully support our leader, Metropolitan Innokentiy of Vilnius and Lithuania, who unequivocally condemned the *special military operation and military aggression. We, law-abiding citizens of Lithuania, fervently pray for the country of Lithuania, its people, government, and the military... We affirm our loyalty to the Orthodox church of Lithuania that stays connected to the Moscow patriarchate and emphasize that our faithfulness to the Russian Orthodox worship tradition by no means equals support for the decisions of the Russian government or agreeing to any statements by the Russian Orthodox clergy.”*



<https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3654-miryane-obyavili-sbor-podpisei-v-podderzhku-pravoslavnoi-cerkvi-v-litve>

JUNE 6

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk (up to June 7, 2022 – head of the Department for External Church Relations):

“One has to mention that the political situation has had a great impact on the events in Lithuania. Several members of the clergy used this to oppose the head of the local church, metropolitan Innokentiy of Vilnius and Lithuania. They appealed to the Patriarchate of Constantinople for help. [...] We shall see how the Patriarchate of Constantinople responds to these appeals; however, as of late, it has wasted no chances to do damage to the Russian Orthodox Church. In my mind, the Lithuanian government is making a mistake by supporting this little schism in the Lithuanian diocese. Ukrainian president Poroshenko made the same mistake several years ago, and we see what this support for the schism in Ukraine led to.”



<https://mospat.ru/ru/church-and-world/89354/>

JUNE 9

Lithuanian minister of foreign affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis once again suggests that the European Union sanction patriarch Kirill.



<https://rossaprimavera.ru/news/e43c24b7>

JUNE 23

Metropolitan Innokentiy of Vilnius and Lithuania issued a decree to unordain ex-priest Georgiy (Gintaras) Sungayla. The decision was made based on the resolution of the Ecclesiastical court that found Sungayla guilty of breaking canonical law.

The court found that Sungayla with a group of clergy conspired together with government representatives to create an alternative church organization in the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

By using antiwar rhetoric, Sungayla together with his co-conspirators unleashed a concerted media campaign to discredit the Orthodox church in Lithuania.



<https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3779-georgii-gintaras-sungaila-izvergnut-iz-svyashennogo-sana-presvitera>

JUNE 29

Metropolitan Innokentiy of Vilnius and Lithuania unordained expriests Vitaliy Motskus, Vitaliy Dauparas, Georgiy Ananyev, and Vladimir Selyavko. The decision was made in accordance with the resolution of the Ecclesiastical court of the Vilnius and Lithuania diocese that found the former clergy members guilty of breaking canonical law.

The court found that Motskus, Dauparas, Ananyev, and Selyavko together with government representatives actively tried to create an alternative church organization in the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, while rejecting the lawful procedure for the transfer of a local church to a different jurisdiction.



<https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3790-za-tyazhkie-kanonicheskie-prestupleniya-chetvero-klirikov-pravoslavnoi-cerkvi-v-litve-izvergnuty-iz-svyashennogo-sana-presvitera>

JUNE 27

Lithuania banned the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia from entering Lithuania until June 23, 2027. The decision was made by the Ministry of the Interior upon considering a suggestion made by the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs. Patriarch Kirill was added to the list of persons regarded as undesirable due to his support of the special military operation in Ukraine.



<https://www.interfax.ru/world/854072>

AUGUST 17

Metropolitan Innokentiy of Vilnius and Lithuania arrived at Warsaw at the invitation of metropolitan Sawa, Metropolitan of Warsaw and All Poland. The leader of the Lithuanian Orthodox Church told metropolitan Sawa of the steps that the clergy of the Vilnius and Lithuania diocese is taking to achieve autocephaly. Metropolitan Sawa commented that the Orthodox community of the Moscow Patriarchate in Lithuania should strive for more ecumenical autonomy: “You should pursue this goal energetically.”



<https://www.orthodox.pl/wizyta-metropolity-wilna-i-litwy-w-polsce/>
<https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3849-glava-polskoi-pravoslavnoi-cerkvi-podderzhal-stremlenie-pravoslavnykh-litvy-moskovskogo-patriarkhta-k-bolshei-cerkovnoi-samostoyatelnosti>

AUGUST 17

Address of metropolitan Eugene of Tallinn and All Estonia to the faithful flock of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate:

“Dear brothers and sisters!

