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# **LATVIA : Orthodox Church of Latvia seceded from Moscow Patriarchate**

## **Orthodox Church of Latvia seceded from Moscow**

Orthodox Times (10.09.2022) – <https://bit.ly/3RS5SK0> – The Latvian parliament, Saeima, approved the full independence of the Orthodox Church of Latvia, from the Patriarchate of Moscow, in a vote that took place on Thursday.

According to a statement from the Parliament, “the Saeima adopted urgent amendments to the Law on the Latvian Orthodox

Church affirming the full independence of the Latvian Orthodox Church with all its dioceses, parishes, and institutions from any church authority outside Latvia (autocephalous church)".

Specifically, Artuss Kaimiņš, Chair of the Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee, after the draft bill passed from the Parliament, stressed that "With the adoption of the Law, the historically existing autonomy and independence of the Latvian Orthodox Church is strengthened, preventing the Russian Orthodox Church from having influence or power over our Orthodox Church".

He even added that "such a decision is in the interests of Latvian Orthodox Christians, society as a whole, and national security."

In addition, the Law establishes the procedure for informing Latvian state institutions and private individuals "about the accession to and removal from office of the Head of the Church, metropolitans, archbishops, and bishops."

According to the explanatory note to the Draft Law, the definition of the scope of legal status in the Law does not affect or interfere with the Church's doctrine of faith and canon law.

The Law stresses that, by 31 October, the Church will have to align its statutes with the amendments made to the Law on the status of the church.

By 1 October, the Chancery of the President must be notified of the appointment of the Head of the church, metropolitans, archbishops, and bishops.

This decision by the Latvian parliament, comes a few days after the country's President, Egils Levits, tabled the bill saying that "this bill restores the historical status of the Orthodox Church of Latvia", stressing that the independence of the Church established "by the 6(19) July 1921 Tomos issued by

Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Tikhon to Archbishop Jānis Pommers and the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 8 October 1926 on the Status of the Orthodox Church”.

The main goal is, as described in the bill, “to preclude any influence or power over our orthodox church by the Patriarch of Moscow. Rejecting any link with the Patriarch of Moscow is a crucial matter for our orthodox community, the whole society of Latvia and national security.”

The President of Latvia says actually that “on an independent and democratic state of Latvia based on the rule of law the orthodox community needs its own autonomous and independent church. That has been, is and will always be the position of the state of Latvia. Under Archbishop Jānis Pommers, this was already achieved shortly after the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia.”

He also informed that he has discussed the law with the Speaker of the Parliament and the chairpersons of all parliamentary groups of the Saeima, who fully supported this initiative.

The Latvian President added that the Church had also been informed, and he confirmed that “the Latvian Orthodox Church and Metropolitan Alexander can count on full support from the state of Latvia as an autocephalous church henceforth also recognised in law”.

### **What the Orthodox Church of Latvia says**

The Church of Latvia, after the presidential and parliamentary announcements, informs the faithful that this decision is of a legal nature and that the adopted changes concern the legal status of the Church.

It clarifies that: “The state established the status of our Church as autocephalous. The state has determined that the Latvian Orthodox Church is legally independent from any

ecclesiastical center located outside of Latvia, maintaining spiritual, prayerful and liturgical communion with all canonical Orthodox churches of the world.

The change of status does not change the Orthodox faith, the doctrines, the liturgical life of the Church, the calendar, the sacred liturgical language, the rituals, the traditions and the inner church life”.

Finally, it calls on clergy and laity to maintain the unity of the Church, “strictly observing the laws of our state, Latvia.

Living spiritually and prayerfully in unspoken unity with the entire Orthodox world, let us preserve the purity of our faith and strengthen Holy Orthodoxy in the land of Latvia.”

### **The reaction of the Church of Russia**

The Russian Orthodox Church reacted immediately – as expected – to the decision of the Latvian state to pass a law on the separation of the country’s Church from the Moscow Patriarchate.

Archpriest Nikolai Balasov, former vice-president of the department of external church relations of the Moscow Patriarchate and current adviser to Patriarch Kirill, told the Interfax news agency that “obviously, they firmly believe in political expediency and state security, and they are not afraid of God to declare autocephaly.”

According to him, such a decision by the state authorities regarding the status of the Church, fits perfectly “in the general logic of decision-making in many European countries”.

“Did anyone doubt? This is how Europe is now”, he pointed out characteristically, wondering how it is possible in a secular state where the Church has been separated from the state by the Constitution, to have a say in the affairs of the Church. “They have overcome the Middle Ages”, he pointed out

characteristically.

*Photo: orthodoxtimes.com*

### **Further reading**

Latvian saeiman adopts a law on separation of the Latvian Orthodox Church Russian Church

Russian Orthodox Church outraged by interference of Latvian secular authorities in church affairs

Riga seeking independence of Latvian Orthodox Church from Moscow Patriarchate (*updated*)

Latvian Saeima endorses law on independence of Latvian Orthodox Church

### **Further reading about FORB in Latvia on HRWF website**

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