



DECR chairman presides over round table meeting on cooperation between Russian Orthodox Church and compatriots residing in European countries



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On 3rd – 4th September 2026, a round table meeting entitled ‘The Russian Orthodox Church and Compatriots: Experience of Cooperation in European Countries,’ took place in Yerevan, Armenia. Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, presided over the meeting with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus’.

Among those who arrived in Armenia to attend the meeting were hierarchs, clergymen and laypeople of

the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as representatives of Russian compatriots' organizations from European countries.

The delegation accompanying Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk included Archpriest Igor Vyzhanov, DECR Deputy Chairman; Archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev, DECR Secretary for Far Abroad Countries; Hieromonk Kirill (Peregudin) of the DECR Secretariat for Far Abroad Countries; and Priest Nikolai Vasin, Secretary to the DECR Chairman.

Taking part in the meeting were also representatives of non-governmental associations of compatriots and Russian diplomats.

The Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations opened the meeting, conveying to all those present blessings from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'.

In his address, the DECR chairman noted that the conference taking place in Yerevan in 2026 was the 14th meeting of the kind. "Such events always receive a positive response from clergymen and compatriots living in far abroad countries, facilitating communication between archpastors, pastors and laypeople from different countries and enabling them to share their experience with one another when it comes to diocesan and parochial life and ministry," he said.

Metropolitan Anthony pointed out that the Russian Orthodox Church had been destined for its historic role as protector and unifier of the Russian people living in the diaspora: it took care of refugees and prisoners of war, remaining a pillar of support for compatriots and a link connecting them with their Homeland.

"Unfortunately, recent years in Europe and certain countries in the post-Soviet space have seen an increase in Russophobia. Undisguised is the authorities' striving to 'nationalize' the Orthodox Church or, to put it bluntly, split it and make it an instrument of anti-Russian policy," Metropolitan Anthony said, providing a number of examples of such Russophobic policy.

"The year 2022 was one of the most dramatic periods in the history of the Russian diaspora all over the world, requiring from our compatriots consolidation, on the one hand, and openness towards their brothers and sisters from the countries of the historical Rus', on the other hand," Metropolitan Anthony added, "Over the recent years, the Russian Church's communities abroad have seen an inflow of parishioners from among the Ukrainian refugees. These are the believers who deliberately seek parishes of the canonical Orthodox Church and who have not been totally remodified by the Ukrainian state propaganda," the DECR chairman added.

“It is our mission to preserve peaceful prayerful atmosphere and unity at the church-wide and parochial levels, avoiding any discussions as to the political situation in Europe and around the globe,” Metropolitan Anthony said in his address, “All political issues must remain outside the church fence.”

Today, as always, when it comes to compatriots who by force of circumstance have found themselves outside their Homeland, the Russian Church sees its major goal in strengthening their faith, offering them pastoral guidance and spiritual consolation, organizing mutual help and promoting solidarity within a community of brothers and sisters abroad, the DECR chairman noted, emphasizing that the Moscow Patriarchate’s institutions abroad help compatriots integrate into society in the country of their residence while also helping them preserve their own spiritual and cultural identity.

Among those who addressed the round table meeting were also Mr S.P. Kopyrkin, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Armenia; Metropolitan Mark of Korsun and Western Europe, Patriarchal Exarch of Western Europe; Mr G.A. Ovechko, Director of the Department for Relations with Compatriots Abroad of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Mr M.M. Melekh, Special Representative of the Russian Foreign Minister for International Cooperation in Ensuring the Right to Freedom of Religion; and Mr G.A. Yakovlev, Head of the Administration for Relations with Compatriots Abroad of the Department for Foreign Economic and International Relations of the City of Moscow.

Among the speakers were also Metropolitan Nestor of Stupino, Vicar of the Patriarchal Exarch of Western Europe; Archbishop Simon of Brussels and Belgium; Archbishop Elisey of the Hague and Netherlands; Archbishop Tikhon of Ruza, Administrator of the Diocese of Berlin and Germany; Bishop Alexy of Vienna and Austria; Bishop Peter of Kafa, Vicar of the Patriarchal Exarch of Western Europe; Archimandrite Philip (Ryabykh), Acting Representative of the Russian Orthodox Church to European International Organizations, Rector of the Church of All Saints in Strasbourg, France; Archpriest Vladimir Tyshchuk, Representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus’ to the Patriarch of Bulgaria, Rector of the Russian Orthodox Church’s Metochion in Sofia, Bulgaria; Archpriest Vitaly Tarasyev, Rector of the Russian Orthodox Church’s Metochion in Belgrade, Serbia; Archpriest Mikhail Gundyaev, Representative of the Russian Orthodox Church to the World Council of Church and International Organizations in Geneva, Rector of the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos in Geneva; Archpriest Viktor Lyutik, Acting Dean of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Parishes in Sweden, Representative of the Moscow Patriarchate in Finland, Rector of the Church of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos in Helsinki, Finland; Archpriest Sergy Bondarev, Rector of the Church of St. Alexander Nevsky in Copenhagen, Denmark; Hegumen Nikita (Dobronravov), Head of Chancery of the Swedish Deanery of the Moscow Patriarchate, Rector of the St. Sergius of Radonezh Parish in Stockholm, Sweden; Archpriest Timofey Zolotusky, Rector of the St. Nicholas Stavropegial Parish in Reykjavik, Iceland; Archpriest Vladimir Abrosimov, Rector of the Church of St. George the Victory-Bearer at the

Russian Embassy in the Czech Republic; and Ms O.V. Shuvalova, member of the World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots, Co-Coordinator for the Region of Europe and North America (Spain and Andorra).

Over the course of the two-day meeting, its participants had a fruitful exchange of opinions on ways to promote cooperation between the Church and associations of compatriots and acknowledged the importance of strengthening ties between parishes abroad and coordinating councils of the Russian compatriots' organizations in various countries.

Concluding the meeting, Metropolitan Anthony expressed his hope that the results of the discussion that had taken place would prove to be useful in the pastoral, social and educational work of the Moscow Patriarchate's institutions in European countries.

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