Patriarch Kirill meets with Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou

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His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou on February 16, 2010, at his working residence in Chisty Pereulok.

Participating in the meeting were also Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations; Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman; Rev. Igor Yakimchuk, DECR acting secretary for inter-Orthodox relations – from the Russian Orthodox Church; as well as Russian ambassador in Greece V. Chkhikvishvili, ambassador at large A. Vdovin, and foreign ministry fourth European department director A. Alexeyev – from the Russian Foreign Ministry.

The head of the Greek government was accompanied by Greek's state minister Charalampos Pampoukis, first deputy foreign minister Dimitris Drutsas, governmental representative Georgios Petalotis, minister for environment, energy and climate change Ioannis Maniatis, general secretary of the ministry of culture and tourism Stiliani Mendoni, Greek ambassador in Russia Michael Spinellis and others.

Welcoming the guests, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church stressed that the fact that the people of Russia and Greece were mostly Orthodox was one of the most important binding factors in relations between the two countries. This factor was also significant in the Soviet times when the state power was very far from the Church. ‘The Orthodox Church has formed the system of values and determined to a considerable extent the cultural profile of our nations’, His Holiness said.

‘Dialogue between our two nations should be carried out not only on a pragmatic basis but necessarily on the level of human hearts. Then this dialogue will be solid and will be able to bring significant results’, His Holiness stressed, adding, ‘The system of values, which has been formed to a considerable extent under the influence of Orthodoxy both in Russia and Greece, determines the outline of the Eastern European Orthodox civilization. It is my conviction that in the globalization era we all should be concerned for the preservation of this civilization’s special features and characteristics’. The Patriarch stressed the importance of broadening cooperation between Orthodox countries, citing as an example the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy. ‘It is very important that this cooperation should develop also in other areas so that we together could move forward while preserving our identity’, he said.

Patriarch Kirill pointed to the problem of preserving spiritual, cultural and moral values in the life of the human civilization, saying, ‘It is quite clear that the system of values formed in Christian tradition is a very important factor for Europe. Therefore we are concerned over the developments in various European countries, pointing to something like ousting of Christian values from the life of today’s society’. His Holiness cited as an example the profoundly disturbing decision made last November by the European Court of Human Rights to ban Christian symbols from Italian schools. His Holiness was pleased to note that an attempt to remove the icon of the Saviour from the court or to renounce the oath on the Gospel in Greece had failed.

Addressing the history of the 20th century, Patriarch Kirill recalled the severe trials experienced by the Russian people and the Russian Orthodox Church. ‘Our historical experience shows that a high quality of human life can be attained only if spiritual and material values are combined. An emphasis on pragmatism and exclusion of moral and spiritual values from people’s life turn out to be a degradation of the human civilization’, he said, adding, ‘Therefore we all, especially people of Orthodox cultural tradition, should be concerned today for preventing these values from disappearing from the life of modern man. In this connection I believe the cooperation on the level of international European organizations to be very important’.

‘We hold very dear our fraternal relations with the Greek Orthodox Church. We often exchange delegations, but more often ordinary people visit each other. There is a great number of pilgrims coming from Greece to Russia and from Russia to Greece’, His Holiness remarked and expressed conviction that the flows of pilgrims from the two countries would grow.

Among the places which attract Orthodox Russians is Holy Mount Athos. Addressing Mr. Papandreou, His Holiness said, ‘We are grateful to Greece for the preservation of the unique status of Athos and rejoice in the fact that Russia is also making her contribution today to the support of Athonite monasteries including financial one’.

Patriarch Kirill rated high the project for an exhibition of Athonite treasures in Moscow. The work to carry it out has been undertaken by the Russian embassy in Athens. This project was also discussed during Patriarch Kirill’s visit to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the talk with His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew last summer. ‘I think if this idea is realized it will be a vivid testimony to Russia’s interest in Greece and the Holy Mount’, the patriarch said.

His Holiness approved of the opening of a Russian center in Thessaloniki in which the Russian World Foundation took part, noting that there were many Russian-speaking people living in Greece, especially in its northern part. He also supported the plan to observe a Year of Greek Culture in 2013 in Russia

and a Year of Russian Culture in 2014 in Greece.

His Holiness wished God's help to Prime Minister George Papandreou in his service of the Greek people.

The head of the Greek government thanked His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for the meeting. 'For me and for all those who accompany me, to meet you is a joy and honour', he said. He also affirmed that the age-old cultural and spiritual ties contributed to the rapprochement of the two nations.

The prime minister expressed support for Patriarch Kirill's position on the preservation of Christian values in social life. He underlined that the technical power of humanity achieved through scientific development required especially urgently that the spiritual principles should be strengthened in people's life. According to the Greek prime minister, spiritual wisdom is needed also to prevent humanity from using its technical power to the detriment of itself and nature.

During the meeting Mr. Papandreou also spoke about problems concerning the life of Russian-speaking people in Greece and supported the idea of organizing the Treasures of Athos exhibition.

The head of the Russian Orthodox Church in his talk with the Greek prime minister also spoke about the development of pastoral and missionary work of the Russian Church in the present situation. 'Every parish should be a center of not only devotional life but also social service', he stressed and expressed interest in the experience of the Greek Church in social and youth work. Mr. Papandreou manifested readiness to promote the exchange of experience between the Greek and Russian Churches.

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