

# Demand that the Russian Orthodox Church in Sweden break with the patriarch

svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/ryska-kyrkan-i-sverige-under-pess-en-sakerhetsrisk-enligt-kritiker

Marcus Ytter

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The future of the Russian Orthodox Church in Sweden has been debated since the war in Ukraine began. Critics believe that the congregations under the Moscow Patriarchate run Putin's errands, support the war and spread propaganda to parishioners.

Patrik Oksanen, from the think tank Frivärld, thinks the church should break ties with Patriarch Kirill in order to remain in Sweden's Christian Council and continue to take part in the Swedish state aid paid out by the Authority for Support to Religious Communities.

- The Moscow Patriarchate is an integral part of Putin's influence apparatus. It is hard to say where the church begins and ends. But if we talk about the Russian empire building, the church goes hand in hand with Putin, he says.

## Bless the patriarch

SVT has visited several services in one of Sweden's Russian-Orthodox congregations, which is under the Moscow Patriarchate. During the visits, it appears that in addition to praying for peace, they also bless the state, Patriarch Kirill and pray for "victory over the enemy".

However, the latter should not be seen as support for the war in Ukraine, says Michael Hjälm, Orthodox researcher and theologian.

- These are standard prayers that go back basically over a thousand years. It has absolutely no connection to the war, he says.

## "Difficult to take a stand"

He emphasizes that it is difficult for Russian Orthodox churches to relate to the Russian state.

- The risk is great that even if you wanted to separate, it would not be possible because there are too many ties between church and state. The difficulty for the congregations in Sweden is to take a stand against the war without taking a stand against Russia. It becomes even more difficult in a war situation, he says.

The head of the Moscow Patriarchate in Sweden, Vitaly Babushin, does not want to comment on politics or appear for any interviews. Instead, he refers to a call against the war and a written statement in which he believes that the congregations in Sweden pray for peace and a quick end to the war in Ukraine.

## **The patriarch subject to new sanctions**

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Sanctions that are now being proposed against Patriarch Kirill are part of the EU's sixth sanctions package, and in addition to the spiritual leader, there are several high-ranking Russian military personnel. This is according to documents that several international newsrooms have seen.

Patriarch Kirill, described as Putin's closest religious man, has been singled out as the war's ideological leader and is described in the documents as "one of the most vocal supporters of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine".

What consequences the new sanctions will have on the war, the church and the congregations in Sweden remains to be seen.

## **The Archbishop critical of exclusion**

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Sweden's Archbishop Antje Jackelén, who is chairman of Sweden's Christian Council, emphasizes the importance of a dialogue and believes that exclusion from the Christian Council is not the right way to go, in an interview with SVT on February 28.

- As far as I know, the small Russian Orthodox community in Sweden has not said the same thing as the patriarch in Moscow. Then excluding instead of searching for calls would be the wrong way to go.