AGREEMENT

BETWEEN

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

AND

THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

ON COOPERATION

The **Government of the Republic of Lithuania** (hereinafter referred to as "Lithuania"), represented by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania H.E. Ms Ingrida Šimonytė, and the **Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople** (hereinafter referred to as "Ecumenical Patriarchate"), represented by His All-Holiness Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch (hereinafter jointly referred to as the "Parties" and separately as the "Party");

Acknowledging the deep historical roots of the Orthodoxy in Lithuania which go back to the 13th century, as well as the contribution of the Orthodox Church to the spiritual tradition, historical development, cultural patrimony, and diversity of religious confessions constituting an inalienable part of the Lithuanian identity for centuries as well as today;

Having regard to the fact that in the 14th century the Orthodox Metropolitan in Lithuania, under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, carried out the activities in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and that since the 14th century the Lithuanian Orthodox believers have been part of the Orthodox Metropolis of Kyiv and the whole Rus, which recognised the Church of Constantinople as its Mother Church and was

under jurisdiction of the Most Holy Apostolic Throne of Constantinople, recognising the ecclesiastical authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch;

Having regard to the reorganisation of the Metropolis of Kyiv by the Constantinople in 1458, after which Vilnius and today's territory of Lithuania remained within the Kyiv, Halich, and the entire Rus metropolitan diocese under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate;

Having regard to the fact that after 1596 the Orthodox fraternities and monasteries of the Lithuanian Orthodox Union, which had the Stavropegiony of the Ecclesiastical Union, remained loyal to the Mother Church of Constantinople and the Ecumenical Patriarch;

Taking into account the canonical shortcomings of the Patriarchal and Synodal Act ("Letter of Issue") of 1686 which granted to the Patriarch of Moscow the permission only to ordain the elected Metropolitan of Kyiv, as stipulated in the Tomos of autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Poland on 13 November 1924; and *welcoming* the revocation of the Letter of Issue of 1686 by the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on 9-11 October, 2018;

Supporting the aspiration of the group of Lithuanian Orthodox priests and believers representing various ethnic communities in Lithuania to follow their conscience and to restore historical justice by practising their religion in a church under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate;

Mindful of and in full commitment to the right to freedom of conscience and religion enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Encyclical of the 2016 Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete, as well as the need to support the right of the Lithuanian Orthodox believers to worship freely and in conformity with their conscience;

Recognizing the fact that by performing its religious and public activities the Orthodox Church contributes to the preservation of the respective mother tongues and cultural values of the national minorities historically linked to their Mother Church;

Relying upon the expressed will and readiness of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to restore its activities in Lithuania as well as taking into account the exceptional circumstances for renewing the activities of the Orthodox Church in Lithuania under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and with a view to creating conditions for a smooth start of the activities thereof;

Desirous to strengthen and develop bilateral relations between Lithuania and the Ecumenical Patriarchate,

Have agreed as follows:

Article 1
Purpose of the Agreement

The purpose of this Agreement is to strengthen and develop relations and cooperation between the Parties in the areas of mutual interest, including on issues concerning the establishment, institutionalisation, and operation of the local Orthodox Church in Lithuania under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and hereby to facilitate the implementation of freedom of conscience and religion for believers of Orthodox confession seeking to practise their religion in the Orthodox Church under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Article 2
Relations between the Parties

1. The Parties shall recognise that legal relations between Lithuania and the Ecumenical Patriarchate and/or any legal entity under its jurisdiction established in the Republic of Lithuania shall be governed by the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the Law on Religious Communities and Associations of the Republic of Lithuania, other laws and regulations, as well as by the canonical tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and taking into account international obligations of the Republic of Lithuania.

2. Lithuania shall recognise the Orthodox Church as a traditional religious community in Lithuania, which shall comprise a part of Lithuania's historical, spiritual and social legacy, and be entitled for its activities to state funding provided for all traditional religious communities and associations in the Republic of Lithuania in accordance with relevant laws and regulations.

3. The provisions of this Agreement shall apply to the religious communities and associations under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate upon their establishment and inclusion in the Register of Legal Entities in accordance with the procedure laid down in legislation. Lithuania will ensure for the religious communities and associations under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate the same rights, benefits of state protection and other conditions necessary for their operation as those granted to other traditional religious communities and associations in Lithuania under the provisions of the Law on Religious Communities and Associations of the Republic of Lithuania, other laws and regulations, and international obligations, including, but not limited to:

a) the right to freely organise based on their hierarchic and institutional structure, and manage their inner life according to their canons, statutes and other norms;

b) the possibility to receive financial and other support from the state and municipal budgets in accordance with the procedure established by laws and regulations;

c) the right to free performance of religious rites and ceremonies in houses of prayer and in other private and public locations as defined in the relevant legislation, if those rites are not in violation of public order, people's health and morality, or the rights and freedoms of other individuals;

d) the possibility to hold by the right of ownership houses of prayer, residential houses and other buildings and structures, as well as other assets necessary for the activities; such assets will be managed, used and disposed of in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Lithuania;

e) the possibility to have own denominational cemeteries or own territory within common cemeteries in accordance with the procedure set forth by a municipality;

