



Athens, 21 October 2021

Meetings of the I.A.O. Secretary General with European Presidents of Parliaments

O The Secretary General of the Interparliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy (I.A.O.) Dr. Maximos Charakopoulos, on the sidelines of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament in Athens, October 21 - 22, 2021, held meetings with Speakers of Parliaments of Armenia, Finland, Poland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Slovenia, accompanied by the I.A.O. Advisor Dr. Kostas Mygdalis.

During these meetings, the I.A.O. Secretary General was briefed about the situation of Orthodoxy and the current parliamentary developments in these countries, while he had the opportunity to present the scheduled activities of the Organization, mainly with regard to the issue on the protection of threatened cultural heritage sites of the Orthodox, following the conversion of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul and the Monastery of Chora into mosques. In this framework, he expressed his desire to hold events related to the presentation of the Volume "Hagia Sophia in the World" and the photographic material that resulted from the relevant International Photo I.A.O. contest. He also suggested the organization of joint events, scheduled by the I.A.O. for the year 2025, during which the Easter for all Christians is jointly celebrated, as well as the 1700th anniversary since the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.

During the meeting with the **President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia Mr. Alen Simonyan** the Armenian MPs Mr. Sisak Gabrielyan, Mr. Gevorg Papoyan and Mr. Vahagn Aleksanyan participated as well. The head of the international institution discussed with the President of the Armenian Parliament the coordination of joint activities. It was agreed that the 29th I.A.O. General Assembly will be hosted in Yerevan, Armenia "as a vote of confidence in one of our founding members with long-standing Christian presence in Eurasia, despite the persecution and genocide it suffered". The Secretary General stressed the following: "The constant relationship we, as an international institution, have built with Armenia allows us to jointly set the values and principles of the Orthodox Christian tradition at the core of our parliamentary action. "We are very pleased that one of our members has been appointed President to the Parliament of our friend country and we look forward to work closely with you."



An extensive reference was made to the necessity to protect Christian monuments, which are being threatened, either by destruction due to war or by changing their status by converting them into mosques, as Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. The head of the I.A.O. recalled the statement the spring 2020 International Secretariat adopted, on the Protection of Christian Monuments in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

In addition, they discussed the organization of events related to the year 2025, and in that context the President of the Armenian Parliament stressed that "it is an honor for Armenia - the first Christian Nation - to host activities that promote the Orthodox Christian Tradition." And suggested that the events should begin in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan.

The I.A.O. delegation also met with the **Speaker of the Parliament of Finland, Ms. Anu Vehviläinen** and discussed the potential of progressing the institutional contact and relations and the prospect of appointing a formal parliamentary delegation to the international institution. The Speaker stressed the importance of the national parliaments dealing with religious issues and pledged to earnestly examine the possibility of appointing a delegation to the I.A.O.

The I.A.O. delegation had the opportunity to meet with the **Marshal of the Sejm (Poland) Ms. Elżbieta Witek**. The two sides agreed to highlight fruitful ways for the rebirth of Christian values in Europe. The two Parliamentary leaders shared their common concern about the persecution of Christians in the wider region of Middle East and around the world and expressed their desire to put the issue at the top of the agenda. The I.A.O. for its part proposed to organize in Warsaw in 2022, where the Orthodox Cathedral is dedicated to the Wisdom of God, the presentation of the Volume of Hagia Sophia, as well as to hold events for the year 2025.

"Orthodoxy has a deep impression on the Balkans, which for centuries experienced the Ottoman occupation. For years, it was considered the tinderbox of Europe. Today, everyone is looking forward to the European course of the Western Balkans for development, prosperity, peace and security in the region. That is why I believe that those of our neighbors who are not yet members of the EU should also have a say in the great dialogue on the "Future of Europe" launched by the Union institutions. "The I.A.O. offers this contribution floor to the dialogue, to the institutional representatives of non-EU European countries as well, having as a vision a Europe bridging the Atlantic to the Urals." The I.A.O. Secretary General, following the meetings with the **Speakers of the Parliaments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Denis Zvizdić, of Montenegro, Mr. Aleksa Bečić, and of Slovenia, Mr. Igor Zorčič**, stated the aforementioned.



In the meeting with the **Speaker of the House of Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mr. Denis Zvizdić**, the I.A.O. Secretary General noted that "Bosnia and Herzegovina is a positive example of peaceful coexistence of peoples with different religions and we would like a more active collaboration". The Speaker of the Bosnian Parliament stated that despite the multinational and multi-religious profile of his country, the different religious communities have coexisted peacefully for 6 centuries. He also expressed his full support to the I.A.O. activities and was committed to explore the possibility of holding an International Secretariat Meeting of the Organization in his country in the near future.

Addressing the **President of the Parliament of Montenegro Mr. Aleksa Bečić**, the I.A.O. Secretary General stressed the need to enhance relations between Montenegro, as he said "a country with a deep impression of Orthodoxy" and the international institution, which "acquires a more substantial status through the appointment of an official and permanent representation to our Organization". The President of the Parliament welcomed the I.A.O. initiatives and praised the important work aimed at promoting Christian values, but also the mutual understanding of peoples, especially in countries with a strong multinational and multi-religious character, and promised to make every effort to participate more actively to the Organization.

Finally, at the meeting with the **President of the National Assembly of Slovenia Mr. Igor Zorčič**, the I.A.O. Secretary General stressed the importance of establishing institutional conduct and relations between the National Assembly of Slovenia and the I.A.O., "which will be a lasting reminder of the Christian roots of Europe ". He also suggested the organization of joint events, scheduled by the I.A.O. for the year 2025.