Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad meets the chief of the Turkish Directorate General for Religious Affairs Ali Bardakoglu

On 14 November 2008, the Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations (DECR) Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad met in the Embassy of the Turkish Republic in Moscow with the chief of the Turkish Directorate General for Religious Affairs Prof. Ali Bardakoglu. Discussed were bilateral relations and how to facilitate the visits of Russian tourists and pilgrims to the holy place in Turkey.

Taking part in the meeting were Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Turkish Republic in the Russian Federation Halil Akinci, head of Department for External Relations of the Turkish Directorate General for Religious Affairs Prof. Ali Dere, and staff members of the Embassy. The Russian Orthodox Church was represented by the DECR acting secretary for Church-Society relations Rev. Georgy Ryabykh, and a staff member of the same secretariat Rev. Georgy Roschin.

Metropolitan Kirill said that the number of pilgrims from the Russian Orthodox Church to Christian holy places in Turkey had increased in the recent years. It is encouraging the state policy of the Turkish Republic is conducive to the extent of such pilgrimages.

An active development of political and economic relations between the two countries was noted. 'Friendship among nations is maintained also in human hearts, – the DECR Chairman said. – When human hearts touch, the dialogue of religions is necessary. The Russian Church actively participates in the dialogue with many Muslim communities in the entire world. We are very happy to promote the development of relations among our religious communities. I am confident that religious factor will contribute to friendship between our nations and cooperation between our countries.'

Prof. Ali Bardakoglu underscored the value of the principle of free profession of faith. An said that the Turkish authorities considered the Russian Orthodox Church 'a major world centre of wisdom.'

Also discussed was spiritual care for the thousands of Russians living in Turkey.

The participants in the meeting talked about cooperation in providing tourists and pilgrims with reliable and complete information about Christian holy places and historical monuments in Turkey issued in the Russian language.

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