Russian Church representative takes part in discussion on protection of holy sites

November 26, 2014 – A roundtable was held at the International Press Center in Brussels under the theme “Protection of Holy Sites in Armed Conflict Area” organized by the Council of Europe’s liaison office with the European Union.

The participants shared their experience of implementing the International Code of Conduct on Holy Sites developed by the European Council of Religious Leaders in cooperation with non-governmental organization. The document states in particular that the reverence held by humanity throughout its history for churches and holy places is of exceptional importance for the self-awareness of whole nations. In the situations of wars, political conflicts, territorial claims and interreligious confrontations, holy places prove to be the hottest spots of confrontation between warring forces and need to be protected from violence and desecration.

International projects and initiatives of European non-governmental organizations were presented for preventing the acts of vandalism and desecration of shrines, for consolidation of peace and mutual understanding among people of various religions in the Holy Land, Syria, Nigeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Archpriest Dimitry Sizonenko, acting representative of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European international organizations in Brussels, spoke about the efforts of the Moscow Patriarchate to help preserve the Christian presence in the Middle East and North Africa and to develop pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He stressed the need to protect against destruction and desecration not only churches but also the dignity of the clergy and religious feelings of the faithful.

The roundtable also discussed various aspects of cooperation of representatives of religious communities with governmental bodies and civil society institutions in the efforts to prevent interreligious conflicts, ensure the free access of believers to holy places, establish a security regime, restore ruined monuments, make restitutions, conduct archeological studies and broaden educational work.

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