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Russian Orthodox Center in Paris meant to be another Russia-France link — writer

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Against the background of an ongoing dispute in France about the role of Russia in modern world, the center will become a new link between the two countries, according to Dimitri de Kochko



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PARIS, October 10. /TASS/. The upcoming unveiling of the Russian Orthodox Cultural and Spiritual Center in Paris will be a new link connecting Russia and France, the head of the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots in France, Dimitri de Kochko, told TASS on Monday.

"This is a major event, it attracts tremendous interest, and not only from the Russian community. The opening of the spiritual and cultural center has awoken an echo in the hearts of rank-and-file Frenchmen and is widely discussed in local media," he said. "This event will draw a wide response," said Dimitri de Kochko, a writer and publicist.

Against the background of an ongoing dispute in France about the role of Russia in modern world, the center on Quai Branly will become a new link between the two countries, de Kochko said.

"Of course, we shouldn't think that the opening of this facility will defuse differences between Moscow and Paris," he warned.

"When such global projects are involved, ... reflections on momentary things is out of place," the writer said. "This is a brick to the foundation of links between the upcoming generations, a reminder that Europe stretches from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans," he added.

Spiritual mission and a new church

The compound with a total area of 4,200 square meters was built on the territory that formerly belonged to the French meteorological service Meteo-France. The spiritual center will incorporate an Orthodox church, a library and a center where ethnic Russians will be able

meet, while French people will have a chance to learn about the Orthodox culture. Besides, a French-Russian primary school for 150 school students will be opened there.

"It is very important that the center will have at the same time spiritual and cultural missions," de Kochko said. "As a descendant of the first wave of immigrants, I am grateful to the Orthodox Church that played a very important role in preserving Russian culture among descendants of immigrants in France". He said the construction of a new church was prompted by objectively growing demands of the Orthodox community. "At the same time, it is remarkable that the center will host exhibition and thematic conferences, and Russian language will be taught there. This gets in line with a more contemporary approach, aimed at all who are interested in Russian culture in a broader sense. It is necessary to understand that Russia is exceptionally diverse," the writer said.

Architectural complex

Russia bought the land plot on the left bank of the Seine in 2010. Terms of the deal were confidential. Experts put the cost of the land plot in this historic district of Paris at about 70-75 million euro.

The contract for the construction of the center was signed in 2011, in the presence of Russian President Vladimir Putin and the then French Prime Minister, Francois Fillon.

It was designed by famous French architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte, renowned for restoration of College de France in Paris's Quartier Latin and the Rijksmuseum art museum in Amsterdam.

In his project, Wilmotte managed to harmonize traditions and the present day. Burgundy limestone used in the construction of the Louvre and Notre Dame was chosen for the historic project.

Symbolically, one of the sides of the Orthodox compound will overlook Avenue Franco-Russe.

It is worthy of note that several hundred meters up upstream, there is the famous bridge - Pont Alexandre III, built in 1896-1900 to commemorate the union of France and Russia and named after Russia's last but one emperor. Nearby is a monument to soldiers of the Russian Expedition Corps, who fought side by side with allies in battles of WWI. The monument was unveiled in 2011, when Vladimir Putin visited France.

"The site was a good choice," de Kochko said. "It takes your breath away when you see golden domes of the Orthodox Church against the background of the Eiffel Tower," de Kochko said.

District 7 residents also appreciate a remarkable architectural aspect. Meteo-France used to cause mixed feelings because of its visual massiveness. Besides, it obstructed the view of Quai Branly.

Jean-Michel Wilmotte, the architect, opted for a more open, light and attractive for visitors compound, maximally freeing the interior space. "Every effort was made to see the Russian center fitting maximally organically into the general architectural ensemble, but to also add a fresh touch to the look of the embankment," sources from the District 7 Mayor's Office told Tass.

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