
Montenegro: street protests and clashes with police. Metropolitan Hilarion (Moscow) invites to "constructive dialogue" for civil peace

Street protests, clashes with police. In Montenegro, tensions unfortunately remain high. Last night, at 2 a.m., the bishop of Budimlja-Nikšić Joannice of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro and seven priests of the diocese, after having been interrogated for two hours in the security centre in Nikšić and then by the public prosecutor, were ordered into custody for 72 hours. Charges are linked to a procession held in Nikšić to celebrate the local saint, St Basil of Ostrog, that violated the ban preventing the spread of the Coronavirus. The bishops and the priests had not requested any authorization to hold the procession that was in fact promoted by the local population, who, on their own initiative, gathered in large numbers in front of the Cathedral of Nikšić. Police officers intervened and arrested the bishop and the priests. But the latter refused to enter the police van and reached the police station with their own vehicles. The clergy who remained on the site of the procession asked the people who had stood in defence of their bishop to leave and not to attack the police. **The news rapidly spread to the Balkan region**, where, over the past months, the promulgation of a law on religious freedom by the Parliament of Podgorica reignited tensions. The Act stipulates that religious communities in Montenegro must provide evidence of their pre-1918 property rights. Citizens took to the streets at the end of 2019 in the Serbian capital Belgrade and in several Montenegrin cities in support of the Serbian Orthodox Church because in their view this "unconstitutional and discriminatory" law was designed to strip the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro and register it as State property instead, including medieval monasteries and churches.



Immagine non disponibile

[The arrest was the object of a telephone conversation between Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Serbian Patriarch Irenaeus who "expressed great concern" in a joint communiqué, inviting the population to adopt "peaceful and calm behaviour, at a time when no reasonable person would ever hope for conflicts and disputes." In the statement, Patriarch Irenaeus of Serbia recalled that the hostilities of the State of Montenegro against the Serbian Orthodox Church began with "the adoption of the controversial law on religious freedom, in flagrant contempt of the Serbian Orthodox Church's request for equal treatment with all other churches and denominations and for the](#)

safeguarding of the rights it has enjoyed for centuries. President Vučić offered "his full support" to the Patriarch of Serbia Irenaeus and to the bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, hoping that "all the problems encountered will be resolved through dialogue, in a peaceful manner, in full respect and freedom of the faithful of the Serbian Orthodox Church" in the certainty - reads the communiqué - "that Archbishop Joannice and the other arrested priests will be released as soon as possible."

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