We are all witnesses to multiple attacks that the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate is suffering from the mass media.

Being faithful Orthodox Christians, we consider this a trial sent by the Lord. [...] It behooves us to amplify our prayers for our Church.”



<https://orthodox.ee/announcement/obrashchenije-mitropolita-jevgenija-s-prosboj-molitsja-ob-epc/>

SEPTEMBER 19

His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew welcomed a delegation from Latvia headed by the deputy minister of foreign affairs Mantas Adomėnas. Councillor to the Lithuanian prime minister Galina Vaščenkaitė and Lithuanian ambassador to Turkey Ričardas Degutis also participated in the meeting that included the Patriarch and representatives of the Lithuanian government. The meeting was devoted to “serving the Mother Church;” the situation in the Orthodox Church and in Latvia, and other questions of mutual interest.



<https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3893-komentarii-vilensko-litovskoi-eparkhii-po-povodu-vstrechi-predstavitelei-pravitelstva-litvy-s-patriarkhom-konstantinopolskim-varfolomeem>

SEPTEMBER 22

Metropolitan Innokentiy of Vilnius and Lithuania:

“We believe that providing ecclesiastical harmony in the country is a common goal, and the leadership of the Vilnius and Lithuania diocese is absolutely open to dialogue in this respect. At the same time, we cannot agree to government involvement into internal church affairs. [...] Unfortunately, up until now our calls for dialogue have

remained unheard. I have yet to receive a response to my letter to the prime minister asking for a meeting that I sent in May. We believe that it is this open dialogue between the state and the canonical Orthodox leadership could help relieve the growing tension.”



<https://www.orthodoxy.lt/novosti/3893-komentarii-vilensko-litovskoi-eparkhii-po-povodu-vstrechi-predstavitelei-pravitelstva-litvy-s-patriarkhom-konstantinopolskim-varfolomeem>



ESTONIA



Metropolitan of Tallinn and All Estonia Eugene

27 СЕНТЯБРЯ

Minister of the Interior of Estonia Lauri Läänemets:

*“If the Russian Orthodox Church in Estonia of the Moscow Patriarchate makes any statements supporting the *special military operation, the state could strip metropolitan Eugene of his residency.”*



<https://baltnews.com/v-ehstonii/20221005/1025760075/Oruzhie-shan-tazha-kak-MVD-Estonii-prinuzhdaet-RPTs-poyti-protiv-Moskvy.html>

SEPTEMBER 28

Vice-chancellor of the Ministry of the Interior Raivo Küüt summoned the head of the Estonian Orthodox Church metropolitan Eugene. Due to the metropolitan undergoing medical treatment in Russia, the vicar of the Tallinn diocese bishop Sergiy and archpriest Juvenal Kaarma arrived as his representatives. Raivo Küüt informed them that the recent statements patriarch Kirill had made could be viewed as an open attempt to exert influence and to justify the *special military operation in Ukraine. Küüt stated that such actions were illegal in Estonia and demanded that the church provides its community with services free of ideological influence.



<https://rus.err.ee/1608731425/mvd-zhdem-ot-mitropolita-evgenija-chet-koj-pozicii-po-povodu-vyskazyvanij-patriarha-kirilla>

SEPTEMBER 28

Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs Urmas Reinsalu offered to include patriarch Kirill into the EU sanctions list.



https://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2022-10-04/9__538__variants.html

OCTOBER 4

Head of the Religious affairs department of the Ministry of the Interior Ilmo Au:

“If there are legal reasons to repeal the residency [of metropolitan Eugene – Religion Today] and it is deemed necessary, we can repeal it at any time, regardless of the current location of the residency holder. [...] We would like to learn the position of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and its leader regarding the statements patriarch Kirill made on Sunday, September 25. It is unacceptable for the positions of the church and the church leader to be considered exerting influence. If this influence is indeed exerted, we are to impose sanctions commensurate with the manner of the act and the motives of the person who committed it.”



<https://rus.err.ee/1608738826/v-mvd-ne-iskljuchili-annulirovanie-vi-da-na-zhitelstvo-mitropolita-evgenija>

OCTOBER 6

Address by the Synod of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate:

*“Estonian citizens cannot stay indifferent to the ongoing *special military operation in Ukraine. [...]*

Discussions on the topic cause pain, misunderstanding, confusion, as well as hostility and mutual hatred that could eventually split our society.

