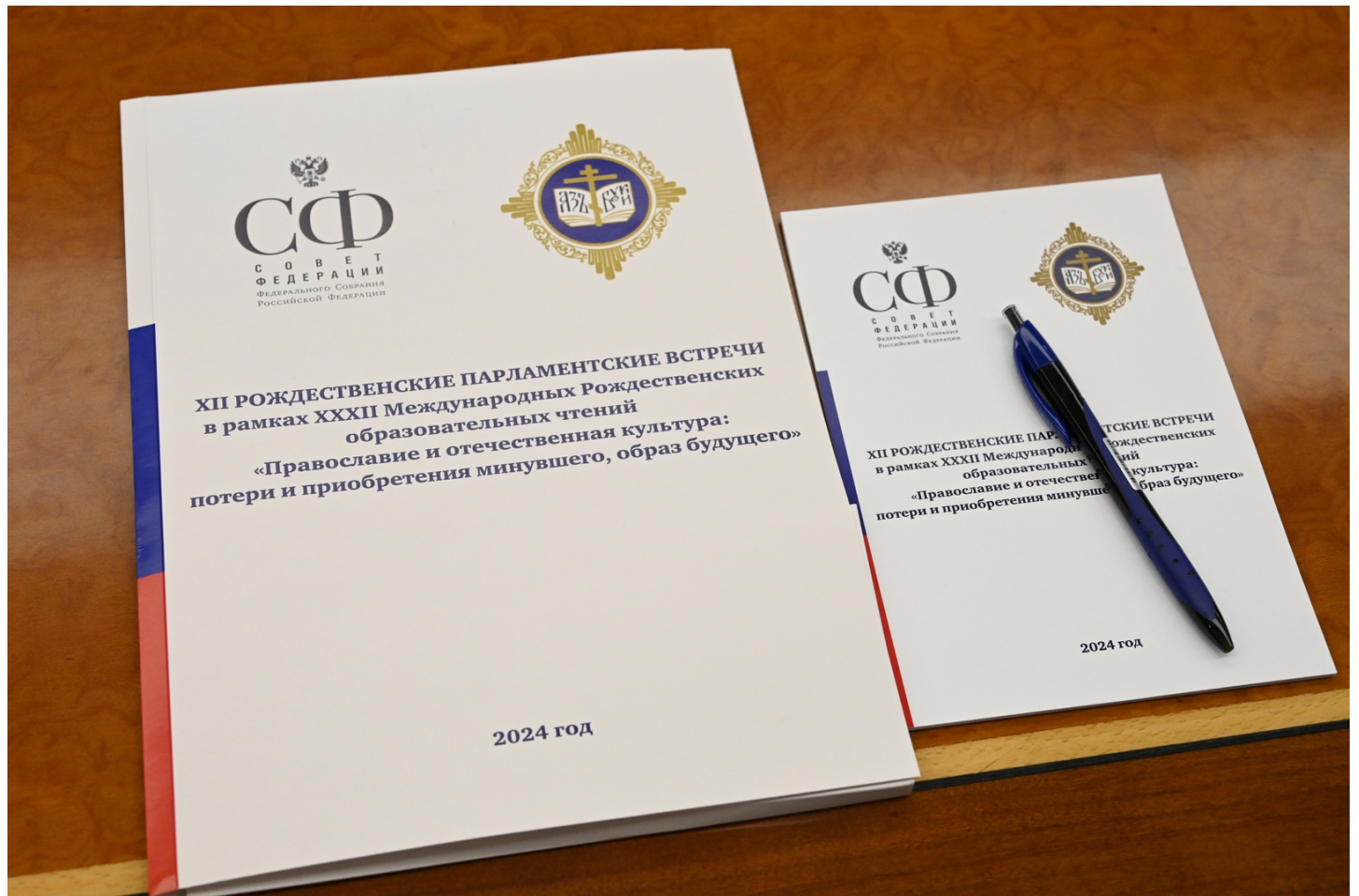




## **DECR Chairman Addresses Round Table at the Federation Council**



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On January 23, a round table on “Russia’s role in the global humanitarian space. Preservation and promotion of cultural and spiritual heritage” took place at the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in the context of the 12<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary Meetings which are traditionally held as a part of the International Christmas Educational Readings.

The round table was co-chaired by Mr. Grigory Karasin, head of the Federation Council Committee on Foreign Affairs, and Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations (DECR).

Mr. Karasin addressed the participants with opening remarks.

In his speech, Metropolitan Anthony emphasized the urgency of the topic discussed at this meeting, “since it gives a wide field for meaningful and businesslike talks, deliberations and discussions about the mission of Russia and the Russian Church in the modern world.”

