



Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church meets with Antonis Samaras, leader of Greek New Democracy Party

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On 26 January 2012, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with Antonis Samaras, leader of New Democracy Party, at the Patriarchal residence in St. Daniel's Monastery.

They were joined in the meeting by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR); archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for Inter-Orthodox Relations; archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for far abroad countries; Panos Panagiotopoulos and Andreas Psyharis, deputies of the Hellenic Parliament; Chrysantos Lazarides, advisor of the leader of New Democracy; and Dimitrios Yamalas, who represented the Embassy of the Republic of Greece to the Russian Federation.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill warmly greeted them, saying: "We are always happy to welcome guests from fraternal Greece." He said further that the Russian Orthodox Church and the Church of Greece have maintained traditionally good relations that are important to the ties among Greece, Russia, Ukraine and other countries in which the Moscow Patriarchate is present. "Political circumstances are changing, whereas our relations that date back centuries remain unchanged. Orthodoxy is a very important factor of national identity of both the Greeks and the Russians."

His Holiness mentioned Orthodox relics that have been brought from Greece recently; the Sash of the Theotokos and the relics of St. Demetrios the Great Martyr. "Millions of people stood in queue for hours to venerate the relics. So many people never came to a political meeting of a sports event. As long as they come to venerate relics, there is hope for the future," Patriarch Kirill said and added that veneration of the new martyrs of Russia and Greece was very important, too.

The Primate of the Russian Church stated that the Russians sympathize with the Greek people who are experiencing difficulties. "We highly appreciate the Orthodox Church of Greece's charitable work. I know, for instance, about soup-kitchens. This shows that the Church takes the suffering of common people to heart," he said and noted that relations between the Russian church charities and the Church of Greece are being established to help those in need. Patriarch Kirill has given his blessing to raise funds in all churches of the Russian Orthodox Church.

His Holiness mentioned the forthcoming official visit of His Beatitude Archbishop Hieronymos of Athens and All Greece to the Russian Orthodox Church and expressed his hope for the visit "to give a new impetus to the development of relations between the two Churches."

Antonis Samaras thanked His Holiness for the meeting and agreed with His Holiness in that the Greek relics brought to Russia and the decision to lend a helping hand to the needy show the level of bilateral

relations. "It happened that politics divide people, whereas faith always unites them," he said. The leader of New Democracy party hopes that Greece will cope with the crisis in the near future. He believes that along with economic analysis of the crisis the Greek people should carry out its "spiritual study." Antonis Samaras is confident that Orthodoxy is a fundament that gives spiritual strength which people need for struggle and for finding a way-out from crisis situation.

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