These conversations are exhausting and strip people of energy to go on about their lives.

Some accuse our church of supporting the conflict and calling for more violence, which, of course, has never happened and cannot happen. Our Church has always advocated for peace and for peaceful resolutions to any conflict.

The Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate operates in a multi-national society that includes people of various education levels, cultures, and political beliefs. Our churches are attended by both locals and refugees. The goal of the Church is to offer everyone the same eternal gravity centre which is the teaching of Christ. Everything else – everything temporary and fleeting – should fade into the background. This is the mission of the Church. This is its peacekeeping and unifying role.

The Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate co-signed the statement made by the Estonian Council of Churches on March 19, 2022. [...] At the same time, we keep receiving demands for the church to give political evaluations of the current events and to continue making political statements. However, if the church joins the argument and together with political figures starts to revile at current events, where are people to find solace for their restless souls?

The Church is called to preach the Lord's peace. And the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate preaches exactly that.

Because of it, people of differing opinions have an opportunity to participate in service and receive spiritual support and consolation.”



<https://orthodox.ee/articles/obrashchenije-sinoda-estonskoj-pravoslavnoj-cerkvi-moskovskogo-patriarhata-06-10-2022/>

OCTOBER 7

Minister of the Interior of Estonia Lauri Läänemets declared he was dissatisfied with the address published by the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate on October 6. He stated that if metropolitan Eugene failed to unequivocally condemn the words of patriarch Kirill, he, Lauri Läänemets, would call for revoking his residency.

*“The address failed to express the opinions requested by the Estonian government. [...] We want metropolitan Eugene to unambiguously convey through the Estonian media whether he shares patriarch Kirill’s view. [...] We need to be certain that no organization within the borders of the Republic of Estonia, including religious ones, supports the *special military operation. If an organization does not openly express condemnation, it must support it, and this cannot be tolerated in any Estonian organization. This is a question of national security. [...] I will ask the Police and Borders department file a lawsuit. The Police and the Department of Police should lead this process concerning security. There are grounds for it. At the same time, I will have to initiate the process with my government partner: it is an important issue that the minister of the interior should not resolve alone.”*



<https://rus.err.ee/1608742066/ljajenemets-primet-reshenie-o-vide-nazhitelstvo-mitropolita-evgenija-na-sledujuwej-nedele>

OCTOBER 11

Archbishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran church Urmas Viilma: *“A question arises here: could the government or its representative issue an ultimatum in a country like Estonia that does not have a state church. [...] What happened to the freedom of religion; to the freedom of thought and opinion? Where do these legislative demands*

lead? [...] If the state starts demanding churches to give opinions and statements based on hot-button concerns and not the legislative framework, then it will no longer be the country with no state religion, according to our Constitution. I believe this goes against freedom of thought and freedom of religion.”



<https://rus.err.ee/1608746668/vijlma-podnjaj-vopros-o-prave-gosudarstva-stavit-cerkvi-ultimatumy>

OCTOBER 12

Response to the letter from the Ministry of the Interior by metropolitan Eugene of Tallin and All Estonia:

“To Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Estonia

To Minister of Justice of the Republic of Estonia

Most esteemed Sir Lauri Läänemets

Most esteemed Madam Lea Danilson-Järg

In a letter from October 07, 2022, addressed to me and the Synod of our Church, vice-chancellor of the Ministry of the Interior Raivo Küüt offered me to make a public statement to the media before October 12, 2022. Otherwise, he threatened to start the procedure of revoking my Estonian residency. He requested that I:

*1) Unequivocally and clearly state whether I share the opinion of His Holiness patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill that the latter expressed on September 25, 2022 where he supported the *special military operation of the Russian Federation in Ukraine.*

*2) Persuade the Ministry of the Interior as well as the Estonian public that the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate leads no activities in Estonia that incite the *special military operation, that would be inspired by the sermon given by His Holiness patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill, and that would aim to spread similar ideological messaging.”*

In response, I state the following:

1. Our Church in its activities abides by the Charter of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the legislation of the Republic of Estonia.