f) the right to teach the Orthodox religion in houses of prayer, state, municipal and non-state schools, as well as other premises and locations in accordance with the relevant regulations;

g) the right to establish and have general education schools and other schools and cultural establishments, as well as schools for training clergy and religion teachers in accordance with the procedure established by laws and regulations;

h) the possibility to engage in charity, participate in benevolent activities as well as the right to engage in publishing, production and economic activities in accordance with the procedure established by laws;

i) the right to establish mass media, medical institutions, charity bodies, foundations and other organisations in accordance with the procedure established by laws;

j) taxation of the income of religious communities, associations and centres (higher governing bodies), and enterprises (organisations) established by them, as well as the income of the clergy, servers at religious rites and service staff of religious communities, associations and centres (higher governing bodies) in accordance with the procedure set forth in tax legislation of the Republic of Lithuania;

k) social and health insurance of clergy and other persons specified in relevant laws provided by means of State resources in accordance with the procedure and conditions established by the laws as well as social and health insurance of persons employed under the employment contracts by the religious communities and associations provided in accordance with the procedure and conditions established by the laws, benefits available to such persons under the laws;

l) the right to independently establish and maintain international relations and contacts, participate in the activities of international organisations and their bodies, exchange information, receive religious necessities, literature and charity from foreign states, international organisations and private individuals; possibilities to send members to other states for training, organise clergy and pilgrim journeys abroad, as well as, in other ways, cooperate with the religious organisations located abroad.

4. Taking into account the exceptional circumstances for renewing the activities of the Orthodox Church in Lithuania under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and with a view to creating conditions for a smooth start of the activities thereof, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania shall, at the request of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, whenever possible, make all necessary efforts so that acting in accordance with the laws governing the management of state-owned property or its transfer for

gratuitous use as well as conditions and procedure generally applicable to the transfer of such property laid down by the Government, the religious communities and associations under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate are provided with property in Lithuania, including land and buildings, necessary for the fulfilment of their rights, in particular those referred to in points (c) and (e) of paragraph 3 of this Article.

Article 3
Areas of Cooperation

1. The Parties shall cooperate in the areas of mutual interest which shall include in particular, but not be limited to, the following:

a) issues on the establishment and institutionalisation of the Orthodox Church in Lithuania under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate;

b) issues on relations between the relevant public authorities and Orthodox religious organisations, as well as exchange of information on existing best practices of different countries;

c) maintenance of dialogue and exchange of information on the current religious situation in the world and Lithuanian Orthodoxy;

d) contribution to social, cultural, and educational projects that could be initiated by the Parties for the realisation of the Agreement, within the scope of their competence;

e) holding of other joint activities targeted at the implementation of the Agreement;

f) coordination of any other joint or individual activities within the framework of the Agreement, when such a need may arise.

2. The Parties shall consult with each other to identify the priority cooperation areas and other possible cooperation areas of mutual interest.

3. In accordance with the provisions of this Agreement Lithuania shall, having assessed the exceptional circumstances for renewing the activities of the Orthodox Church in Lithuania under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the principle of equality:

a) ensure the right to exercise the freedom of conscience and religion for believers of Orthodox confession seeking to practise their religion in the Orthodox Church under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as well as conditions favourable to the establishment and functioning of its religious communities and associations in accordance with the procedure laid down in legislation;

b) provide, wherever needed, institutional support to the representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the process of acquiring necessary migration related documents in accordance with the provisions of the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners and other relevant laws and regulations;

c) provide support, in accordance with the relevant laws and regulations, for the preservation and restoration of the monuments, works of art and other values of cultural heritage owned by the Orthodox Church in Lithuania under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

4. In accordance with the provisions of the Agreement, the Ecumenical Patriarchate shall:

a) promote institutionalisation of the Orthodox Church in Lithuania under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate after its establishment, on the basis of the canonically prescribed decisions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate;

b) promote active cooperation of the Orthodox Church in Lithuania under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the representatives of the Orthodox Churches in other countries and representatives of other religious communities and associations in Lithuania;

c) represent interests and position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate during the institutionalisation processes of the Orthodox Church in Lithuania under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Article 4
Consultations

The Parties shall hold consultations on any issue relating to the application or implementation of this Agreement.

Article 5
Final Provisions

1. This Agreement shall not create any rights and obligations to the Parties under international law.

2. This Agreement shall not affect the recognition by the State or legal status of other religious communities and associations of Lithuania.

3. This Agreement shall come into effect on the day of its signing and remain in force indefinitely unless terminated by mutual written consent of the Parties or by either

Party at any time which shall notify the other Party in writing three months prior to the intended day of termination.

4. The termination of this Agreement shall not affect ongoing activities and projects that both Parties have already decided upon prior to its termination unless the Parties mutually agree otherwise.

5. This Agreement may be amended by mutual written consent of the Parties. The amendments shall come into effect in accordance with paragraph 3 of this Article and constitute an integral part of this Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned have signed this Agreement in two originals, each in the Lithuanian and English languages, both texts being equally authentic. In case of divergence, the English text shall prevail.

DONE at Vilnius on this 21st day of the month of March in the year 2023.

For the Government of the Republic of Lithuania	**For the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople**
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