Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk begins his visit to the Greek Orthodox Church

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On 10 December 2011, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR), arrived in Athens at the invitation of His Beatitude Archbishop Hieronymus II of Athens and All Greece and with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. Metropolitan Hilarion was met at the airport buy Bishop Gabriel of Diavleia, chief secretary of the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church and Mr. F. Voskresensky, second secretary of the Embassy of Russia to Greece.

The DECR chairman is accompanied by archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations; hierodeacon Ioann (Kopeikin) assistant to the DECR chairman; and Leonid Sevastianov, executive secretary of the St. Gregory the Theologian Charity Foundation.

On Sunday, December 11, Metropolitan Hilarion officiated at the Divine Liturgy in the Church of St. Dionysius the Areopagite in Kolonaki. Concelebrating were Bishop Theodorite of Nazianzus, Bishop Procopius of Christianopolis, clerics of the Greek Orthodox Church, and ordained members of the Russian Orthodox Church's delegation.

His Beatitude Archbishop Hieronymus II of Athens and All Greece, who prayed at the service, welcomed Metropolitan Hilarion, thanking him on behalf of clergymen and laymen for the joy of his visit and for officiating at the Divine Liturgy. Archbishop Hieronymus asked Metropolitan Hilarion to pray for all Greeks and wished him strength to overcome difficulties of his responsible ministry, and also asked to convey love to fraternal Russian people and to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill in particular.

The DECR chairman greeted all those present on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, saying that he has arrived in the holy land of Greece with his blessing to meet with His Beatitude Hieronymus and hierarchs of the Church of Greece and to present Patriarch Kirill's book 'Freedom and Responsibility' about the problems of the life of the Church at present. "The book is widely known in Russia and in many other countries, as it has been translated into many languages; I do not doubt that it will elicit response from the Greek readers,' Metropolitan Hilarion added.

He said further, "Your Beatitude! His Holiness Patriarch Kirill has asked him to convey his love and support to you. The Russian Orthodox Church has always been and will be with the Church and people

of Greece. We know about their current difficulties and hope that with God's help they will be overcome in the nearest future.'

Metropolitan Hilarion spoke of the spiritual dimension that helps Christians to cope with sorrows and endure crises. "We hear much about the financial and economic crisis in Greece. There are problems everywhere, people are suffering elsewhere. Yet, the spiritual dimension, which the Church gives us, helps us to master difficulties in our life.'

"Several days ago we witness an amazing event in Moscow and other Russian cities: the Sash of the Theotokos was brought there. During several days one million people venerated it in Moscow, and over three million – in other cities. People stood in a queue for over twenty hours; temperature below zero. What attracted people to the holy relic? This was God's grace. People felt deep in heart that the Most Holy Mother of God visited the country, and they stood in a long queue to venerate the relic. This is the power of God and the power of people's prayer. We feel this power any time we come to church and partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. The Eucharist Mysteries are the holy of holies; when we participate in the Divine Liturgy, we become the chosen people, participants in the Lord's Last Supper,' Metropolitan Hilarion said.

He concluded his address with wishes of God's help to His Beatitude Hieronymus in his primatial ministry, peace and prosperity to the Greek Orthodox Church, its clergymen, monastics and laymen, to Greece and its people.

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