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VATICAN AIDE WELCOMES NEWS OF PAN-ORTHODOX COUNCIL

Stresses Importance of Vitality of Orthodox Church

VATICAN CITY, JUNE 3, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The forthcoming preparation of a Pan-Orthodox Council is a reason for joy, says a subsecretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Msgr. Eleuterio Fortino, who follows relations with the Orthodox Churches for the pontifical council, said this to the SIR news agency of the Italian bishops' conference after Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople announced the preparation of a council that will include all of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

"We decided to facilitate the process of convening the holy and great Council of all Orthodox Churches," said the patriarch in an interview with Vesti 24 TV, which was recorded on Sunday in St. Petersburg, Russia.

The announcement is the crowning point of a historic visit that the patriarch made to the Orthodox patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Kirill I, a gesture that has served to overcome distances and differences of past years between both patriarchs.

Patriarch Bartholomew I referred to the council as one of the major objectives of the Church in Constantinople and stated that its outcome would "have the greatest impact on the entire Orthodox world."

According to him, the event's agenda "has been already been set up and is well-known to the Orthodox community." It covers 10 major points, including the principles of self-governance and autonomy of the Orthodox Churches, and a set of issues related to the diptych -- the order of mentioning Churches during service.

"Our Orthodox Church continuously seeks to keep up with the times, avoiding giving up anything of its teaching, but at the same time, responding to the spirit of the time, helping believers to stand up to the currents of the real world," Patriarch Bartholomew I said.

The preliminary work to convene the council was started as far back as the 1960s, although the idea had already arisen at the beginning of the 20th century.

The All-Orthodox Council is preceded by the meetings of the Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference and the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission.

The council will discuss problems that have been accumulating over several centuries, from the time of the last ecumenical council, issues that should be addressed by the entire Church.

Moving forward

Kirill I also affirmed that relations between the Russian and Constantinople Churches are moving forward.

The meeting of these two Orthodox leaders was decisive for the future convocation of the Council because, although the Patriarchate of Constantinople has a symbolic place among the Orthodox Churches, it has only 3.5 million faithful. Worldwide there are 225 million Orthodox faithful, 140 million of whom belong to the Russian Orthodox Church.

The rapprochement between Constantinople and Moscow is viewed favorably by the Catholic Church, as it will also enable progress to be made in the dialogue between Orthodox and Catholics.

Msgr. Fortino explained that a Pan-Orthodox Council "will make a decisive contribution to the communion and cooperation of the Orthodox Churches of our time."

He noted that one of the items on the table at the council will be "the question of the attitude of the Orthodox Churches toward the Christian world."

Msgr. Fortino affirmed: "As a Catholic I look with pleasure and interest at all that happens between the Churches.

"The vitality of the Orthodox Churches is important for the Church of Christ in the world. But it is also positive for the restoration between Catholics and Orthodox, also for surmounting critical or reticent fringes, present in several Churches, to ecumenical relations."