Patriarch Kirill meets with President Gjorge Ivanov of Macedonia

On May 23, 2017, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with President Gjorge Ivanov of Macedonia at the Red Hall of the Church of Christ the Saviour.

President Ivanov was accompanied by Macedonia's Ambassador to Russia Mr. Goce Karajanov, the General Secretary of the Presidential Administration Boris Josifovski, the Presidential Administration counsellor for foreign affairs Darko Kostadinovski, Bishop Clement of Heraclea, vicar of the diocese of Prespa and Pelagonia; the dean of the St. Clement of Ohrid Orthodox Theological Faculty Gjoko Gjorevski, the Presidential Administration public relations representative Mr. Snezhana Stojanova.

From the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations there were Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, DECR chairman, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman, and Archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for the far abroad.

In attendance was also the President of the International Public Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Nations V. Alekseyev.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was represented by Mr. A. Botzan-Kharchenko, director of the Fourth European Directorate, and K. Bersenev, counsellor-minister of the Russian embassy in Macedonia.

Welcoming the Macedonian president and his wife to the Church of Christ the Saviour, Patriarch Kirill congratulated Mr. Ivanov on being awarded the prize of the Unity of Orthodox Nations Foundation, saying, 'You as President of the fraternal Republic of Macedonia play an important role in preserving the Orthodox nature of your people and we appreciate it. We closely follow the processes taking place in your country, empathize with your people in hardship they encounter, while admiring the Macedonian people for their efforts to preserve the Orthodox faith and Orthodox culture.

'Our fraternal ties go deep into antiquity. Ohrid is a holy city for all the Slavs, for it was in this city that the disciples of the holy brothers Cyril and Methodius used to work. Their names are associated with the enlightenment of all the Slavic peoples. I remember the feeling I had during my visit to Ohrid and its old churches. The culture of the city reflects a tremendous importance it played in the past, because it situated at the meeting-point between East and West. Its architecture and mosaics reflect the Orthodox tradition, which was shared by the then world. We remember the important role the Archbishopric of Ohrid played historically when it was autocephalous. For this reason, the history of your country still preserves the memory of those who loved Orthodoxy and bound themselves with its history and culture'.

In the 10-11th centuries, Ohrid constituted a bridge between the cultures of East and West, between the Eastern Church and the Western Church, His Holiness reminded, noting, 'Today it is also at a meeting-point… We are aware, on one hand, of the great responsibility lying on Macedonia situated between the two worlds, Orthodox and Eastern Islamic. On the other hand, we understand how difficult it is today for both the Macedonian state authorities and the whole people of the country to preserve their identity, their independence, while living in peace with their neighbours.'

The situation at present is aggravated by a considerable number of refugees coming through the territory of this country. 'The small Republic of Macedonia has encountered a great challenge and to meet it is not an easy task', Patriarch Kirill stated, 'Therefore, I would like to wish you God's help that peace may be in your land, that the Orthodox identity of your people may be preserved, that peaceful relations may be established and developed between the two communities, so that all the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia could live in peace and security'.

His Holiness stressed that the Russian Church feels strongly for the developments in Macedonia,

especially for the status of Orthodoxy in the country: ‘We seek to do everything that depends on us to begin as soon as possible a dialogue with the Serbian Orthodox Church on the settlement of the canonical status of Orthodoxy in Macedonia. You know that in one time this dialogue was impossible because Archbishop Ioann was imprisoned. Last time I asked you to set him free and I thank you that it happened so. After that, certain positive steps were made by the both sides. I regret that there is no dynamic development of the situation but I hope that such development will take place and will lead to positive consequences’.

Patriarch Kirill gave a high value to the level of relations with Macedonia in the field of education. Thus, people from Macedonia study theology and receive academic degrees in Russia. ‘I welcome the development of relations between the University of Skopje and theological academies in Moscow and St. Petersburg’, he noted, ‘Our theological academies have been recognized and accredited by the state now. It will considerably facilitate also the cooperation with the State University of Skopje’.

During the talk, His Holiness mentioned the fact that many people learn about Macedonia while visiting the Valamo Monastery. ‘Your ‘envoy there’, Hegumen Mefody (Petrov), a legendary person loved by all, is working on the continuing basis. He received all who come with open hearts’, he said.

His Holiness expressed the hope that relations with the Republic of Macedonia, which are rooted in history, will continue on all levels in our time as well, on the societal and state levels, so that people could have an opportunity to communicate with each other.

‘The fact that this high award for the year 2016 has been granted to me gives an additional weight to this step because last year we marked the 1100th anniversary of the demise of St. Clement of Ohrid, our spiritual patron and teacher’, the high guest stated, ‘All that we are today is a consequence of the deeds and teachings of St. Clement, the first Slavic bishop and the best disciple of the holy brothers Cyril and Methodius. It took him only seven years to train over three and a half thousand of teachers who continued his cause and enlightened the Slavs’.

President Ivanov dwelt on the spiritual ties between Ohrid and Rus’ in the first decades after Rus’ was baptized in the Kiev font. He emphasized that in many difficult historical times it was Orthodox faith that helped the people to survive and now the Macedonian people seek to be guided by the teachings of Ss Cyril and Methodius Equal-to-the-Apostles and St. Clement. ‘We have remained in history only thanks to the fact that we have remained believers and have taught the new generations in this spirit’, he stressed.

‘We are grateful that a great number of Russian clergy remained in Macedonia after the 1917 October Revolution’, the president continued, ‘It was thanks to the Russian nuns that many of our monasteries have survived. We thank the Lord that a Russian church is being built in Skopje, so that this spiritual

center may preserve the memory of the Russian clergy and monastics who worked in our country'.

The president spoke with gratitude about the efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church to promote the settlement of the canonical status of Orthodoxy in Macedonia. He also expressed gratitude for the assistance given to Macedonians to receive theological education.

'Our geography is very small, but history is very big, and our heart is also very big', he said, 'We have the Slavic soul which knows how to forgive. We happened to live precisely in the Balkans, where many ethnoses, languages and religions are united. Meeting here are not only East and West but also South and North. It was through our land that the way lied from the first Rome to the second Rome, and all the pilgrims went through our land. That is why there are so many churches in Ohrid – 365. Today our territory is used by refugees and to this day we play the role of a gate to Europe, defending it from the inflow of migrants. If you live at a crossroad, you should have good relations with all and conquer others by kindness. We seek to maintain good relations with all our neighbours and all religions'.

After the talk, Patriarch Kirill and President Ivanov exchanged tokens of the meeting.

DECR Communication Service

Patriarchal Press Service

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