

## Conference: "Nation, Religions-Orthodoxy and the new European Reality"

### CONCLUSIONS

Athens, Greece | 17-19 April 2005

The International Secretariat of the INTERPARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY ON ORTHODOXY (I.A.O.) in an attempt to summarize all those interesting views which were recorded during the conference co organized with the EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT and the EUROPEAN COMMISSION in Athens from 17 to 19 of April 2005 on the topic "NATION, RELIGIONS – ORTHODOXY AND THE NEW EUROPEAN REALITY", and draw useful conclusions, notes the following:

The changes taking place nowadays in the European region cannot be characterized simply by the free movement of people; nor can the necessary political unity of the European Union and the whole of Europe be anticipated as a consequence of the European common market of capital and services. In any case, the goals defined a few years ago by the Lisbon Council were never part of the public consciousness of the citizens of Europe; as a result, they collapsed and disappeared. {"We do not ally states, we unite peoples" (Jean Monnet, 30 April 1952) }

These findings are guiding European Union's political leadership towards the need to make the necessary political decisions in view of the future goals of the European venture, which will highlight the significance of tradition, defining the contents which make up "European culture" on the basis of purely objective historical and cultural facts, without self-serving or politicking, which not only distort European history but, in the end, undermine the prospects for Europe.

Such a venture, that of European integration, requires the broadest political cohesion based on European solidarity among all European peoples and traditions. This solidarity will not be based on economic expediencies, which, in order to be served, alter European history and reverse the traditions of the peoples of Europe. Europe's future cannot be based on the falsification of European history, the womb of global history, with its roots in Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome and Christianity, or on half-truths, supposedly promulgated in the name of coexistence and tolerance.

Besides, the specific features of European culture, such as tolerance and mutual respect towards others, have their references in Christianity, and constitute the healthy foundations and the necessary guarantee of the coexistence of peoples and traditions.

Moreover, such a venture demands a search for and identification of forces capable of strengthening European solidarity and contributing to the formation of a common model of values which should govern the public and social life of millions of people. These are forces that will constitute a framework of solidarity, less remote than Parliaments and Institutions and therefore closer to European citizens. The future of Europe will, in the end, be decided by the existence of these forces and how well they respond over the next years.

The conference recorded the role and significance of the concepts of "nation" and "religion" in a multi-national, multi-cultural and integrated Europe, in the modern world and the risks caused by this integration. It also stated that the future of Europe cannot be defined in defiance of national

cultures; nor can it be defined on the basis of antagonism towards a specific religion.

The possible risks- which do, indeed, exist- from the public presence and role of European religions are being significantly reduced, minimized, since it is clear that the presence of religion in public life cannot be reduced merely to the public role of churches, nor can it bring into question the ideas and views about European public life which currently prevail.

Moreover, conflicts of a religious nature occurring in the European region usually obscure political and social causes which must be handled as such, before they acquire a religious tinge or become an excuse for nationalistic conflicts.

Additionally, the conference by and large succeeded in its efforts:

-To record concerns growing in Central Europe about religions, Christianity, national identity, the European constitution, and the public role of European religions

-To record the thinking developing in Eastern Europe on the issue of Orthodoxy, other religions, national consciousness, the relationship between Orthodoxy and nationhood, cultural relations with Western and Central Europe etc. In other words, to allow members of the I.A.O. to keep up with the thinking which is emerging at the level of parliamentarians, churches and researchers all over Europe, concerning multi-cultural societies and multiple identities, and also to present their own thinking on the topic.

-To combine by osmosis the I.A.O.'s thinking with the concerns expressed by other European politicians, who have experienced different religious and cultural traditions, from various regions of Europe and the world.

-To discover and record the views of major political parties of the European Parliament on the issues of "identities".

-To promote to the whole European environment the existence of the I.A.O. as a political organization whose aim, among much else, is to contribute positively to the more general thinking on the problems of multi-culturalism.

-To inform European politicians and researchers that the I.A.O., through the activities it has undertaken and motions it has passed, has contributed to the more general thinking on the future of Europe, and constitutes an organized expression of culture and the understanding of the cultural dimensions of religions.

An initiative of this kind shows the I.A.O. to be a force which is actively contributing to the formation of a Europe based on the synthesis and osmosis of different cultural reference points, and, in the end, is contributing to European integration.

The conference was positive in its appraisal of the text "The spiritual and cultural dimension of Europe" drawn up by a working group on the initiative of the president of the European Commission, Mr. Romano Prodi, and praised this initiative. It also noted that the I.A.O. agrees with most of the concerns expressed in the text, and with most of its proposals as well.

However, the I.A.O. feels obliged to note that:

- These findings, as well as the suggestions of the text, are, in the end, the views of large parts of the European population. The fact that, in order for them to be expressed and recorded, the president of the European Commission was required to undertake a special initiative- an initiative which was doubtless taken under the pressure of specific circumstances and which functioned outside the structures and procedures of the EU- may be indicative of the modus operandi of the European Union bodies and the regulations governing their operation. It would seem that this does not always successfully guarantee the expression and recording of the views and wishes of the citizens of Europe. Critical questions concerning the future of Europe or the supports on which this must rest, should be put to European citizens independently, through direct procedures (e.g. universal referendums), rather than the response being conjectured through the processes of political parties or organizations.

- Since 1993, the year of its foundation, the INTERPARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY ON ORTHODOXY has made a number of similar conclusions and remarks, which unfortunately have not received the attention they deserved by European Union agencies.

Finally, the International Secretariat of the INTERPARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY ON ORTHODOXY feels obliged to thank the EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT and the EUROPEAN COMMISSION for their cooperation in the conference.