29/05/2024

The second day of the 4th International Conference of Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on Religious Freedom and Human Rights



The second day of the 4th International Conference of Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on Religious Freedom and Human Rights continues at the Zappeion, a significant and historic building used for various official and public functions, located in Athens. Attendees include Archons from around the world, along with prominent religious leaders such as His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira, His Eminence Metropolitan Athenagoras of Belgium, Grand Ecclesiarch Archimandrite Aetios, Director of the Private Patriarchal Office, and Fr. Alex Karloutso

Mr. Konstantinos Sideridis, Archon Proto Notarios, welcomed Dr. Despina Hadjivassiliou-Tsovilis, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Dr. Hadjivassiliou emphasized the importance of religious freedom as a fundamental value in European democracy. “The Europe we know today is the result of the interaction of many cultures,” she stated, addressing the impact of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

Dr. Hadjivassiliou highlighted the rise of populist and extreme ideas in Europe,

particularly concerning immigration. She argued that refugees and migrants should be supported to become active members of their new societies rather than marginalized. “Religious communities must support newcomers and facilitate their integration,” she said, adding that modern Europe is inherently multicultural.

She also touched on the plight of Armenian refugees and the need for an open society. “Our common society must be an open society,” she declared, emphasizing that Europe’s fundamental rights should unite all people.

In a subsequent Q&A session with Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou, Professor in the Program of International Studies, Dr. Hadjivassiliou commented on Turkey’s withdrawal from the “Treaty of Constantinople” concerning the persecution of women and children, expressing hope for Turkey’s re-engagement with the treaty.

Discussing Ukrainian refugees who fled in March 2022, she described them as “exhausted but hopeful” despite the “inhuman and barbaric invasion of Russia.” She also revealed that the Ecumenical Patriarch has been invited to visit the Parliamentary Assembly of Europe in January 2025.

When asked about the destruction of churches in Ukraine by Russia, Dr. Hadjivassiliou mentioned the establishment of a committee dedicated to this issue and the creation of the first disaster recording platform. This initiative aims to enhance the effectiveness of repairing damage to religious sites and churches caused by the war.

Discussing the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, particularly following the invasion of Russian troops in Ukraine, Dr. Despina Hatzivassiliou-Tsovilis remarked, “The issues with the Russian Church are well-known, especially after the Ecumenical Patriarchate granted Autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. I fear that Moscow’s propaganda will persist. We, at the Council of Europe, are continually striving to engage with Russian society and its citizens. They deserve better.”


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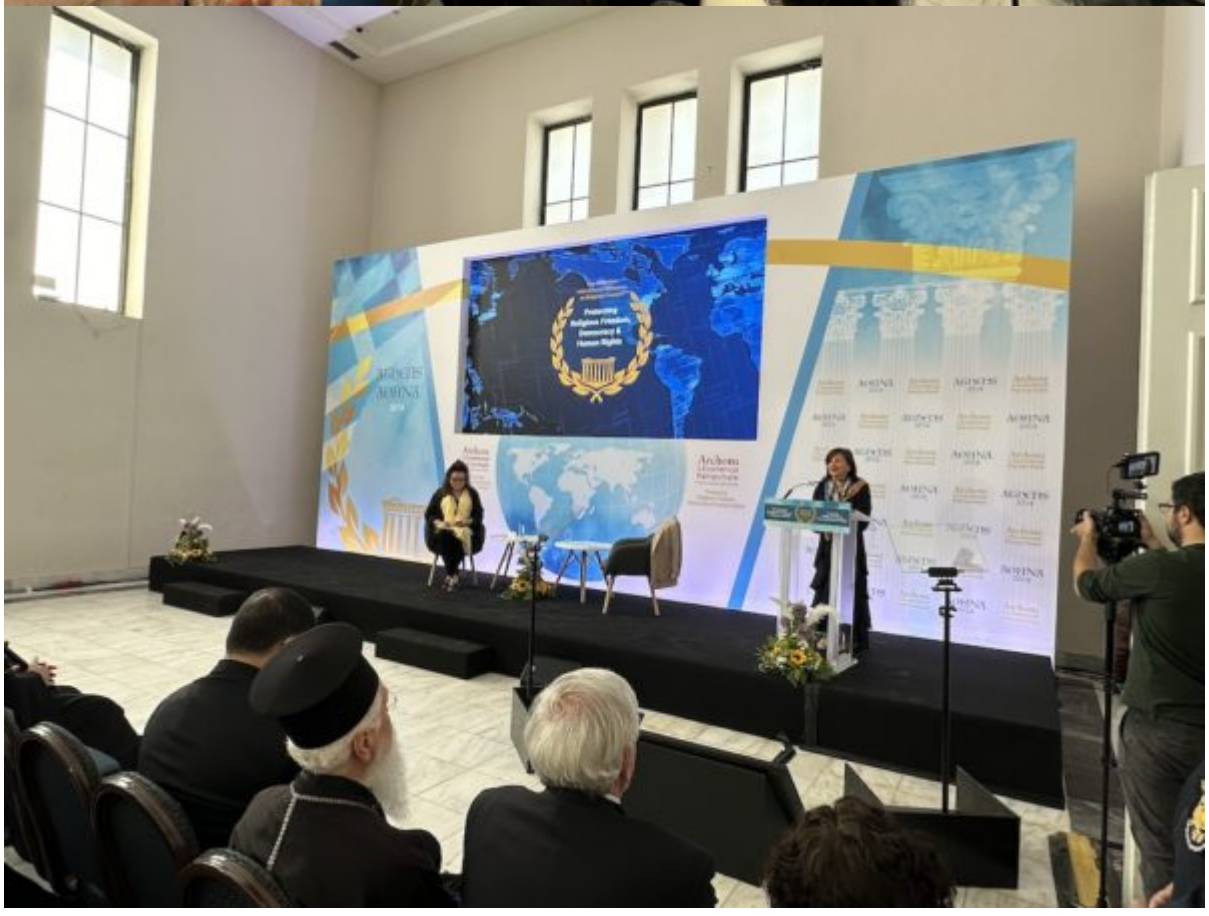

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