



Message of greeting by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, to participants in the conference dedicated to the centenary of consecration of Russian church in Sofia

On 29 November 2014, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and His Holiness Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria, the conference on 'Bulgaria-Russia: Images of Spiritual Unity' took place at the Russian Cultural and Information Centre in Sofia.

Your Eminences and Your Graces,

Venerable Fathers, dear Brothers and Sisters,

On behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia I cordially greet the participants and guests of the conference dedicated to the centenary of the consecration of the Church of St Nicholas the Wonderworker, now the Metochion of the Russian Orthodox Church in Sofia.

This famous Russian church in Bulgaria is a visible sign of the intertwining of the destinies of the fraternal Russian and Bulgarian peoples and a monument commemorating the history of their relationship which began over a thousand years ago.

We have inherited common cultural tradition ascending to the deeds of the Holy Brothers, Cyril and Methodius Equal-to-the-Apostles. Even in the period of the Baptism of Rus', Bulgaria gave liturgical books to our ancestors and did much to include Rus' in the great family of the people of the Christian civilization. Missionaries, teachers and clergymen from Bulgaria were working in Kiev. The Russian Church never forgot her obligation towards her brothers in the field of Christian education, and during the Ottoman yoke generously helped the Bulgarian Orthodox monasteries and churches, sending liturgical books, church utensils and financial aid to her suffering brothers in faith. The liberation of Bulgaria during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 was a great exploit of the Russian commanders and soldiers. The Russian Church blessed the people and the army for the feat of arms. Up to this day, the Bulgarian Church has been praying for Emperor Alexander II the Liberator at all divine services, and his monument adorns the centre of the Bulgarian capital. As a result of the war, a considerable part of Bulgaria was liberated. The church life gained a strong impetus for revival and development.

In the 20th century the country received numerous refugees from the Soviet Russia; some of them played a noticeable part in its history. Thus, in the 1930s a renowned theologian, Prof. Nikolai Nikanorovich Glubokovsky, lived and worked in Bulgaria. He was one of the founders of the Faculty of Theology of the Sofia University and stood at the origins of theological scholarly studies in the country. In 1945, with the support of the Russian Orthodox Church, the independence of the Bulgarian Church was recognized which had been lost in the 14th century when Bulgaria had been conquered by the Ottoman Empire. In 1953 the Patriarchate of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was restored. The Russian Orthodox Church was among the first Churches to welcome the reestablishment of the Bulgarian Patriarchate and did much for its recognition in the whole Orthodox world. In 1948 the Metochion of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Moscow was established at the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Gonchary, while St Nicholas Church in Sofia became the Metochion of the Russian Orthodox Church in Bulgaria.

Constructed in the beginning of the 20th century for the Russian diplomats and officials working in Bulgaria, after the Russian revolution and civil war it became the centre of church life for many Russian exiles who had come to Bulgaria.

The history of the church has been marked by the names of its celebrated rectors: archpriest Petr Preobrazhensky, a renowned scholar and patrologist, and a prominent figure among the Russian church emigrants, Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), who is now widely venerated by the Russian and the Bulgarian Orthodox Christians.

Up to this day St Nicholas Church attracts many compatriots living in Bulgaria. It brings our two Churches and nations closer together. It is gratifying to see that in this extremely challenging time the brotherly relations between the Russian and the Bulgarian people have not only been maintained, but also developed.

Dear participants and guests of the conference! Our forum has to show more vividly the spiritual ties binding Russia and Bulgaria, based neither on political nor on self-seeking benefits. The solid foundation of these relations is not only the community of our history and culture, but also our common world outlook formed by the Orthodox faith. The Church of St Nicholas the Wonderworker, the centenary of which we are solemnly celebrating these days, helps greatly achieve this goal.

I wish all the participants in the conference God's help in their new scholarly endeavours!