

Table of Contents

- ***[The Russian Orthodox Church to be declared a terrorist organization?](#)***
 - ***[Estonia expels head of Russian church branch, a threat to national security](#)***
-

The Russian Orthodox Church to be declared a terrorist organization?

The head of the Estonian Ministry of Internal Affairs proposed to recognize the Russian Orthodox Church as a terrorist organization. The Russian Orthodox Church compared it to a "witch hunt"

By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (15.04.2024) - Estonian Interior Minister Lauri Läänemets and leader of the Social Democratic Party, has announced on the ETV channel his intention to invite the parliament to recognize the Russian Orthodox Church as a terrorist organization in order to eventually ban its activities in the country.

"We must understand that today the Moscow Patriarchate is subordinate to Vladimir Putin, who, in fact, leads terrorist activities in the world," the minister stressed.

"If we draw a parallel, Islamic terrorists are saying that they are waging a holy war against the Western world, the values of the Western world; today the Patriarch and the Patriarchate operating in Moscow are no different from Islamic terrorists."

The representative of the **Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate** claimed that they do not oppose the Estonian state and the accusations are groundless.

He added that they are not directly subordinate to the Moscow Patriarch and cannot be held responsible for the statements made in Moscow in support of Russia's war against Ukraine.

The Holy Synod of the Estonian Orthodox Church [condemned](#) the final document adopted at the 25th Congress of the World Russian People's Council in which the war in Ukraine was called "holy", stating that it "does not correspond to the spirit of the Gospel teaching."

Based on the examination of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the assessment of the Security Police, the Minister of the Interior said he has no choice but to take measures to break ties between the Estonian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Patriarchate.

Breaking the ties with the Moscow Patriarchate

If the parliament votes in favor of his proposal, the minister will appeal to the court and propose to stop the activities of the Estonian Orthodox Church under its current status. It does not mean that its churches will be closed, he said, but it means that ties with Moscow will be severed.

"Each parish has its own legal entity, and they will be able to continue to work. This does not apply to parishes and believers, it applies only to the parent organization. However, this will still affect two parishes: Alexander Nevsky Cathedral reports directly to Patriarch Kirill, as well as the Pykhtitsky Convent. We will need to try to find a solution in cooperation with the monastery and the cathedral," the minister said.

The best option, according to Läänemets, would be autocephaly. In this case, the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate would have gained independence from Moscow.

The head of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Urmas Viilma believes that Orthodox parishes will have the opportunity to join the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople as it happened in Ukraine after creating the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

Under Estonian law, the **Orthodox Church of Estonia** (independent from Moscow) is already under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople as on 20 February 1996, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople had formally reactivated its 1923 canonical subordination.

In 1993, the synod of the Orthodox Church of Estonia in Exile had been recognized and re-registered as the legal successor of the pre-World War autonomous Orthodox Church of Estonia to which the Patriarchate of Constantinople had granted autonomy (not autocephaly) in 1923. In 1940, when the Soviet Union occupied the Estonian Republic, the Church had over 210,000 faithful, three bishops, 156 parishes, 131 priests, 19 deacons, two monasteries, and a theological seminary; the majority of the faithful were ethnic Estonians.

The Orthodox Church of Estonia has now more than 100,000 followers. In January this year, the Estonian authorities refused to extend the residence permit to the head of the local metropolis of the Russian Orthodox Church, Evgeny (Valery Reshetnikov). He was recognized as a threat to the security of the state. Before that, Estonia banned Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia from entering the country.

Which fate for the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral?

As for the fate of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, even in the case of the separation of the Estonian Orthodox Church from the Moscow Patriarchate, there is hope that the cathedral will remain under the jurisdiction of the Tallinn diocese.

"This parish and this cathedral are part of our entire Orthodox Church. Since now the question has arisen very acutely that the charter states that this is a stavropegia, but in fact it is only on paper" explained the vicar of the Tallinn diocese. The stavropegia status implies a direct subordination to a primate or Synod, rather than to a local bishop.

"Now, a general decision has already been made that the parish meeting will soon make some decisions on its part and submit a re-registration of the charter, where the participation of the Russian Patriarch will be crossed out," said the vicar.

