



Milan, 26-29 March 2022

Meeting of the I.A.O. International Secretariat and Committee Chairpersons and Rapporteurs

The spring meeting of the International Secretariat and Committee Chairpersons and Rapporteurs of the Interparliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy (I.A.O.) was held at the Teca Brera in Milan on March 26th-29th, 2022. The meeting of the International Secretariat was attended by members of Parliaments from Armenia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Jordan, North Macedonia, Moldova, Poland and Syria, while the members of the delegations from the Russian State Duma, Belarus and Serbia participated online.

During the works the discussion focused on the on-going war in Ukraine and the vast majority of parliamentary delegations condemned the invasion of one state on the territory of another and the hostilities between orthodox peoples from two member parliaments of the I.A.O. The deputies exchanged views and underlined their commitment to make every effort to consolidate peace, as well as to provide good offices to the engaged parties.

The I.A.O. Secretary General, Dr. Maximos Charakopoulos in his concluding position on the situation in Ukraine underlined *“as the I.A.O. we are against the prevalence of the doctrine that the law of force is superior to the force of international law. We have proved this many times in the past. For example, in our positions on peace in Syria... on Turkey's position for both the arbitrary conversion of Christian churches and especially Hagia Sophia, into mosques, as well as the policy pursued in the Cyprus issue. We have proved it in the past with the NATO war against Serbia. These anti-war positions and in favor of the rule of law and the territorial integrity of all states, are positions of principle, which we continue to defend to this day without exception. If we did not do that, we would be unreliable, and we would undermine the international prestige of the I.A.O., which we managed to highlight in the past years with great effort and with such consistency.*

For all the aforementioned reasons, I believe that we have rightly condemned war as a means of resolving problems between states. We rightly called for an immediate cessation of hostilities in Ukraine, the withdrawal of Russian troops from the territory of Ukraine. We support the conclusion of an agreement that will lay the foundations of a lasting peace, based on the rules of international law and respect for state sovereignty and the territorial integrity of each state”.

Moreover, the Secretary General presented the overview of the past activities, as well as the programming of the future initiatives of the I.A.O., while the delegates agreed to hold the 29th General Assembly in Yerevan, Armenia at the end of June, according to the proposal by the Speaker of the Armenian Parliament, Mr. Alen Simonyan.



Presentation of the Italian edition of the Volume on Hagia Sophia Churches

On the side of the works of the International Secretariat, the presentation of the Italian edition of the Volume: "Hagia Sophia: The Churches of the wisdom of God around the world" took place at the Galleria Meravigli, in the presence of the Under-Secretary to the Presidency of the Council of Italy, Mr. Bruno Tabacci, who, in fact, warmly welcomed the initiative of the I.A.O. In his speech, the I.A.O. Secretary General noted, inter-alia: *"Our arrival in Milan is related to a cultural project, the publication of a significant volume including the Italian language. In this book of exceptional quality, both in terms of aesthetics, as well as of scientific validity, -for which we are grateful to the Greek Parliament for the exceptional printing- 37 emblematic churches dedicated to the Holy Wisdom of God are presented. These Churches cover a huge imaginary axis that starts from Britain, passes through Europe, and reaches the ends of Asia. The center of this axis is none other than the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (Constantinople), a Church of incomparable beauty and deep spirituality. A Church built by the emperor Justinian, in 537, during the time period the East and the West were last met, including Milan, within the great Roman Empire"*.

The Under-Secretary to the Presidency of the Council of Italy, Mr. Bruno Tabacci noted the dynamic nature of the I.A.O., which is not limited to a forum of Orthodox parliamentarians from different states, but promotes culture, understanding and unity among peoples of different beliefs and perceptions. He also stressed the importance of the Church of the Wisdom of God for the Christian world, which he described as a *"religious monument of world heritage and radiance, unique in its time. Hagia Sophia constitutes a source of inspiration for the whole civilized world"*.

Apart from the Secretary General, the President of the Institute of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies of Venice, Mr. Vassilis Koukoussas, spoke extensively about the volume, praising the dual-purpose initiative: *"Firstly, it describes the greatness of a unique Byzantine monument, which unites not only the Orthodox, but also the whole Christian world. The Church, which is dedicated to the Wisdom of God, Christ, greatly influenced the Christian faith, art, education and culture. The second purpose is to inform about the great sadness caused by its conversion into a mosque, although since 1934 it operated as a museum, while in 1985 it became a UNESCO World Heritage Monument. The church of Hagia Sophia belongs to the whole world and can in no case be the object of political exploitation and religious fanaticism."*

The participants were welcomed by the President of the Greek Community of Milan, Mrs. Sofia Zafeiropoulou, while the event was coordinated by the I.A.O. Advisor Dr. Kostas Mygdalis. The event was honored by the presence of the Metropolitan Polycarpus of Italy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Orthodox MPs from various countries, the Honorary Consul of Greece in Milan Mr. Nikolaos Sakkaris, the representative of the Armenian Apostolic Church Fr. Tirayr Hakobyan, the representative of Greece at the NATO Headquarters of Italy, General Stergios Kazakis, the President of the Federation of Greek Communities and Societies Mr. Dimitrios Fessas, the I.A.O. Advisor Mr. Alexandr Fomenko, representatives of the academic community and Italian citizens.



Meeting with the Catholic Archbishop of Milan

During his stay in Milan, the I.A.O. Secretary General, accompanied by members of the Armenian and Jordanian delegations, the Advisor Dr. Kostas Mygdalis and the Liaison between the I.A.O. and the Catholic Institutions Mr. Virgilio Avato visited the church of the Catholic Archbishop of Milan Mario Delphini. The meeting was attended by Vicar Bishop Luca Bressan as well. Dr. Maximos Charakopoulos briefed the high-ranking clergyman of the catholic church - the Diocese of Milan is the largest diocese of the catholic church - on the international public awareness campaign for the conversion of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (Constantinople) into a mosque and offered to the Archbishop a copy of the Volume in Italian language.

Visit to the Holy Monastery of Bose

An I.A.O. delegation visited the Monastic Community of Bose, known for its contribution to building closer relations among the Christian denominations of the East and the West, by organizing conferences and meetings, honored with the presence of as many Catholics as well as Orthodox, mainly by His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. The head of the International Institution thanked the Priore Fr. Sabino Chialà for the cordial reception and offered him the volume with the 37 emblematic churches dedicated to the Wisdom of God. Among other things, he stated that *"in the Orthodox Christian tradition, monasticism and monastic life have a fundamental value in the life of the Church. It is not accidental that the Monastic State of Mount Athos in Greece in its glory and respect of the faithful and researchers throughout the centuries"*.

Doxology

Finally, during its stay in Milan, on Sunday of the Lent, the I.A.O. leadership participated in the doxology for the Greek anniversary of March 25 - a day that coincides with the celebration of the Annunciation of the Theotokos- in the presence of H.E. Metropolitan Polykarpos of Italy in the Church of the Akathistos Hymn (Santa Maria Podone).