19/12/2025

“Through the Cross come bearing witness and martyrdom. This is our duty. The rest lies in the hands of God.”



His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew presided at the Divine Liturgy celebrated on Thursday, 18 December, at the Holy Church of Saint Dimitrios of Sarmasikio, where the historic Holy Spring (Hagiasma) of the Great Martyr Saint Sebastian, who is commemorated on that day, is also located.

His All-Holiness expressed his joy and emotion at visiting the Community of Sarmasikio once again this year, calling it “a tradition which we established at the beginning of our humble Patriarchate, as an expression of doxology and gratitude to the Giving God for our election by divine grace on this day in the year 1973 to the Metropolis of Philadelphia.”

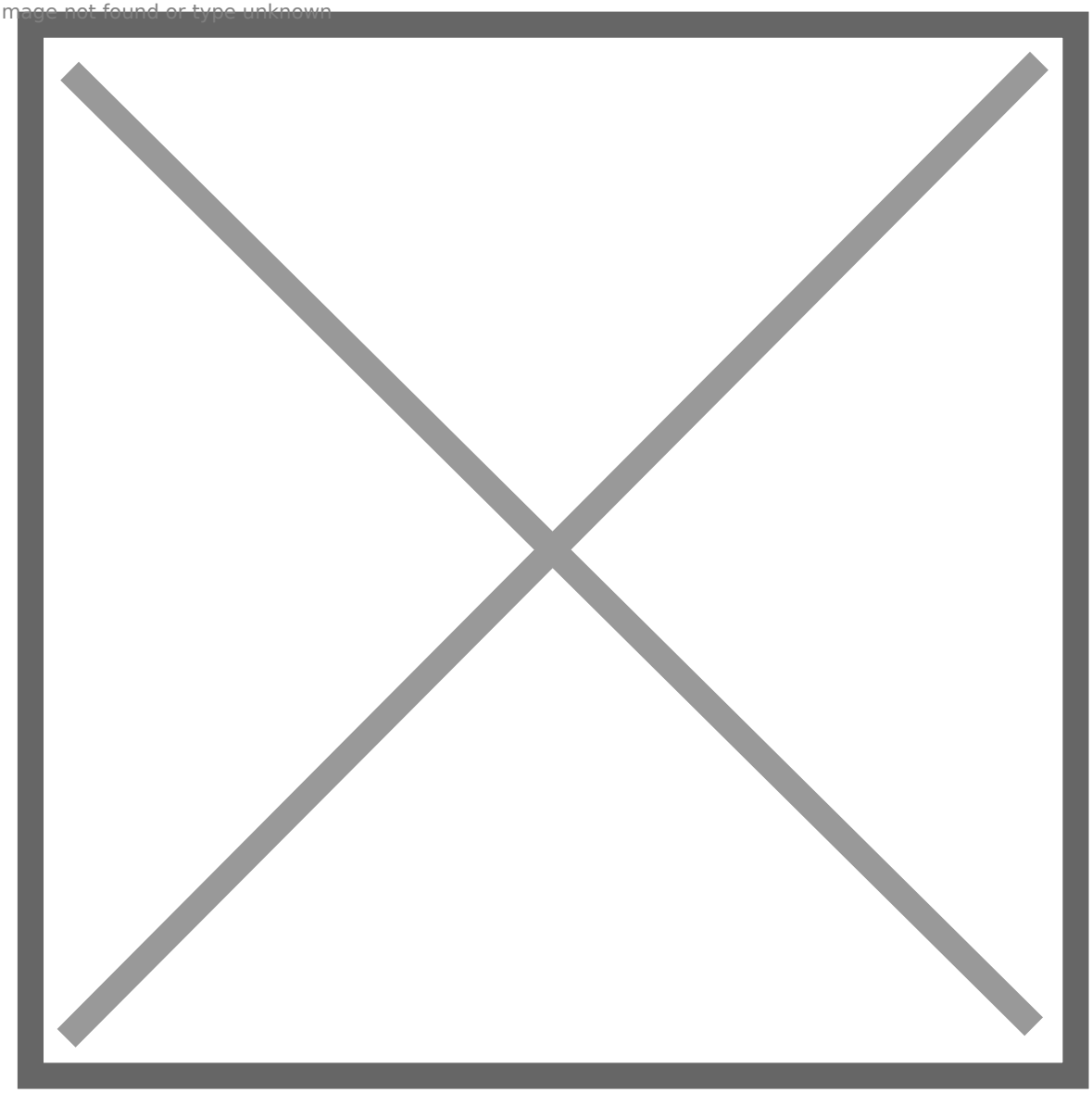
The Patriarch continued: “Each year on this day our thoughts return and relive those moments anew. We believe that every person leaves something of himself, something of his heart, in the place where he was once called to offer his services while ministering to the Church, society, and humanity. And that ‘something’ is later transformed into nostalgia, into remembrance, into a lasting and unbreakable spiritual bond, which bestows sweetness upon life. All this exists all the more so when relationships between people and institutions are honest, upright, sincere, and pure. Then mutual esteem and trust are firmly established, and the ideal or the institution which the persons serve is served more fruitfully and effectively.