The archpastor reminded the audience that throughout history “our nation has been creating spiritual and cultural space inseparable from the Orthodox faith. It was the Christian worldview that became the key factor and basis for the formation of Russian culture and national identity and greatly influenced the development of national social and political thought,” he underscored. “Russian culture, which is known to the whole world today in all its diversity and richness, could not come into being without Orthodoxy. As time went on, this culture got enriched by new traditions brought by the people who took the path of common historical development, which ultimately gave rise to the phenomenon of Russian civilization.”

Metropolitan Anthony continued to say: “Like any civilization, we cannot retreat into ourselves, but seek contacts and cooperation with other peoples and cultures and with all those who are ready for dialogue with us. This is a kind of mission to which the Russian Orthodox Church attaches great significance. The language of spiritual ideals and meanings, moral axioms, high culture and art is an instrument that despite all potential obstacles and impediments can cross national and linguistic boundaries, thus offering a chance to relate people all over the world with one another.”

The DECR chairman added that the Days of Russia in foreign countries with religious events is one of such instruments. “This project traces its origin to the Days of Russia in Latin America in 2008. Divine services, concerts, and meetings with our compatriots living in different countries of the region held by Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, the then chairman of the Department for External Church Relations (now His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'), were a momentous event and provided a powerful impetus for the promotion of Russian culture in the countries of Latin America”.

Metropolitan Anthony noted that over time the Days of Russia’s Spiritual Culture have acquired a wider geographical scope and been implemented in a large number of countries on different continents. The format of these events is very diverse. It consists of performances by choral groups, including church ones, exhibitions of works by national artists featuring religious subjects, as well as international conferences and discussion platforms that are to develop and strengthen cultural and spiritual ties.

The DECR chairman continued to say that the present difficult times have left their mark on the programme of the Days. Due to the reversal policy towards culture pursued by some Western states, the focus in making the list of countries for hosting the events has shifted to the near abroad countries, Africa and Asia. However, it would be erroneous to speak about a complete break of cultural relations with Western society, because, for instance, the Days of Russia were held in France in the autumn 2022

and in Serbia in September 2023.

The archpastor is confident that “these events serve as a manifestation of cultural public diplomacy that is much in demand in the present challenging political situation. It is impossible not to note special importance of such events to our compatriots living abroad. Thanks to these events, they have an opportunity to keep so important spiritual ties with their Fatherland and its spiritual traditions in a foreign cultural environment.”

The DECR chairman said that in recent decades an interest in Orthodoxy and Orthodox culture in the Russian-speaking diaspora has been enjoying resurgence, as is evidenced by the steady increase in the number of the Moscow Patriarchate’s institutions and their growing role and significance in the life of compatriots. Speaking from experience of his work abroad, Metropolitan Anthony noted that Russian churches in other countries are serving as “meeting places for our compatriots who come there on Sunday and can not only pray, but share their news, joys and difficulties.”

“The spiritual, cultural and educational events organized by our parishes abroad together with Russian embassies and consulates, Russian centers of science and culture, organizations of Russian compatriots and their Coordination Council bring an important contribution into the popularization of national spiritual and cultural heritage.”

Metropolitan Anthony attaches importance to the decision to hold the Russian-Chinese Years of Culture in 2024 and 2025 for the purpose of promoting relations between Russia and China and extending bilateral cultural contacts. “The Chinese Orthodox Church, to which the Moscow Patriarchate granted autonomy in the last century and with which it maintains ties, needs development. We hope that cultural flow between the peoples of our countries would help to move spiritual bonds between them to a deeper level, preserve traditional values and educate future generations in the spirit of peace and brotherly love.”

The archpastor underscored that against the background of contradictions that have been massing up over many years and today have boiled over into all kinds of conflicts and confrontation, the development of international humanitarian cooperation is needed as never before. “Though the contacts with many Western states at official level have unfortunately reached the minimum today, cooperation at the level of representatives of religions and cultural and scientific community remains one of the few important channels for maintaining communications,” he stated. “We must learn how to strengthen and develop spiritual and cultural relations under externally unfavorable conditions, using previous platforms that have proven their worth and at the same time setting up new formats for our cooperation.”

Metropolitan Anthony is confident that the popularization of the national spiritual culture abroad

demands cooperation of the Church with the state and public structures.

Among those speaking at the round table were Rev. Feodor Lukyanov, chairman of the Patriarchal commission on family matters, protection of motherhood and childhood, Dr. Damir Mukhetdinov, first vice-chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation, and hieromonk Pavel (Shcherbachev), deputy chairman of the Patriarchal Council for Culture.

Attending the round table were retired Archbishop Mikhail (Donskov); archpriest Sergy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for far abroad countries; hierodeacon Alexy (Ochkanov) and V. Kukovich of the same secretariat; Mr. Eduard Taran, co-chair of the Board of Trustees of the Interreligious Council of Russia (ICR) and president of RATM Holding; Mr. Oleg Blyudov, secretary of the ICR Board of Trustees, and invited guests.

Recommendations for government bodies of the Russian Federation based on the results of the round table were adopted.

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