The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Medvedev Hopes for Peace From New Ukraine Metropolitan

August 17, 2014



Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev leads a government meeting in Moscow, Russia.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said Sunday he was sure the new head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Onuphrius, would help bring peace to Ukraine.

"I am sure that you will do everything to instill and preserve peace, strengthen Orthodox unity and revive spiritual and moral values," Medvedev said in a telegram sent to Metropolitan Onuphrius on Sunday to congratulate him on his enthronization as primate of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

President Vladimir Putin congratulated the new metropolitan after his election Wednesday.

"I am sure that in this difficult time for Ukraine, your work as a spiritual leader will contribute to reconciliation and mutual understanding between people, restoring solidarity and stability in society," Putin said.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate is one of three major branches of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. It is the only one whose canonical status is recognized by the whole Eastern Orthodox communion. Despite being under the ecclesiastic jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, the church is autonomous in most of its affairs. Nevertheless, nationalist forces in Ukraine have campaigned for its complete independence for many years.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko met with the newly elected primate Saturday in his office, stressing that the Church must contribute to dialogue and peace in a country that is going through "difficult times."

While Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill blessed the newly elected metropolitan for service, Onuphrius was elected by the bishops of the Ukrainian Church.

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