This was precisely the relationship that Our Modesty built with our late predecessor, Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios, when he called us, as a young Archimandrite, to assume in July 1972 the directorship of the then newly established Private Patriarchal Office. This same relationship was renewed jointly in Synod on 18 December 1973, when Patriarch Dimitrios, in the so-called ‘Minor Message,’ together with the announcement of our election as Metropolitan of Philadelphia, expressed his deep conviction that ‘we would honour in every way the Church that honoured us, and that with greater responsibility, zeal, and diligence we would serve the Mother Church, always in humility and fidelity and obedience to

her, considering her glory as our own, unto the glory of God.’

For this reason, our response, in our address of thanks on the day of our episcopal ordination, at Christmas 1973, was: ‘At this sacred moment I give to the Church the promise that also in my new capacity I shall labour, with all my humble strength, with greater zeal than today and with the same fidelity and devotion, for her glory unto the glory of God and for the salvation of souls.’ And we continued: ‘I promise before You, Your All-Holiness, to love and honour and respect the human person as an image of God, and to serve him with joy and willingness, and, if necessary, to sacrifice myself for him. After all, Philadelphia will continually remind me that I am obliged to love my brethren.’

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Fifty-two years later, this same promise continues to stir our soul and to constitute the guiding principle of every decision of ours and, in general, of our pastoral ministry. This promise has kept us and strengthened us at the Sacred Centre of

