



Dialogue over Pope-Patriarch meeting thwarted by Greek Catholics' actions in Ukraine - patriarch's spokesperson

“The subject of a meeting between the Patriarch of Moscow and the Pope is on the agenda of the two Churches, and the Holy Patriarch highly values the balanced and genuinely Christian position of Pope Francis on many problems faced by present-day society,” Patriarchate spokesman Deacon Alexander Volkov told *Interfax-Religion*.

This makes both Churches “strategic partners” in the attestation to the Christian moral values, the need to preserve peace and mutual understanding between people of various faiths and nationalities, in defending the rights of Christians in the Middle East, the spokesperson said.

The view of the leader of the Roman Catholic Church on the difficult situation in present-day Ukraine largely overlaps with that of the Russian Orthodox Church, he said.

“Like Patriarch Kirill already said on multiple occasions, the only service the Church can conduct in this conflict is a peacekeeping one that would exclude any political preferences. And in this sense, we have to acknowledge once again that the line pursued by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is a significant factor thwarting normal development of the relations between the Churches,” he said.

Another factor is “the overt support for one of the parties to the conflict, and public association with schismatics in Ukraine,” Deacon Volkov said.

“We would like to hope that the voice of our Church will be heard and the involvement of the Greek Catholics in the political conflict in Ukraine will decrease, thereby creating favorable conditions for maintaining a proper dialogue between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, including on the subject of a possible meeting between the Patriarch and the Pope,” he summed up.

One of these days the Pope expressed a wish to meet with Patriarch Kirill. “I signaled to the Patriarch Kirill that I would like to meet him. He backed the idea. I told him: ‘Invite me, and I will come over.’ He too expressed such a desire,” the pontific said on the Italian television.

At the same time Pope Francis said that the current international situation is not conducive to such a meeting. “Recently, the problem of the war (in Ukraine) and many other difficulties have pushed the subject of a meeting with the Pope to the back burner. Nevertheless, both of us want to meet and move forward,” he added.

The Uniates, or Greek Catholics, are part of the Roman Catholic Church; however, they conduct church services according to the Byzantine ritual which is identical to the Orthodox one. The Uniates’ positions are particularly strong in Western Ukraine which saw a number of serious conflicts between the Uniates and the Orthodox Christians in the 1990s.

Tensions in the relations between the Orthodox believers and the Uniates in Ukraine is among the factors which have for years prevented a meeting between the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Pope.