



DECR chairman: It is not fortuitous that the meeting of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill with Pope Francis has been called an epoch event

Relations with the non-Orthodox communities are a focus area of the DECR's activities.

In his address at the grand meeting held on the occasion of the DECR's 70th anniversary, Metropolitan Hilarion noted that the development of relations with the Roman Catholic Church looks promising both on the pan-Orthodox and bilateral levels. 'A wide range of problems has been considered in the frame of the official dialogue which the family of the Local Orthodox Churches maintained with the Roman Catholics from 1979. This dialogue is geared to theological consultations, while the bilateral relations of the Moscow Patriarchate with different institutions of the Roman Catholic Church are developing in the field of social problems on which our positions are close. 'An important place in these relations has been given to cooperation in culture.

'As the struggle against terrorism is going on in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Iraq, we are interested in the strengthening of cooperation in defending Christians from persecution and in rendering humanitarian aid to people in the region,' the archpastor noted.

These and other urgent problems were reflected in the Joint Declaration signed by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Pope Francis in Havana on February 12. The preparation for the meeting lasted almost twenty years if counting from the first effort undertaken in 1997. The meeting did not take place as the position for a joint statement was not aligned. 'Since then the level of mutual understanding has been enhanced, and one can see in the Havana statement'.

'It is not fortuitous that the meeting has been called an epoch event, as it took place at the crucial moment of modern history when a threat of a new world war is looming. The strike of the Turkish air forces on the Russian plane over the territory of Syria could have played the role of a catalyst as a terrorist's shot did in Sarajevo in 1914. In this situation a call of the Patriarch and the Pope to common and coordinated efforts was very timely.'

Metropolitan Hilarion noted that the Russian Orthodox Church appreciated the balanced position of the Holy See on the civil confrontation in Ukraine that, regrettable, is being aggravated by the policy of the leadership of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The DECR chairman reminded the listeners of the words in the Joint Statement: 'It is today clear that the past method of "uniatism," understood as the

union of one community to the other, separating it from its Church, is not the way to re-establish unity.'

'The same was said earlier, for instance, in the 1993 Balamand document of the Joint Commission for the Theological Dialogue, but the document was not approved by Pope John Paul II. Now the head of the Roman Catholic Church confirmed that which has become evident not only to the Orthodox, but also for the Catholic participants in the dialogue. I consider it a landmark achievement,' Metropolitan Hilarion emphasized.

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