Patriarch Kirill on Moscow Patriarchate's relations with Local Orthodox Churches

In his report to the Bishops' Conference held in the Church of Christ the Saviour, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia spoke in detail about relations with a number of Local Orthodox Churches.

He addressed in particular the relations with the Georgian Church, informing the gathering that, in accordance with an agreement reached, the two Church have exchanged representatives. Along with their pastoral duties, the clergy appointed to Moscow and Tbilisi will, if need be, present the positions of their respective Churches. In addition, an intensive dialogue was conducted with the Georgian Church on a number of urgent problems in their bilateral relations throughout the year.

Speaking about the Serbian Orthodox Church, His Holiness reminded the gathering that Bishop Irinej of Nis was elected to the Patriarchal Throne on January 22. 'On that day I extended warm congratulations to the newly-elected Patriarch in a personal talk by telephone and in a message', he said. The following morning the first enthronement took place in Belgrade, while the main grand enthronement of Patriarch Irinej will take place after Easter on the old chair of the Patriarchate of Pec in Kosovo. A delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate will participate in the event.

'We have known His Holiness Irinej for many years and do not doubt that the cordial and friendly relations between the Russian and Serbian Churches will be preserved and consolidated', His Holiness Kirill said.

The Moscow Patriarchate and its Bulgarian brothers are tied by special bonds, he stressed. The Russian and Bulgarian Churches experienced various hardships together and showed solidarity when schisms arose in one of them. Last January, the European Court of Human Rights granted a suit of the schismatics who challenged the actions of the Bulgarian State to restore the legitimate rights of the canonical Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The ruling of the Strasbourg Court concerned both the Bulgarian state leadership and the Bulgarian Patriarchate. The Russian Church responded to that concern. With an active participation of a Moscow Patriarchate delegation which included not only clergy but also experts in international law, a pan-Orthodox meeting was held last March in Sofia to deal with this problem. A legal analysis drafted in the Russian Church was used by the Bulgarian side, and during his visit to Russia the Bulgarian Prime Minister Sergey Stanisev expressed gratitude for the support given to Bulgaria.

Last year also saw a dynamic development in relations with other Local Churches including the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia and Orthodox Church in America, His Holiness informed the gathering. The Primates of these Churches made not one visit to the Russian Orthodox Church during the last year.

Speaking about the prospects of inter-Orthodox cooperation this year, His Holiness Kirill noted that the Russian Orthodox Church's relations with sister Local Orthodox Churches will actively develop.

Patriarch Kirill has planned to visit the Orthodox Church of Alexandria this spring. In autumn, he will go to the Patriarchate of Antioch. The program of these visits include concelebrations and talks with their Beatitudes Patriarchs Theodore of Alexandria and Ignatios of Antioch as well as meetings with state officials in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, with heads of the Coptic and Jacobite Patriarchates, with Muslim leaders and Russian compatriots.

The Moscow Patriarchate will maintain cooperation with Local Churches in pastoral care of those Russians who live in their territories. As was arranged with the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, the construction of a new church will continue in Limassol to meet the needs of Russian-speaking believers.

His Holiness stressed that the Russian Orthodox Church would also broaden cooperation with Local Churches in bearing common witness to the gospel's values before the external world, in organizing pilgrimages to Orthodox holy places, in exchanging seminarians and in many other areas and would support all the initiatives promoting Orthodox unity.

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