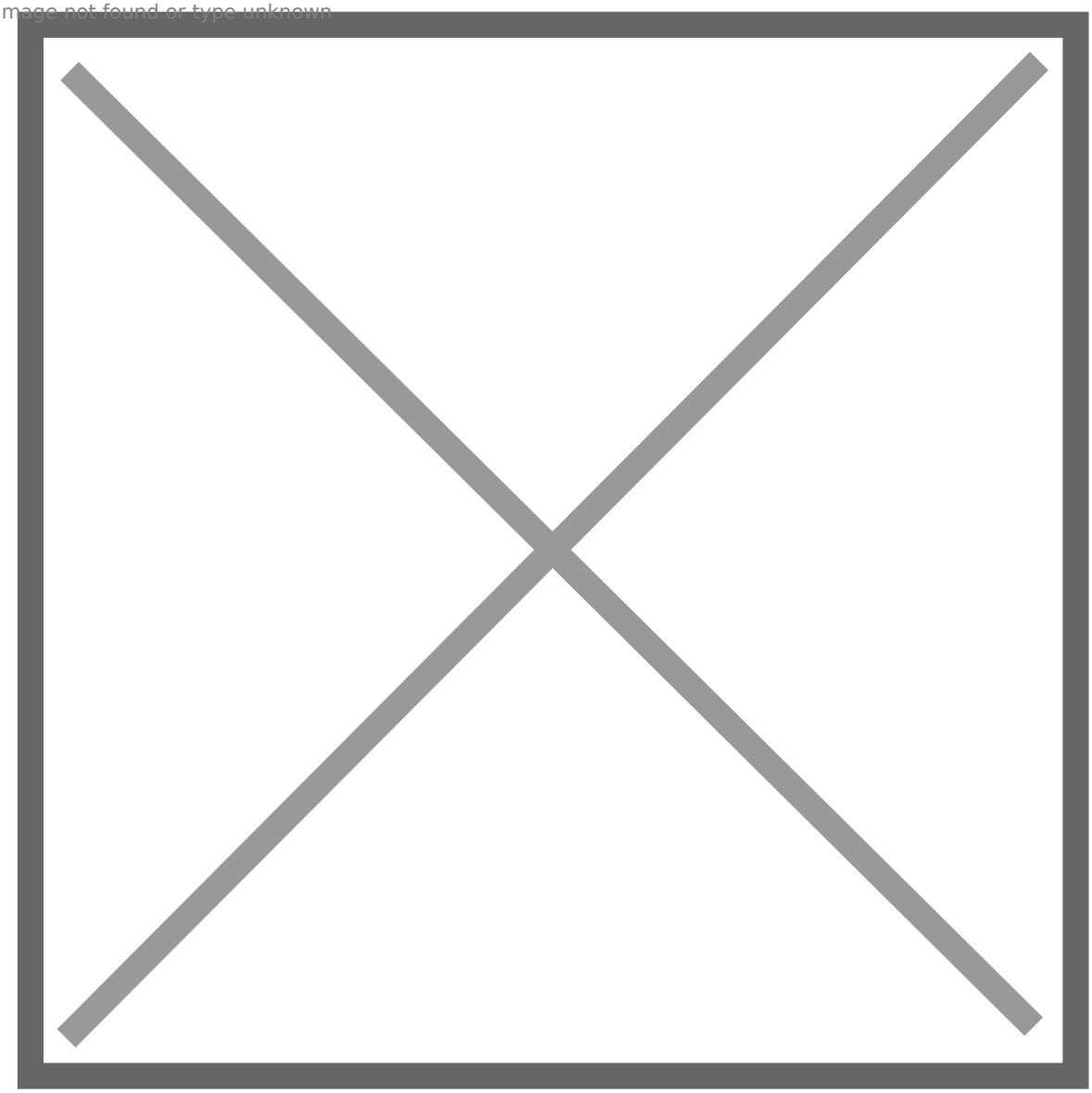
Orthodoxy all these years. And when harsh times came, once again in this promise, in our unshakable faith in God, we found refuge and support, and from it we drew patience and were strengthened. Truly, ‘great are the achievements of faith.’ With this faith as our provision, even when we find ourselves in the fire of the flame or in the threatening cold of the northern steppes, we feel as though we were beside waters of rest.

Ignoring the many crosses, pains, and tribulations of daily life, we walk the path of our destiny, not forgetting that without the Cross there is no Resurrection. Through the Cross comes the salvation of humankind. Through the Cross come life, strength, and virtue. Through the Cross come the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of humanity. Through the Cross come witness and martyrdom. This is our duty. The rest lies in the hands of God, who also writes history through us human beings, and who will not allow us to be tested beyond what we can bear.”

Referring to the recent official visit of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarch said: “The Papal visit attracted worldwide attention, and all spoke and wrote about it. Our own presence here is a simple and customary visit of a shepherd to his flock, which presents nothing extraordinary. And therefore, apparently, there is no similarity and no comparison can be made between these two visits. Yet no, there is indeed a similarity, and that is the motive of both.

A few days before his departure from Rome for Turkey, the Pope stated, and he repeated it in his response at the All-Venerable Patriarchal Church on the very day of our Thronal Feast of Saint Andrew, that as long as the Christian world remains divided, the credibility of the Gospel is diminished and the work and mission of the Church in the world are weakened. Pope Leo therefore came to us so that we might share a common spiritual vision and jointly strengthen the theological dialogue between our sister Churches. He came in order to build Christian unity and to contribute to a more effective exercise of the pastoral and missionary work of the Church for the anxious contemporary world.