*Relying on the Orthodox faith, Estonian Orthodox Church opposes the *special military operation. It advocates for peace and peaceful resolution of all conflicts, which was reiterated in the address of the Synod of the Estonian Orthodox Church of October 6, current year.*

In this regard, I inform you that I do not share the opinion expressed by His Holiness patriarch Kirill in his sermon from September 25, 2022 regarding absolution of sins for the military personnel who died performing their military duty.

*On March 19, current year, I co-signed the statement made by the Estonian Council of Churches that condemned the *special military operation. I have not changed my stance since then.*

*2. In order to persuade the government and the public of Estonia that the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate does not spread in Estonia any ideology inciting the *special military operation, I must first state the following:*

*In the address made by the Synod of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate regarding the ongoing *special military operation in Ukraine, we jointly confirmed to our flock and the people of Estonia that we are praying for the speedy end of this *special military operation, same as all Christian churches of Estonia. In all our churches at every Liturgy prayers are said to end the *special military operation and to restore peace in the lands of Ukraine.*

*Since the very beginning of the *special military operation I have implored my flock to not give in to feelings of hostility and hatred, to not get dragged into political debates and instead to take care of refugees left without shelter and means to survive. Our churches collected 10000 EUR in donations and transferred the money to MTÜ Eesti Pagulasabi. Our churchgoers volunteered in refugee centers; participated in col-*

lecting clothing, food staples, and essential goods; helped find housing. Our clergy continues to provide spiritual support to Ukrainian refugees coming to Estonian Orthodox churches.

*Today, there exist 38 active Estonian Orthodox church communities that belong to the Moscow Patriarchate. They unite the majority of Orthodox believers in our country. Since the beginning of March 2022, almost every parish started welcoming Ukrainian refugees of the Orthodox faith. This can only serve to confirm that our parishes do nothing to promote the *special military operation or incite hatred. Such activities would soon have come to light: our parishes act in a transparent and open way.*

All that aside, I still hope to participate in a meaningful dialogue during our meeting at the Ministry of the Interior on October 18, 2022, where I was invited earlier.”



<https://orthodox.ee/articles/otvet-mitropolita-tallinskogo-i-useja-estonii-jevgenija-na-pismo-iz-mvd-ot-07-10-2022/>

OCTOBER 12

Minister of the Interior Lauri Läänemets:

“In this response, the Estonian Orthodox church distances itself from the words of patriarch Kirill. [...] This is the only thing we wanted to know. We wanted to hear this position loud and clear.”



<https://eadaaily.com/ru/news/2022/10/12/estoniya-ne-budet-otbitat-vid-na-zhitelstvo-u-mitropolita-evgeniya>

OCTOBER 14

Metropolitan Eugene of Tallinn and All Estonia:

“This [the metropolitan’s formal response from October 12, in which he expressed his disagreement with the words of patriarch Kirill – Religion Today] is not opposition; opposition is a schism. I once again need to bring it to attention to the fact that this is not a schism but a disagreement on a particular topic. [...] Any phrasing will always have those who agree and those who do not. This is why I try to avoid making flashy, scandalous statements that could escalate the situation. Our goal now is to find the most peaceful resolution for what is happening. [...] It [autocephaly for the Estonian Orthodox Church – Religion Today] is not currently on our agenda, and won’t be for the foreseeable future. A church needs to satisfy certain conditions to be granted autocephaly. And the Estonian church does not satisfy these conditions.”



<https://rus.err.ee/1608756037/mitropolit-evgenij-ne-sleduet-delat-shumnyh-zajavlenij-kotorye-mogut-vzorvat-situaciju>

In conclusion, we offer you an annotation of an article written by a scholar of religion Anastasiya Koskello. You can find the full text on our website *reltoday.com*.

TO LEAVE OR NOT TO LEAVE:
THE DILEMMA FACING THE ORTHODOX
COMMUNITIES IN THE BALTIC STATES

Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia are very different in social and religions sense. The only thing that unites these three Baltic states nowadays is that the members of the Orthodox church are experiencing problems there.

