

## **Greek Education Minister: We will honour our promise to Archbishop Damianos**



In a significant parliamentary session, Greek Minister of Education Sophia Zacharaki addressed concerns surrounding the newly introduced bill establishing a Legal Entity under Public Law in Greece for the Greek Orthodox Royal Autonomous Monastery of Saint Catherine of Sinai. The debate unfolded amid an internal crisis within the monastic brotherhood and growing public attention on the role of Archbishop Damianos, who has served as abbot for over five decades.

During the discussion of the bill titled “Establishment of a Legal Entity under Public Law in Greece under the name: Greek Orthodox Royal Autonomous Monastery of the Holy and God-Trodden Mount Sinai, and regulations for the enhancement of security in higher education institutions and sports”—Zacharaki made a firm and public commitment: “We will remain faithful to the promise we gave to the Holy Sinai Brotherhood and to Archbishop Damianos.”

Archbishop Damianos was present in the parliamentary gallery during the session,

following the proceedings with keen interest.

Responding to the recent turmoil within the monastic community, Zacharaki stressed the government's position: "The official statement issued by His Eminence Archbishop Damianos is clear and leaves no room for doubt: he is the lawful and canonical Archbishop of Sinai and Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Sinai. From that point on, each of us must weigh our responsibilities before the 15 centuries of history this sacred institution represents."

The minister emphasised that Parliament must not interfere in internal Church affairs: "The national legislature will in no way replace ecclesiastical courts or make rulings on the legality or canonicity of internal procedures within the Holy Monastery of Sinai."

Calling for political restraint, Zacharaki urged all parties to refrain from involvement in the internal issues of the Monastery. She praised opposition leader Nikos Androulakis for pledging to honour his promise to the legitimate representatives of the Monastery, calling his statement "extremely helpful for the national effort."

"These matters belong to the Church, as they concern the core of religious freedom. They are not the government's to resolve, nor Parliament's. The only legitimate interlocutor for anyone wishing to engage with the Holy Monastery of Sinai is Archbishop Damianos of Sinai, no one else. Unless, of course, someone deliberately seeks to interfere in the internal affairs of the Monastery."

Zacharaki warned against introducing any rhetoric into Parliament that might challenge the legitimacy of the Archbishop: "It is a fundamental mistake to allow any argument that questions the legitimacy of Archbishop Damianos to circulate in this Parliament. Because if such a debate is held here, what is to stop it from being held elsewhere? Let us not open back doors—there will always be someone ready to walk through them."

She was categorical in ruling out any reconsideration of the bill: "Since we do not wish, and indeed must not, intervene in the Monastery's internal matters, we must also avoid even the slightest contribution to any narrative that delegitimises Archbishop Damianos. Therefore, withdrawal or reconsideration of this bill is out of the question. The Archbishop has publicly endorsed the agreement it enshrines."

Calling the bill a "significant, unprecedented, and historic step," Zacharaki clarified that it does not attempt to solve the legal complexities surrounding the Monastery's status in Egypt, noting: "We are not creating a second Monastery of

Sinai in Greece, nor are we interfering with the legal order of another country. The Monastery of Sinai is based in Egypt, and its legal personality is subject to Egyptian law."

However, she acknowledged the importance of the bill as part of a broader solution: "As we now all know, the Monastery of Sinai does not have legal personality in Egypt. Fulfilling that request is a crucial element of the overall resolution. It is the thread of Ariadne. It is equally clear that granting legal personality to the Monastery's representation in Greece strengthens the Greek position but only to that extent."

Source: ANA-MPA

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