



## **Metropolitan Hilarion speaks at Orthodox-Catholic Forum on Rhodes**

Metropolitan Hilarion, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, takes part in the Second Orthodox-Catholic Forum being held on the island of Rhodes on 18-22 October 2010 on the initiative of His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

The unofficial meeting gives an opportunity for a free exchange of opinions on Church-State relations throughout centuries.

Taking part in the Forum are representatives of all Local Orthodox Churches (except the Bulgarian Church) in Europe and of the Roman Catholic Church.

In his address Metropolitan Hilarion showed some key moments in the history of relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state since October 1990, when the RSFSR Supreme Council adopted the Law on the Freedom of Religion. The Law of 1997 recognizes a special role of Orthodoxy in Russian history and becomes topical because of the recent discussion of the role of Christianity to be included in a draft Constitution for the European Union.

"The Church does not aspire to merge with the state, - the DECR chairman noted. – The Church does not interfere in state affairs and politics. At the same time we want the state to take into account the interests of no less than 80% of people in Russia who consider themselves believers."

Metropolitan Hilarion believes that the time has come for Church-State cooperation on solid legal basis. He said: "The [Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, is bringing Church-State relations on a new level. We would like to move up from partnership in some socially important fields to systematic cooperation with the state for the good of Russian society."