

## **CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE ORTHODOX PRIMATES OF THE MIDDLE EAST WITH HIGH RANKING OFFICIALS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

On 19<sup>th</sup> September 2012 during ongoing discussions in Brussels with senior officials of the European Union, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, His Beatitude Theophilos III of Jerusalem and His Beatitude Chrysostomos II Archbishop of Cyprus continued to pass on their message of intense anxiety regarding the future of the Christian Communities of the Middle East. At many of these meetings, the Europarliamentarian Mrs Rodi Kratsa, the former Vice President of the European Council, accompanied the Primates.

The focus of the discussions was the so-called "Arab-Spring" and the manner of support for a better future for the countries of the Middle East by the United Europe, the harmonious co-existence of all citizens, as well as the protection of the rights of the Christian communities in the region.

Within the framework of the high ranking contacts of the three Primates, especially significant was the meeting they had with the European Counselor of Cyprus, Mrs. Androula Vasileiou, responsible for issues of Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, yesterday afternoon at the offices of the Representative of the Church of Cyprus in the Belgian capital. Both parties agreed that the youth of the Orthodox Churches of the Middle East should be supported by Europe, through activities such as camps which have already been realized during the past summer on European soil. Mrs Vasileiou also promised to support issues of education in this turbulent region and will also submit the issues to other European Counselors who together will agree on further programmes of support of the youth of the Christian communities.

"It is unfair that our brothers and sisters should be tormented so, especially in the region in which Christianity was developed, as the faith which preaches love, understanding, forgiveness and mutual respect", emphasized His Beatitude Theodoros II Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa in one of his effective interventions during the meeting which followed with the President of the Parliamentary Group of the Christian Democrats Mr Joseph Daul, who in his turn asked for the contribution of the Orthodox Churches of the region to the work of the European Parliament in efforts of reconciliation. Mr Daul was accompanied by the Vice President of the European People's Party in the European Parliament, Mr. Ioannis Kasoulides.

Also, His Beatitude Theophilos of Jerusalem analysed the situation prevalent in the spiritual jurisdiction of the Church of Sion, and His Beatitude the Archbishop of Cyprus stressed the need for the communities of these regions to return to the previous situation of a balanced and harmonious co-existence between Christians and Muslims and stressed that this dialogue which has just begun between the three Primates and United Europe must continue.

One other significant piece of news which came out of yesterday's meetings especially with the leadership of the Christian Democrats is that the European People's Party – which comprises the majority at the European Parliament – has begun to set the foundation for the 16<sup>th</sup> dialogue which will take place next September. These are to be discussions with religious bodies which are likely to take place in Cyprus, a member-state of the European Union, with particular importance being given to the fields of development in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East. The issue was placed before the Archbishop of Cyprus by

the President of the European Parliament, Mr. Jan Albrecht, who is responsible for Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Matters.

Also very constructive was the meeting between the three Primates with Mr, Miguel Angel Martinez Martinez, the Vice President of the European Parliament, who has family ties with Egypt, is fully informed about the situation in the land of the Nile and its neighbouring countries of the Middle East.

There was also a meeting between the Vice President of the European Parliament who is responsible for the implementation of Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty (on the dialogue with religious leaders) Mr. László Surján who was representing the Mr. Martin Schultz, of the European Parliament. Moreover, a very productive discussion was held with the former President of the European Parliament, MEP Hans-Gert Peterin, head of the Working Group of the European Peoples' Party on issues regarding the Middle East, as well as with Mr. Elmar Brok, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Union.

In conclusion, welcoming the Venerable Primates at a dinner hosted in their honour the Europarliamentarian Mrs. Rodi Kratsa, in the presence of many Greek and Cypriot Europarliamentarians, underscored the need for the Orthodox Churches of the Middle East to preserve the "imaginary Thermopylae of the values of Christianity and Hellenism as universal spiritual values", and expressed the certainty that the relevant dialogue with the European Union will continue.