



Meeting of the European Council of Religious Leaders opens in Istanbul

The annual meeting of the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) opened in Istanbul on 26 April 2010. The Council is comprised of thirty representatives of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrism from European countries. The ECRL objective is to promote peaceful coexistence of the communities of different religions in Europe.

This years the Council's meeting is being held under the headline "At the Crossroads: Justice, Equality and Sharing as Basis for Cultures of Peace."

Taking part in the meeting on behalf of the Local Orthodox Churches are Metropolitan Emmanuel of France (Patriarchate of Constantinople), Bishop Ioannis of Thermopylai (Greek Orthodox Church), and hegumen Philipp (Ryabykh), deputy chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (Russian Orthodox Church).

The plenary session of the Council was preceded by the Executive Committee meeting at which working plans for the future were discussed.

At the opening session of the Council, Dr. Mahmed Gormez, Turkey's deputy minister for religious affairs, greeted the participants on behalf of the Turkish authorities. He underscored that they gave considerable prominence to peaceful relations among different religions on the basis of justice, equality and sharing.

Mayor of Istanbul Kadir Topbaş greeted the participants and told them about the city as a model of peaceful coexistence of different religions. Governor of the Istanbul Province Muammer Güler also greeted the participants.

Counsellor to the President of the European Commission Dr. Nevish greeted the Council on behalf of José Manuel Barroso. He emphasized that democratic institutions work on the basis of values, but cannot create them. We should develop relations with the institutions, religious communities including, which have created values of justice, solidarity, equality and respect of the human person for centuries, he said.

Presented at the meeting was the work of the "Alliance of Civilizations." Turkey is an initiator of its establishment."

On the first day of the Council's meeting the participants heard reports of its moderator Bishop Gunnar Stålsett (Norway) and general secretary the Revd. Vebjørn Horsfjord (Norway). The participants accepted new members of the Council. They are Bishop Michel Santier, special envoy on interreligious affairs of the French Episcopal Conference (Roman Catholic Church); Bishop Martin Hein, member of the German Religious Round Table (Evangelical Church in Germany); Bishop Michael Jackson (Church of England); and sister Marian Murcia (Congregation of the Holy Family of Bordeaux, Roman Catholic Church).

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