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Thus, this Papal visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate also had a pastoral dimension. Likewise, our own visit to you here today, beloved children in the Lord, is purely pastoral. Our duty as shepherds of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ and the love and peace that flow from it in every direction, to those near and to those far away.

With these timely thoughts we wished to greet paternally our gathering today in the name of the Lord. Our Eucharistic Synaxis' during Patriarchal presidings in various Communities of our Most Holy Archdiocese strengthen the faith of all of us who pray together and constitute an occasion of joy and pride for us personally, for the opportunity each time afforded to us to communicate with our most beloved flock here."

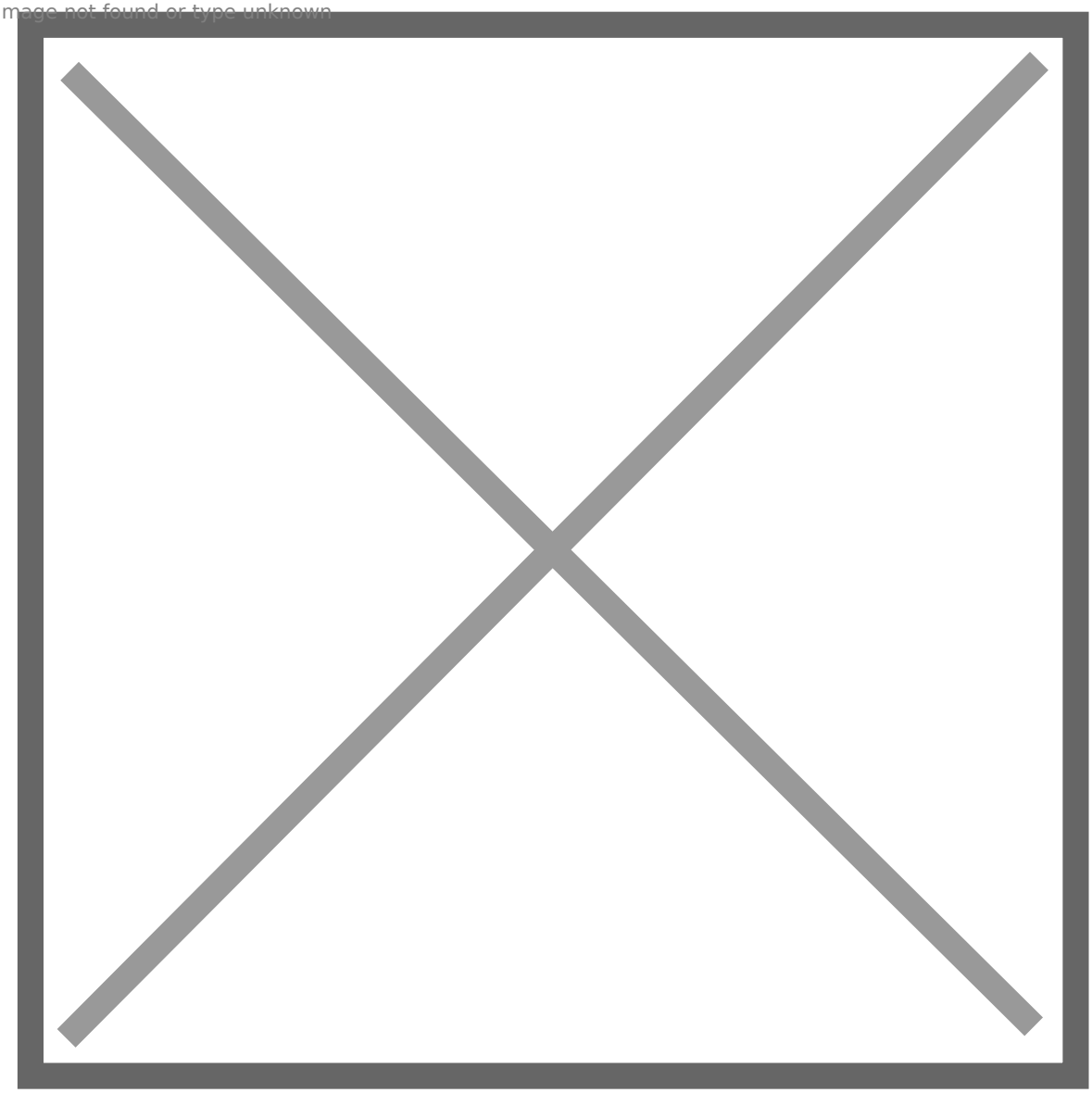
His All-Holiness expressed his Patriarchal satisfaction toward His Grace Bishop

