



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with participants in the first session of the working group of representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Italy as part of the Russian-Italian Civil Society Dialogue-Forum

The meeting took place at the Patriarchal and Synodal residence in St. Daniel's monastery on February 21, 2017. Taking part in it on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church were Bishop Antony of Bogorodsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administration for Institutions Abroad; Very Rev. Sergy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for far abroad countries; hieromonk Stefan Igumnov, DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations; and Rev. Alexy Dikarev, a staff member of the same secretariat.

The Italian delegation consisted of Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, Archbishop of Genoa and president of the Italian Episcopal Conference (IEC); Mons. Ambrogio Spreafico, Bishop of Frosione-Veroli-Ferentino and chairman of the IEC Commission for the Evangelization of Peoples and Cooperation between Churches; Mons. Antonio Raspanti, Bishop of Acireale; Prof. Lorenzo Ornaghi, rector of the Postgraduate School of Economics and International Relations and editor of *Vita e Pensiero* journal; Fr Antonio Ammirati in charge of the IEC TV; Fr Cristiano Begetta, head of the IEC Department for Ecumenism and Dialogue; and Fr Paolo Costa, secretary of Cardinal Bagnasco.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill greeted the guests and underscored the importance of the representatives of both Churches' presence at the Russian-Italian Civil Society Dialogue-Forum, saying: "Italy and Russia are the countries that maintain Christian tradition, which influences people's lives. We, as Churches in Italy and Russia, face the same problems and discuss them. I would like to say that our people feel sympathetic towards each other.'

Speaking about cultural relations, His Holiness mentioned masterpieces of Italian architects in Moscow and St. Petersburg and Italian music that has seriously influenced the contemporary church music in Russia.

"By God's mercy the relations between our Churches have successfully developed in recent years, maybe because of our common problems pertaining to the protection of Christian values in modern society. Both Catholic and Orthodox Christians meet the challenges of secular liberalism. We encounter

the attempts to ruin the notion of traditional family and face the problem of the discrimination of Christians in many countries of the world, especially in the Middle East,” His Holiness said and added that he had discussed these issues with Pope Francis during their meeting in Havana. ‘This meeting has opened a new page in the relations between our Churches and has given an impetus to the development of concrete projects. In our Joint Declaration we said about the necessity of common efforts in the evangelization and Christian witness in the modern world.’

His Holiness believes that cultural cooperation is also important and that the Joint working group is a good form for the development of bilateral dialogue/

Patriarch Kirill welcomed the development of relations between educational institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Italy and mentioned the exhibition of masterpieces from the Vatican Pinacoteca being held in Moscow and called it “a great contribution to our spiritual and cultural relations.” He added that masterpieces from the Tretyakov Gallery will be exhibited in Vatican next year.

His Holiness thanked the Roman Catholic Church for her benevolent attitude to the parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in Italy.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church said: “We understand the events connected with the flow of migrants, also to Italy. The developments may be linked with the threat of extremism and terrorism. We support the position of Pope Francis on the migrants, but we believe that in order to solve this problem it is necessary to end all military conflicts in the Middle East... When peace is established and the reasons of their flight from home are removed, it will be possible to stop the flow.” His Holiness added that the Russian Orthodox Church has accumulated experience of relations between Orthodox Christians and representative of traditional religions: Islam, Judaism and Buddhism and told the guests about the Interreligious Council of Russia. The problem of extremism is the main topic of discussions. “Having personal experience I know that the interreligious dialogue held in good conditions without any side dominating is conducive to peaceful coexistence of the adherents of different religions. I know that Pope Francis pays much attention to interreligious relations and dialogue. I do hope that through our common efforts we will manage to stop extremism based on the wrong understanding of religious traditions.”