DECR chairman takes part in celebrations marking the 70th anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Church's Metochion in Sofia



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On December 6, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated at the church of St. Nicholas in Sofia, marking the 70th anniversary of the Metochion of the Russian Orthodox Church. The celebration was timed to the patronal feast of the church in accordance with the Revised Julian Calendar accepted by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Many faithful attended the festive service officiated at which were Metropolitan Gabriel of Lovec; Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR); and Bishop Gerasim of Melnik, chief secretary of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

The hierarchs were assisted by Archimandrite Vassian (Zmeyev), rector of the Russian Orthodox Church's Metochion in Sofia; oikonomos Neluţ Oprea, representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Bulgaria; Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, acting vice-chairman of the DECR, and Rev. Alexander Yershov, assistant to the DECR chairman, who are accompanying Metropolitan Anthony; as well as other clerics of the Russian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches.

Attending the divine service were H.E. Eleonora Mitrofanova, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Bulgaria; H.E. Sergei Bazdnikin, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Republic of North Macedonia; H.E. Željko Jović, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Serbia to the Republic of Bulgaria; and Mr. Nikita Leshukov, charge d'affaires of the Embassy of Belarus in Bulgaria.

The Divine Liturgy being over, Metropolitan Anthony warmly greeted the celebrating hierarchs and clergymen and all the faithful on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' and underscored the important role played by the Russian Metochion in Sofia and Bulgarian Metochion in Moscow in the strengthening of relations between the two Churches bound by ties of history. He said in particular: "The Lord is where the unity is, while the enemy of mankind is where division is. Throughout its history, the Church has been doing its best to unite people." Metropolitan Anthony continued to say: "The strongest unity is grounded in God, in the faith, in one Baptism and one Eucharist. This is the greatest treasure of the Church."

Metropolitan Anthony presented the church of St. Nicholas with and a "Sign" Icon of the Theotokos as a token of the celebration. In commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Metochion, its rector Archimandrite Vassian (Zmeyev) was awarded the Order of St Sergius of Radonezh, 3rd class; Archpriest Dimitry Tukhchiev of the Sofia metropolis who serves at the church of St. Panteleimon in Knyazhevo was awarded the medal of St. Seraphim of Sarov; Ms. T. Bondar and Ms. O. Stoimenova were awarded the medals of St. Olga Equal-to-the- Apostles; and the medal of St. Euphrosinya of Moscow was presented to Ms. V. Stefanova-Cenova.

Afterwards, a prayer service to St. Seraphim (Sobolev) was celebrated at his burial place in the crypt of St. Nicholas church.

That same day, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk visited the Cathedral of the Holy and Right-Believing Prince Alexander Nevsky in Sofia built in 1912 in commemoration of the Russian soldiers who died during the Russo-Turkish war for the liberation of Bulgaria. Accompanying him was Bishop Gerasim of Melnik, rector of the Cathedral and chief secretary of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

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