



## **Chairman of Department for External Church relations meets with ambassadors of Slavic states**

May 25, 2015 – Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations (DECR), met with ambassadors of several states of Slavic tradition at the Church of Christ the Saviour.

Participating in the meeting were ambassadors of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Belarus, and Slovakia, as well as charge d' affaires of Croatia, deputy ambassador of Serbia, and first secretary of the embassy of Bulgaria.

The meeting was also attended by Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman, and Archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for the far abroad.

Metropolitan Hilarion welcomed the guests on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. Noting that the meeting was timed to the commemoration days of Ss Cyril and Methodius Equal-to-the-Apostles, who toiled in the field of enlightenment of the Slavic peoples, he drew their attention to the importance of all-Slavic unity and the preservation of the religious and cultural identity of the Slavs.

Among the topics discussed was the situation in Ukraine. The developments there are a matter of special grief and pain for the Russian Orthodox Church, His Eminence Hilarion stressed. 'Our Church unites Orthodox Christians in Russia, in Ukraine, in Belarus and in other countries under her canonical jurisdiction. We cannot associate ourselves with a particular side of the conflict', he said, expressing regret that this principled attitude was not always understood in Ukraine and sometimes aroused bitter attacks against the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

In addition, in eastern Ukraine where the confrontation resulted in the suffering of civilians, over 80 Orthodox churches were damaged or destroyed by shelling. 'Our task today is to restore these churches. But what is most important and difficult is the pastoral task facing our bishops in eastern Ukraine: we should reconcile people, help them heal the wounds inflicted by this armed confrontation', Metropolitan Hilarion stressed.

Another issue that should become a matter of common concern, he said, is preservation of the Christian heritage in the Middle East. Patriarch Kirill has repeatedly raised this problem during his meetings with leaders of other countries and representatives of international organization and religious communities.

'What we see in the Middle East today is Christian genocide. It is a policy aimed at the full elimination of the Christian heritage in the region. We hope that the Christian states of Eastern Europe will show solidarity with the Middle East Christian population because if the world community does not rally to overcome this plague there will be no Christians at all left in the Middle East'.

Metropolitan Hilarion reminded his guests that in Europe, too, which until recently could be rightly called a Christian continent, there are attempts made by the secular forces to marginalize Christianity, to declare religion a private affair and, in some cases, even to ban Christian symbols or declare them unconstitutional. It causes special concern, he said, in a situation of the unfolding confrontation, including in Europe, with extremism which 'uses Islamic slogans to bring in an anti-human ideology, thus presenting a real threat to our nations'.

Metropolitan Hilarion's remarks were followed by statements of foreign diplomats who underscored the importance of developing relations between the Slavic countries and pointed to the role of Christian faith in the history of their states.

*DECR Communication Service*

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