



Patriarch Kirill: the visit of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Patriarchate of Constantinople has opened up a new page in relations between the two Patriarchates

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, in his report to the Bishops' Conference on 2 February 2010, addressed the theme of inter-Orthodox relations, informing the gathering in particular about the official visit he made last June to the Church of Constantinople.

Having pointed to a special significance of that visit for inter-Orthodox relations, His Holiness Kirill said, 'There are reasons to hope that in those days a new page was opened up in relations between the two Patriarchates. These relations should not be built in a spirit of rivalry but in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation'.

Along with an expression of unity in Christ manifested in the joint celebration of the Divine Liturgy, there were talks held in a fraternal spirit. There was a discussion on the pastoral care of the Russian-speaking diaspora in Turkey, which amounts to over 15000 people. In addition, an agreement was reached to organize regular pilgrimages of archpastors and pastors of the Russian Orthodox Church to old Byzantine holy places in the territory of Turkey. The first of such official trips took place last December.

The consecration of a Church of Sts Constantine and Helen celebrated by the two Patriarchs at the summer residence of the Russian General Consulate in Buuk-Der near Istanbul was another testimony to the development of fraternal relations.

The Patriarchal visit was planned to coincide with a recital given by the choir of the Sretensky Monastery in Moscow at the old Church of Agia Irine where the Second Ecumenical Council used to have its sessions. 'There is something symbolical in that the vaults of an old church, which has not been used as a church for several centuries, now resounded with Russian spiritual hymns! Many people listened to that recital with tears in their eyes', His Holiness shared his remembrances.

He also informed the gathering that he met with compatriots in Ankara, with Turkish Prime Minister R. Erdogan and with the director of the Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs, Mr. Ali Bardakoglu. Among many important issues they discussed was the problem of the spiritual life of Orthodox believers who live in Turkey and the development of pilgrimage to Turkey. 'I have received full support from the Turkish Prime Minister and the Islamic leaders with regard to the problems of pastoral care for Russian-

speaking Orthodox in Turkey and the development of pilgrimage', the Patriarch said.

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