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Protesting Students Appeal to Patriarch Kirill

By The Moscow Times

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Students and faculty of the Russian State University of Trade and Economics who last week vowed an indefinite strike over the Education and Science Ministry's decision to reorganize the university have appealed to Patriarch Kirill to intervene in the matter, news reports said Wednesday morning.

In an open letter posted on the school's website, members of faculty ask Patriarch Kirill to step in and help save the university and its "spiritual traditions." They also complain of a "special cynicism" in the timing of the Education Ministry's decision to close the school and merge it with the Plekhanov Institute, as the decision was made just before the planned dedication ceremony for the university's newly constructed chapel, built with the help of donations from students, faculty and staff.

This follows earlier reports Wednesday morning by RIA-Novosti of students blocking the university's entrance and refusing to let the new rector, Andrei Shklyayev, enter

the building.

The Russian Orthodox Church's press service has already responded to the students' plea with a short statement: "In Russia, the church is separate from the state. We don't have the right to interfere in administrative matters, but we hope that the situation is resolved smoothly," Gazeta.ru reported.

The initial protests began on Dec. 18, when over 400 students staged a sit-in response to the Education and Science Ministry deeming the school "ineffective" and subject to reorganization. They argued that the ministry's monitoring of the school was done improperly and demanded that the ministry reconsider its decision. The strike was called off on Dec. 20, after the ministry agreed to re-examine the matter. That same day, however, it was announced that the university would be merged with the Plekhanov Institute.

Education and Science Minister Dmitry Livanov, for his part, has assured students that the new reorganization will not affect their studies.

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