The example of the Latvian parliament

In September 2022, only about six months after Russia's invasion attempt of Ukraine, the Latvian parliament, Saeima, approved the full independence of the Orthodox Church of Latvia, from the Patriarchate of Moscow.

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”.

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 Latvian Orthodox Church has not joined the jurisdiction of the Constantinople Patriarchate and is currently an autocephalous Church.

Some final remarks

Since the beginning of Russia’s war on Ukraine fully supported as a “holy war” by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus, there has been a clear trend of fragmentation and dismantling of the Orthodox world under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).

The Baltic states and Ukraine have taken the lead of this development out of (historical) fear of losing their sovereignty, if not their independence again, and falling under the Russian dictatorial rule whose face is now well known in the West.

In January 2019, the Patriarchate of Constantinople granted autocephaly to the national **Orthodox Church of Ukraine** (OCU) as an alternative to the **Ukrainian Orthodox Church** (UOC) in communion and canonical relations with the ROC, and there are now proposals in the parliament going so far as to ban the UOC.

In Kazakhstan, 300 Orthodox members of a group called [Russian Priests for Peace](#) consider to establish an autocephalous Orthodox Church of Kazakhstan.

Other Orthodox Churches in the diaspora dissociate themselves in various ways from the ROC.

Estonia expels head of Russian church branch, a threat to national security

By [Anugrah Kumar](#),

[The Christian Post](#) (22.01.2024) - Estonia will not renew the residence permit of Metropolitan Eugene, head of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, citing national security concerns.

The decision, announced by the Estonian Interior Ministry, requires Eugene, also known as Valeri Reshetnikov, to leave the country by Feb. 6.

Indrek Aru, head of the border guard bureau of the North Prefecture of the Estonian Police and Border Guard Board, or PPA, stated in a press release that Reshetnikov's public actions and statements supporting the aggressor, presumably Russia, led to this decision, Estonian public broadcaster [ERR](#) reported.

Despite warnings, Reshetnikov continued activities deemed incompatible with Estonia's values and legal environment, prompting the PPA to view his actions as a security threat. The Ministry of the Interior repeatedly advised Reshetnikov to cease justifying the Kremlin regime and Russia's military actions. However, his unaltered conduct, especially in light of Estonia's declaration of Russia as a terrorist state following the full-scale war in Ukraine, has raised concerns.

Reshetnikov has been in Estonia for four years, with his last residence permit renewal occurring two years ago, just before Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine. The decision not to renew his permit is based solely on his behavior and does not impact the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate or its followers, Aru said.

The Estonian Internal Security Service contributed to this decision, noting that Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, has consistently supported the Kremlin's aggression against Ukraine. The ISS views the actions of the Moscow patriarch and Metropolitan Eugene as aiding Russia's security policy in Estonia.

This move by Estonia is part of a broader trend in Eastern Europe, where countries are scrutinizing religious groups with ties to Russia amid its nearly two-year war in Ukraine. In Ukraine, lawmakers have [advanced legislation](#) targeting religious organizations linked to Russia, particularly the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is distinct from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The UOC, having severed ties with the Russian Orthodox Church last year, faces potential bans under new laws aimed at protecting national security.

The Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada's legislation prohibits activities of religious groups affiliated with external influence centers in states engaged in armed aggression against Ukraine. This bill, supported by 267 lawmakers on the first vote in October, awaits further voting and presidential approval.

Iryna Herashchenko, a lawmaker from the European Solidarity Party, described the vote as historic, emphasizing the need to protect national security from entities perceived as extensions of foreign security services, specifically the Russian FSB.

The Ukrainian government has accused the UOC of promoting pro-Russian propaganda, leading to raids and evictions of [UOC properties](#) and the alleged discovery of materials supporting the Russian invasion.

Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church condemned the Ukrainian legislation, arguing that it aligns the Ukrainian state with oppressive regimes of the past. He criticized the bill's targeting of the UOC, which he views as an attack on a significant religious community in Ukraine.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Ukrainian government has intensified its stance against the UOC. The church officially severed ties with the Moscow Patriarchate in May 2022, denouncing the war. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has supported proposals to ban the UOC, framing it as a measure to strengthen Ukraine's internal security and resistance against Russian influence.