NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Court says French cathedral belongs to Russia

Sophia Kishkovsky Religion News Service Ecumenical News Service | Jan. 26, 2010

A French court has ruled that the St. Nicholas Cathedral in Nice, France, built with funding from Czar Nicholas II and completed just before Russia's Soviet revolution, belongs to Russia and must be handed over.

The victory is Russia's latest in a series of battles for church property around the world -- attempts by the Russian government and Russian Orthodox Church to reassert control over a widespread diaspora.

A Russian ex-patriate group has run St. Nicholas under the jurisdiction of the Istanbul-based Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople since the 1920s.

Russia's culture minister, Alexander Avdeyev, who served as his country's ambassador to France until 2008, told the Russian edition of Newsweek magazine the dispute over the Nice cathedral was about property, and not of a religious or jurisdictional nature.

In 2006, Russia filed a suit for property rights over the ornate cathedral, which was finished in 1912. The cathedral is one of the city's landmarks, and Nice was a favorite vacation spot for Russian aristocrats.

Bishop Mark, deputy chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's external affairs section, told Russia's Vesti FM radio station the French ruling marked, "the restoration of historical justice." Last year, courts in Britain and Israel ruled for Russia in similar ownership disputes.

Still, he was cautious about drastic changes being made at the cathedral.

"We are not directly connected to this cathedral, since services there are conducted by a community belonging to another jurisdiction, but we are happy that the French state has acknowledged Russia's right to own this church," Mark said.

The Rev. Jean Gueit, the cathedral's rector, told The Associated Press that the Orthodox association would appeal the decision.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/01/2014 - 20:03*): http://ncronline.org/news/global/court-says-french-cathedral-belongs-russia