The Russian Orthodox Church and Turkey's Presidency for Religious Affairs working group meets at DECR



July 10, 2017 – The Russian Orthodox Church and Turkey's Presidency for Religious Affairs working group met at the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR). It was set up as provided by an agreement reached at the meeting of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and the Presidency head Prof. Dr. Mehmet Görmez, which took place on November 30, 2011, in Moscow.

The talk, which was held in a frank and friendly atmosphere, was chaired by the co-chairmen of the group, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, DECR chairman, and Dr. Selim Argun, head of the religious affairs department of Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate (RAD).

The Russian Orthodox Church was represented by the DECR vice-chairmen Archpriest Nikolay Balashov and Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov); V. Kipshidze, deputy head of the department for the Church's relations with society and mass media; Rev. Dimitry Safonov, DECR secretary for interreligious relations; Rev. Alexiy Zabelin, lecturer of Moscow Theological Academy; and Ms. I. Svistunova, PhD.

The Turkish attendees included Prof. Dr. Huseyin Yilmaz, Supreme Religious Affairs Council; Kemal Hakký Kýlýç, head of the RAD Eurasia department; Huseyin Koç and Omer Faruq Savuran, RAD experts, Murat Dikmen, counselor of the Turkish Embassy in Russia; and R. Yanglichev, Turkish Embassy department for religious affairs.

Metropolitan Hilarion conveyed to the meeting a message of greetings from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and made a report on Peacemaking Mission of Religion in the Modern World. He pointed to a great potential of the dialogue between religious communities in Russia and Turkey. Speaking about extremism and terrorism, he stressed that there is no terrorism in the name of religion since none of the traditional religion teaches to kill people. Pointing out that Muslim leaders resolutely condemn terrorism, he called to joint witness to the falsity of the ideology of extremists and terrorists. He also spoke about the positive experience of interreligious cooperation in Russia and the role played by the Russian Orthodox Church in it. He also highlighted other aspects of the peacemaking work of the Moscow Patriarchate. In conclusion of his remarks, he expressed a wish that the dialogue between religious communities in Russia and Turkey may become a response to the challenge of extremism faced by the both countries.

Dr. Salim Argun, in the beginning of his remarks, noted that the trip to Moscow became for him the first overseas assignment since his appointment as head of the RAD foreign affairs department. Pointing to the topicality of regular dialogue between religions and religious leaders, he expressed the conviction that cooperation should be based on the principles of mutual openness, honesty, understanding and exchange of experience. Speaking about the practical aspects of the dialogue, he indicated the major areas of cooperation including prevention of extremism, opposition to such phenomena as aggressive secularism, ideology of consumerism, etc. He made a special mention of the importance of academic cooperation and students and professors exchange and work in archive on history of Orthodoxy in Turkey.

Archpriest Nikolay Balashov made a report on the Peacemaking Role of the Orthodox Church in the Space of the Former USSR: the Example of Ukraine, pointing in particular to regular manifestations of discrimination against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which unites a majority of the Ukrainian people. He expressed the hope that traditional religious communities would support the only canonical Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

Mr. Omer Faruk Savuran devoted his report to the problem of manifestations of intolerance towards Muslims in various countries of the world.

Ms. I. Svistunova, in her remarks, addressed the historical examples of Russian-Turkish cooperation in

the cultural and religious spheres. She proposed concrete ways of cooperation including the development of religious tourism to Orthodox holy places in Turkey, training of guides, participation of Russian specialists in the restoration of Orthodox churches and frescoes in Turkey.

After the reports, Metropolitan suggested that cooperation should be actively developed in the period between the working group meetings. The suggestion was fully supported by the Turkish side. The head of the Turkish delegation, Dr. Selim Argun thanked the participants for their substantial reports and, speaking on behalf of the Religious Affairs Directorate, expressed the readiness to support the outlined areas of bilateral cooperation.

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The first meeting of the working group took place on December 15, 2012 in Ankara. The second one was held on April 8, 2014 at the DECR.

DECR Communication Service

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