Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk leads church delegation at second meeting of working group of Russian Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church in Italy



On 28 May 2018, the second meeting of the working group of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Italy took place in Rome, Italy, within the framework of the Russian-Italian Civil Society Dialogue Forum. The theme of the meeting was pilgrimage and religious tourism.

Taking part in the meeting was a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church, led with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations. The delegation also included Archbishop Antony of Vienna and Budapest, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administration for Institutions Abroad; Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-chairman; Archpriest Sergy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for far abroad countries; Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations; Hierodeacon Yaroslav (Ochkanov), staff member of the DECR Secretariat for Far Abroad Countries; Hierodeacon Sergy (Turkeyev), head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Pilgrimage Service; Mr. Vladimir Dervenev, head of the Pilgrimage Department of the St. Petersburg diocese; and Mr. Yury Minulin, head of the Radonezh Pilgrimage Service.

The Italian side was represented by Bishop Emeritus Cassano all'Jonio Nunzio Galantino, secretary general of the Italian Episcopal Conference (IEC); Bishop Ambrogio Spreafico of Frosione-Veroli-Ferentino, chairman of the IEC Commission for the Evangelization of Peoples and Cooperation between Churches; Bishop Maurizio Malvestiti of Lodi; Prof. Adriano Roccucci from the *Roma Tre* University; Prof. Matei Belavski from the University of Verona; Rev. Cristiano Bettega, director of the IEC National Office for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue; and Rev. Hyacinthe Destivelle, official representative of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Taking part in the meeting on behalf of the Russian-Italian Civil Society Dialogue Forum were Ms. Tatyana Shumova, director of the Film Festivals and International Programmes Centre, and Ms. Natalya Salmanova, executive director of the Dialogue Forum.

In his opening address, Bishop Emeritus Cassano all'Jonio Nunzio Galantino emphasized the importance of promoting civil society dialogue for strengthening friendship between the two peoples and the role of pilgrimages in this process.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations, greeted all those present on behalf of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church. In his address the hierarch noted the centuries-old cultural relations between Russia and Italy, as well as the adherence of the people of both countries to the Christian values. While speaking about the tradition of pilgrimage, Metropolitan Hilarion pointed out a special role of Rome as a centre of formation of the ancient Christian community.

The DECR chairman also devoted attention to the problem of persecution of Christians in the Middle East and the destruction and desecration of the ancient Christian shrines. The hierarch emphasized the necessity for the Churches to bear joint witness before the political leaders to the terrible situation of Christianity in the Middle East and to exert every effort to restore peace in the region.

The participants in the meeting discussed the phenomenon of pilgrimage from the theological perspective, as well as some historical aspects of the veneration of shrines and practical issues pertaining to the organization of pilgrimages to holy sites.

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The Russian-Italian Civil Society Dialogue Forum, established in 2004 on the initiative of the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and the Prime Minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, is a platform that unites religious and public leaders of Russia and Italy and gives them an opportunity to discuss various issues

of topicality for peoplein both countries.

In 2013, within the framework of the Dialogue Forum, a working group of the Churches of Russia and Italy was set up. On 21 February 2017, it held its first meeting on Spiritual and Secular Art as an Instrument of Promoting Accord and Mutual Understanding Between Nations.

DECR Communication Service

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