



## HISTORY

**The Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (I.A.O.) is an interparliamentary body, set up upon the initiative of the Hellenic Parliament.**

**Here factsheet with information concerning the character of the IAO and relevant data: the philosophy, objectives, its rules and the turning point of the organization.**

### Background of the I.A.O.

The fundamental basis of the I.A.O. is expressed in the Manifesto of Participants of the Conference convened by the Hellenic Parliament in Halkidiki, Greece, on the subject: 'Orthodoxy in the New European Reality'. According to this, Orthodoxy in its social, historical and spiritual sense constitutes a common historical cultural tradition and religious expression for approximately half of the population of Europe.

In a context of historical changes in progress throughout Europe (the fall of the communist regimes in Central Eastern Europe, the Maastricht Treaty in Western Europe) personalities from Europe, who participated in the 1993 Conference held by the Hellenic Parliament, detected the need for the presence of Orthodoxy, as a common cultural expression of a large number of European citizens, in the shaping of contemporary Europe. Thus, the joint cultural reference of Orthodoxy was sought through the I.A.O., with the participation of Orthodox in faith deputies from: Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, the Federation of Russia, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovakia and Ukraine, as well as, groups of Members of Parliaments from: Australia, Asia, Africa and the U.S.A.

### Turning Point

The verification that the majority of political and social problems, the European continent is facing, are actually problems of the whole world, the need to seek interpretations and answers based on the people's common cultural tradition, the appearance of new technologies, the phenomenon of globalization of the economy, led the I.A.O. to the decision to surpass the borders of the European continent and contact parliamentarians throughout the world, Christian Orthodox in faith, with the aim of joining our common cultural aspect, that of religion, as the meeting point in the participation of structuring a contemporary complex reality.



To this end and according to article 2, paragraph b. of the Founding Act, parliamentary delegations or groups of Members of Parliaments from other European countries or respectively from non-European countries, are able to participate in the General Assembly. In the General Assembly of 2001 groups of Members of Parliament from Australia, Asia, Africa and the U.S.A. participated and was decided the European Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (E.I.A.O.) to be called from then on Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (I.A.O.).

During the I.A.O. General Assembly in Kiev, Ukraine, in June 2004, it was decided to seek ways of cooperation with the Parliamentary Union of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference Member States (P.U.I.C.).

Following correspondence exchanged between the two parliamentary organizations, a meeting was held in Athens on March 22, 2005 where a draft co-operation agreement was initiated by the Secretary General of each contracting organization.

During the period of the economic crisis, the General Assemblies of the I.A.O. have addressed topics related to the global economic crisis, and adopted relevant conclusions. In June 2009, in Belgrade, on the topic “The Global Economic Crisis and its impact on social – spiritual – cultural European tradition. The role of Orthodoxy”, in June 2011 in Paris, on the topic “Religious values in the economic crisis reality” and in June 2012 in Prague on the topic “Challenges for democracy in periods of global economic crisis”.

Following several visits and discussions, the I.A.O. signed a cooperation agreement with the Pan-African Parliament at its seat in Johannesburg, on May 19, 2011. Moreover, in Moscow, on November 8, 2011, the I.A.O. signed cooperation agreements with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Russia-Belarus Union and the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Eurasian Economic Community.

In the framework of expanding I.A.O.’s cooperation with international organizations, I.A.O. has exchanged “observer” status with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

During the June 2012 General Assembly, the I.A.O., in cooperation with the Pan-African Parliament, reached the decision to undertake the initiative for establishing a foundation under the title “Foundation for Democracy, Parliamentarism and Religious Tolerance in Africa” with one seat in Athens and a second seat in an African country.



During the 20th anniversary General Assembly in Athens, June 2013, a declaration was signed by the Presidents of the Parliament – members of the I.A.O.; during the 21st anniversary General Assembly in Moscow, June 2014, a relevant declaration was signed by Ministers of Culture of the Governments of countries whose parliaments are members of the I.A.O.

At the 4th World Conference of Speakers of Parliament members of the Interparliamentary Union in the seat of the United Nations in New York, 31 August – 2 September 2015, the I.A.O. presented its views on the refugee issue, the movement of thousands of refugees from the broader region of the Middle East towards Europe.

At the General Assembly of the Pan-African Parliament in Johannesburg, in 2015, His Beatitude Theodore II, Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, was invited and spoke to its members, while a photo exhibition by I.A.O. was also presented on the subject “Easter in Christian East”.

The works of the 23rd General Assembly of the I.A.O. in Thessaloniki (4 – 8 July 2016) were officially opened by the Speakers of Parliament of Greece and the State Duma of the Russian Federation, Mr. Nikolaos Voutsis and Mr. Sergey Naryshkin. In parallel, in the context of the celebrations for the Year of Greece in Russia and the Year of Russia in Greece 2016, as well as the millennial presence of Russian monks on Mount Athos (1016-2016), they inaugurated a photo exhibition on the subject: “Athos. The Holy Mountain” in the Museum of Byzantine Culture of the city.

The exhibition with subject: «Athos. The Holy Mountain» held at the European Parliament in Brussels, in October 2016.

The I.A.O. in collaboration with the Lebanese Parliament organized an international conference with subject: «Unity in Diversity and Fundamental Freedoms for Christians and Muslims in the Middle East: A Conference for Parliamentary Dialogue» in Beirut, 2 – 5 April 2018. [The adopted Declaration text, is available at the I.A.O. website.](#) At the same time, the exhibition «Virgin Mariam. Icons from Her Holy Garden. Mount Athos» was presented in the «Beit Beirut» Museum.

The 25th anniversary General Assembly of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (I.A.O.) with subject: «Parliamentary Democracy and Christian Values: 25 years of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy» was held in Athens from 26 to 27 of June 2018. In parallel, an exhibition of the 63 works of contemporary hagiographers, who participated in a relative I.A.O. contest with subject: “The Resurrection of Jesus Christ” was presented at the Byzantine Museum of Athens. [The Declaration of the 25th anniversary General Assembly is available at the I.A.O. website.](#)



A delegation of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (I.A.O.) headed by the I.A.O. Secretary General Dr. Andreas Michailidis visited Tehran and held a meeting with the new Secretary General of the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation of member states (P.U.I.C.), Mr. Mouhamed Khouraiichi Niass.

The regular Meeting of the I.A.O. International Secretariat and the Committee Chairpersons and Rapporteurs (I.A.O.), held in Cairo from 15 to 18 November, as well as meetings with the two Orthodox Patriarches, with the purpose of expressing the I.A.O. support to Christian Populations in the Middle East. Additionally, a pilgrimage visit held to the Saint Catherine's Holy Monastery in the Mount Sinai.

Meetings have been realised between the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (I.A.O.) and the International Catholic Legislators Network (ICLN) examining the perspective of a future cooperation.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the I.A.O. and the Parliamentary Assembly for the Mediterranean (PAM) during the 13th PAM General Assembly in Belgrade on 21st February 2019. [The MoU is available at the I.A.O. website.](#)

The I.A.O. is currently in collaboration with a group of experts of the Presidency of the Republic of Lebanon aiming to establish an Observatory of Religious Persecutions.

Regarding the establishment of an Institution for the long presence of Christians in the broader region of the Middle East, the I.A.O. has met the initial positive response of the Administration of the Neapolis University of Paphos, Cyprus for the establishment of the Institution to be carried out by the University.

The I.A.O. has initiated a communication to explore possibilities and prospects for a future collaboration between the I.A.O. and the Baltic Assembly.