



## MACEDONIAN COMMUNITIES COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA CONDEMNS THE MACEDONIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH HIERARCHY CONCERNING THE DECLARATION OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH

On 09 May 2022 the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarchate issued a Declaration, in the name of the Patriarch Bartholomew, accepting the Macedonian Orthodox Church into “Eucharist Communion” with the Ecumenical Orthodox Church. The Edict does not recognize however the Macedonian Orthodox Church’s autocephalous status, which was self-declared in 1967.

The Decree also ceded responsibility to administratively regulate the ultimate acceptance of the Macedonian Orthodox Church as an autocephalous and independent member of the “Orthodox Family” to the Serbian Orthodox Church, whose jurisdiction over the Macedonian Archdiocese it still recognizes. Notably, the Decree deliberately avoids the use of the name “*Macedonian Orthodox Church*”, and refers to the Church as the “*Ohrid*” Church, a reference only in part to the addendum used by the MOC itself, namely the “*Ohrid Archbishopric*”. Statements made publicly subsequent to the Declaration by both political and religious leaders in the Republic of Macedonia broadly welcome the initiative of the Patriarch.

The Macedonian Communities Council of Australia Inc. expresses deep regret and concern in respect of these developments. **Chris Angelkov**, Chairperson of the Council, stated that “*it is the view of our constituent members, and the significant Macedonian population in this country which they represent, that the position adopted by the Holy Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in particular, to “welcome” and to “support” the initiative by the Ecumenical Patriarch, represents a capitulation to those parties which have consistently opposed not only the global recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, but also the very identity of the Macedonian nation and its people, in all of their ethno-cultural attributes.*”

Angelkov continued by stating that “*it is clear that there are certain pre-conditions now laid down for the ultimate acceptance of the Macedonian Orthodox Church on an equal footing to all of the sibling churches. These include the implicit renaming of the Church to the “Ohrid Church”, as well as a supposed pathway to full acceptance through the chauvinistic policies and practices on this question of the Serbian Orthodox Church. These pre-conditions are not only totally unacceptable, but are indeed both degrading and humiliating for the Macedonian people, and of course for our devoutly Orthodox Christian parishioners.*”

The Council considers that at best, the Church leadership is acquiescing to continued attempts to “denationalize” the Macedonian people by traditionally invested parties who have historically oppressed Macedonians, and denied not only their fundamental national and human rights, but also the very characteristics which define them in terms of their language, culture and religion, amongst other attributes. Angelkov added that “*the fact that the Church hierarchy in Skopje may be complicit in such actions is offensive and hurtful in the extreme to Macedonians everywhere.*” He added that “*emasculating our basic identity and heritage in this manner simply to gain admission to an “elite club of Orthodoxy” is degrading. This is not something to be expected of our enlightened and principled spiritual leaders.*”

The Council considers that “ceding” the ultimate destiny of our rightful position to determine our own religious affairs, and to demand support for that right from the entire Orthodox community, to the Serbian

Orthodox Church, particularly in view of the historical impediments in that relationship, is anachronistic, and cannot under any circumstances be reconciled with any potential benefit or advantage to the Macedonian Orthodox Church, its religious and spiritual adherents, and to the Macedonian nation as a whole. It is yet another act of “*submission*” in order to gain some tangible benefit for a few decision-makers with “*overtly selfish interests*”.

Angelkov concluded by saying that “*this is simply too high a price to pay*”. Reflecting upon the recent “*demoralization*” caused by the “*total capitulation*” of the political leadership in the Republic leading to the “*Prespa Agreement*” with Greece, and the more recent “*dalliance*” with Bulgaria over historical and cultural issues which also carries with it “*enormous insecurity and risk at present*”, Angelkov added that “*the Macedonian Orthodox Church is the church of the Macedonian people, and no one has the right to deny us our rightful use of this sacred name. We do not care if other Orthodox churches do not recognize us at all. The Macedonian Orthodox Church must never concede its name and independence to our traditional oppressors who deny the very existence of the Macedonian nation, language, history and culture, for their own misguided and selfish ends. Macedonians in the other regions of Macedonia, as well as in the Diaspora generally, are an integral part of the Macedonian nation. We unequivocally state that no self-seeking leaders, be they political, religious or whatever, have any right, without our express consent, to bargain away and in turn permanently emasculate, the very essence of our proud and unique identity*”.

The Council calls upon the Holy Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church to immediately review its position on this vital issue. It calls on the political leadership in the Republic to also fulfill its moral obligations in this regard, and to finally deliver on the promises made variously throughout the years, but especially in 1944 and 1991, to build a successful Macedonian state under a “*new sun of freedom*”.

Recent failures by the Church hierarchy in Skopje, pertaining in particular to the situation in the Australian Diocese, have indeed created an environment amongst Macedonians in this country where thoughts of a more independent path have slowly begun to take root. Repeated folly in this respect by Church leaders can only create more fertile ground for radical solutions. That seed, in certain circumstances, can only spread throughout the Macedonian diaspora.

**(16 May 2022)**

**NB See the English version of the Declaration below**

**For further information, please contact :**

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### **THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THE DECLARATION OF PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW:**

*The Holy and Sacred Synod convened today, Monday May 9, 2022, under the chairmanship of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and discussed extensively the ecclesiastical matter of Skopje. Having assessed in its final stage the petition of appeal of that Church to the Mother Church, along with the repeated pleas of the State of North Macedonia, it made the following decisions:*

- 1. It welcomes into eucharistic communion the Hierarchy, clergy and laity under Archbishop Stefan of this Church, thereby healing the wound of schism and pouring “oil and wine” on the ordeal of our Orthodox brethren in that country. To this end, the appropriate Patriarchal and Synodal Act is issued.*
- 2. It cedes to the Most Holy Church of Serbia the regulation of the administrative matters between itself and the Church in North Macedonia, in the context of course of the sacred canonical order and church tradition.*
- 3. It recognizes “Ohrid” as the name of this Church (understood as the region of its jurisdiction solely within the boundaries of the territory of the state of North Macedonia), as also promised in writing to the Ecumenical Patriarchate by its Primate. Thereby excluding the term “Macedonian” and any other derivative of the word “Macedonia.”*

*The Ecumenical Patriarchate continues to express interest for the growth, progress and stability of this ecclesiastical entity of Ohrid, just as it has done through the centuries for all the local Orthodox Churches, as “the inn of love, the source of piety of all Orthodox Christians” (Metropolitan Paul of Drama).*

*At the Patriarchate, on May 9, 2022*

*From the Chief Secretariat  
of the Holy and Sacred Synod*