



## **Metropolitan Hilarion: Russian Church's presence on international scene is aimed at witnessing the beauty of Orthodoxy**

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TV programme "The Church and the World" broadcast on 23 July 2011 was dedicated to the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR).

Metropolitan Hilarion, the sixth chairman of this Synodal institution, told the TV viewers at their request about the most important events in the DECR activities during the two years of his chairmanship.

According to him, the DECR is an analogue of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Department deals with the solution of problems appearing in the contacts of the Russian Orthodox Church with the world.

The staff has to do with many issues, but first and foremost, with the issues of inter-Orthodox cooperation in preparation of the Pan-Orthodox Council at which the current problems in the life of the Orthodox Church will be discussed. 'The process of preparation has begun in 1961 and is far from painless, as there are many differences to be surmounted by the Churches. This work demands profound attention and continual contacts among the Orthodox Churches. However, work intensity is increasing,' Metropolitan Hilarion underscored.

Institutions located abroad play a great part in DECR's work, the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in particular. It was founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and has been very instrumental in maintaining our relations with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the authorities of the State of Israel and of the Palestinian National Authority, and in our presence in the Middle East in general. We try to monitor the events in the region

and help our Christian brothers and sisters who find themselves in an embarrassing situation, the DECR chairman continued.

Metropolitan Hilarion also spoke about the major historical landmarks in the life of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, which was founded in a difficult time. Metropolitan Nikolai (Yarushevich) became its head in 1946. "The revival of the Church began during the War and continued after it. One of the aspects of this revival was the appearance of the Russian Church on international scene. The DECR was needed for this. It prepared the visits of Patriarch Alexis I, elected by the Local Council in 1945, to foreign countries and the most part of the Local Orthodox Churches."

Another important aspect was the re-establishment of relations with the compatriots who, living in emigration after the Revolution, have almost lost any ties with the Church in the Fatherland.

"The last years of Metropolitan Nikolai in office coincided with the beginning of a new wave of persecution of the Church. Nikita Khrushchev put forward a task to do away with the Church in twenty years. Metropolitan Nikolai fell victim to this persecution. He was accused of his a too active position. He wrote an address, which Patriarch Alexis I delivered, saying that the Church has always been with its people and underscoring the historic role of the Church. This address provoked a negative reaction of the authorities, who demanded to discharge Metropolitan Nikolai.'

Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) took over the leadership of the DECR in 1960. "This period was very difficult to the Church, as the decision to eliminate it was not annulled, though not physically, but ideologically. People with certain weakness were found and persuaded to enounce their faith and the Church. There were some notorious incidents; for instance, a professor of the Moscow Theological Academy renounced his faith publicly."

According to Metropolitan Hilarion, all this has caused a very grave damage to the Church. "The authorities have set themselves a task to reduce the number of bishops to zero. When an old bishop died, no one was appointed to replace him. Under the circumstances, Metropolitan Nikodim began a systematic work for making the episcopate younger in defiance of the authorities' will and employing external relations of the Russian Orthodox Church. He used to tell the authorities, "We cannot delegate old people to the international conferences on disarmament; we need young modern people." Among them were his future successors at the DECR chairman post – Metropolitan Juvenaly of Krutitsy and Kolomna, Metropolitan Philaret of Minsk and Slutsk, and Metropolitan Kirill, now His Holiness the Patriarch.

In the 1970-80s, when the DECR was chaired by Metropolitan Juvenaly (Poyarkov) and Philaret

(Vakhromeyev), theological dialogues were intensified, including those with the Roman Catholic Church, with the Old Oriental Churches, and with some Protestant Churches. “This was a very important development, as our Church was isolated from the whole world during the Soviet time and before the War in particular.’

‘Preparation for the revival of ecclesiastical life began in the 1980s. The Church started to prepare for the celebration of the Millennium of the Baptism of Russia. It was thought initially that it would be a close church celebration, but it happened to be a nation-wide festivity, coinciding with the beginning of the disintegration of the communist ideology and the Soviet system. The year 1988, when Metropolitan Philaret chaired the DECR and took a most active part in preparations for the jubilee, has become a turning point in the history of our Church. We have counted the revival of the church life from that year.’

Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, now the Patriarch, led the DECR during the post-Soviet period. Metropolitan Hilarion named the most important events of that time. ‘First of all, Church-state relations were developed not only in Russia, but in the whole post-Soviet space. After over two hundred years of the Synodal period and seventy years of persecution, it was very important to elaborate a model of Church-state relations that would be based on the principle of mutual non-interference into internal affairs of one another and at the same time would allow active cooperation.’ Metropolitan Hilarion thinks highly of the services of Metropolitan Kirill who initiated the document called “The Foundations of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church” that formulated principles of cooperation between the Church and the state.

The most part of the Synodal departments of the Russian Orthodox Church were founded by Metropolitan Kirill. The re-establishment of the Eucharistic communion between the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate was another most important event of that period.

As to the DECR’s work at present, Metropolitan Hilarion said, ‘The presence of the Russian Orthodox Church on international scene is very active. It is aimed at witnessing the beauty of Orthodoxy and the truth kept undamaged by the Orthodox Church. As a matter of fact, this is a missionary task to perform. For instance, when we speak at inter-Christian forums, we speak of the teaching of the Orthodox Church, and often enough this is the first encounter with Orthodox for many people.’