All in all, Baltic state officials ‘terrorize’ the church leadership, so that regular parish members are not significantly affected. Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian societies are multi-religions, and the states are pronouncedly secular. Orthodox parishes there are struggling for equality, and at times for survival due to the lack of financial means. Objectively speaking, this is the role of a religious minority. It is in stark contrast to the privileged position of the church in the Russian Federation that, according to the current events, knows next to nothing about it. The challenge of communication between the Moscow ecumenical ‘center’ and the local Orthodox ‘diaspora’ is at the heard of the post-Soviet ecclesiastic drama in the Baltic states. Year 2022 has shown that this can be the reason (and not just Constantinople plotting and the pressure from the ‘collective West’) that the Moscow Patriarchate might lose its Baltic assets.

The condition of the Orthodox minority in each of the three Baltic states has a sociological cause.

Lithuania is primarily Catholic: according to the census of 2021, 74% of the population calls themselves Catholic (and only 3.75% consider themselves Orthodox.)

Latvia paints a more colorful religious picture, and the Orthodox have a more prominent position there. Lutherans, Catholics, and Orthodox represent the top-3 confessions; however, different polls produce diverging numbers. The Ministry of Justice reports that in 2018 36% of communities were of Lutheran faith; 18% were Catholic, and 9% Orthodox; while the International Social Survey Programme presented different statistics for the same year: 19.7% Orthodox; 18.5% Catholic, and 17.8% Protestant, including Lutheran.

The situation in Estonia is the most complex. Orthodoxy, together with Lutheranism, can be considered ‘traditional’ denominations there, yet in the post-Soviet years the republic has acquired the status

of one of the most ‘atheistic’ countries, where only 14% of the population report of religion playing any role in their lives.

As a result, Orthodox parishes of the Russian tradition across the region are canonically united by administratively divided. Orthodox Christians in Lithuania do not represent an independent church but exist within the Vilnius and Lithuania diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church (52 parishes, 2 monasteries, and 63 clergy members altogether), whereas Latvia and Estonia have independent (autonomous) churches affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate: the Latvian Orthodox Church (LOC; 118 parishes and 78 priests) and the Estonian Orthodox Church (EOC of MP, the least numerous, with 37 parishes and 45 priests.)

Before the start of the special military operation lives of Orthodox Christians in the Baltic states were hardly affected by the absence of autocephaly – and even autonomy, in Lithuania. However, since spring 2022 the governments of these countries have been demanding in various ways to break ‘connections with Moscow.’ This created a conundrum that is unlikely to be resolved in the foreseeable future. Both from the perspective of ecclesiastical tradition and the secular legislation of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia it is impossible to break local dioceses’ connection with the Moscow Patriarchate, since its foundation lies in the canonical and not political unity. Autocephaly can be granted only by the decision of the Council of the Mother Church, which is hardly possible in the current climate.

For the political elites of the Baltics who are opposed to Russia, the institutions of the Moscow Patriarchate are, above all else, not the “Russian Church” – everyone knows this is not the case – but the legacy of the Soviet occupation. ‘Occupant’ is considered a worse slur today than the word ‘Russian.’ It is because of this massive wave of ‘driving occupants out of the country’ that the Estonian government of the 1990s allowed most of the property of the Russian Church in the republic to be reappropriated by the Constantinople Patriarchate. Today the Western media narrative about the ‘Russian

occupation of Ukraine' echoes and intensifies the already existing local one of the 'occupation of the Baltics.'

The last year has shown that the Moscow Patriarchate in its efforts of building a dialogue with local authorities, especially in this charged international climate, can really benefit from the half-forgotten tool of interfaith collaboration. Estonia presents the most successful example here: the country still remembers the ecumenical movement of the 1960s – 1970s and the heritage of metropolitan Alexy (Ridiger.) Thus, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran church provided the most support to the EOC when in October 2022 the Estonian government threatened metropolitan Eugene with stripping him of his residency rights should he fail to condemn the *special military operation. Then, archbishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran church Urmas Viilma expressed his support for the Orthodox community and reminded the Estonian state that “Estonia that does not have a state church.” “If we comply with this blackmailing, the political power will use the opportunity to put pressure on any church regarding any issue,” Estonian Lutherans said.

By Anastasiya Koskelo, for
Religion Today Annual Report №4



Religion today is a community of independent experts who monitor the religious situation in Russia and abroad and are ready to offer consultant services in the area of religion.

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