

Patriarch Visit Sparks Protest in Ukraine

July 26, 2010



Ukrainian police officers detaining a nationalist activist holding a portrait of Patriarch Kirill in Kiev on Monday. **Konstantin Chernichkin**

KIEV — Ukrainian police detained eight nationalist activists in Kiev on Monday for protesting a visit by the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is bidding to boost its influence in the country.

Many Ukrainians refuse to recognize Russia's authority over Orthodox Christianity, a dominant religion in both countries, and accuse Moscow of blocking an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church from gaining international acceptance.

Dozens of activists chanted "Down with the Moscow pope!" and "Long live Ukraine!" on one of Kiev's central squares as Patriarch Kirill visited the St. Sophia Cathedral.

But they were quickly blocked by police, who detained eight men and stopped the others from approaching Kirill as he left the church. A court has banned all rallies in connection with his visit.

Kirill sought to emphasize the common history of the Russian and Ukrainian Churches, which

trace their roots to the conversion to Orthodox Christianity of Prince Vladimir of Kiev in 988.

"Throughout the Holy Rus, there are common saints, common shrines and a common church," Kirill said, Interfax reported.

The Ukrainian church has been split since the Soviet collapse, with some bishops declaring themselves independent of Moscow. Russia's top clergy have prevented the worldwide Orthodox hierarchy from recognizing an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Kirill is still revered by the biggest branch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and hundreds gathered to welcome him when he arrived in Kiev on Sunday.

Ukraine's previous president, pro-Western politician Viktor Yushchenko, had supported the local church's bid for independence, but President Viktor Yanukovich is seen as more amenable to the Moscow church.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/07/26/patriarch-visit-sparks-protest-in-ukraine-a123>