Adrianos of Halicarnassus, Supervisor of the Phanar–Golden Horn District, as well as toward the parish priest and the Ecclesiastical Committee of the Community for the work being accomplished.

He also warmly welcomed His Eminence Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Symi and his recently ordained auxiliary Bishop, His Grace Bishop Antonios of Rodostolos, “to whom we wish a God-pleasing and fruitful episcopal ministry, for the strengthening and support of the pastoral work of this border Eparchy of the Mother Church,” as well as the delegation of the Holy Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Saint Dionysios of Olympus, led by its Abbot, Archimandrite Maximos, “who unfailingly comes every year at this festive season to receive the blessing of the Mother Church for the New Year and brings us great joy.”

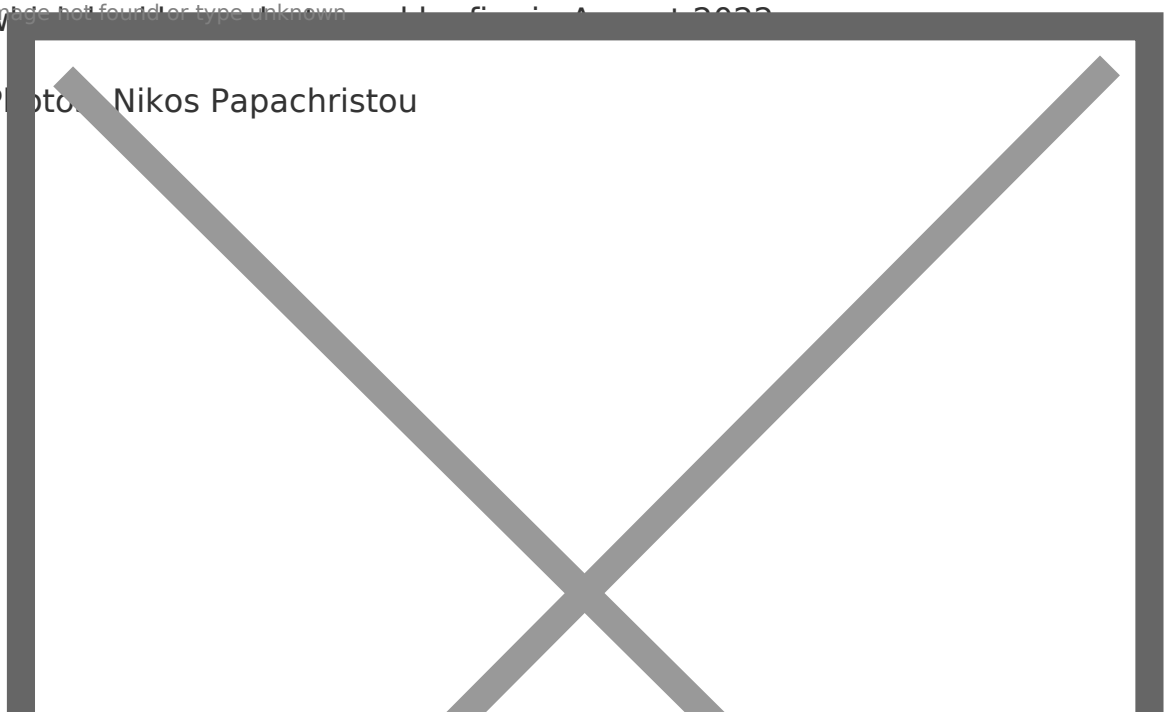
Earlier, His Grace the Bishop of Halicarnassus welcomed His All-Holiness with warm words.

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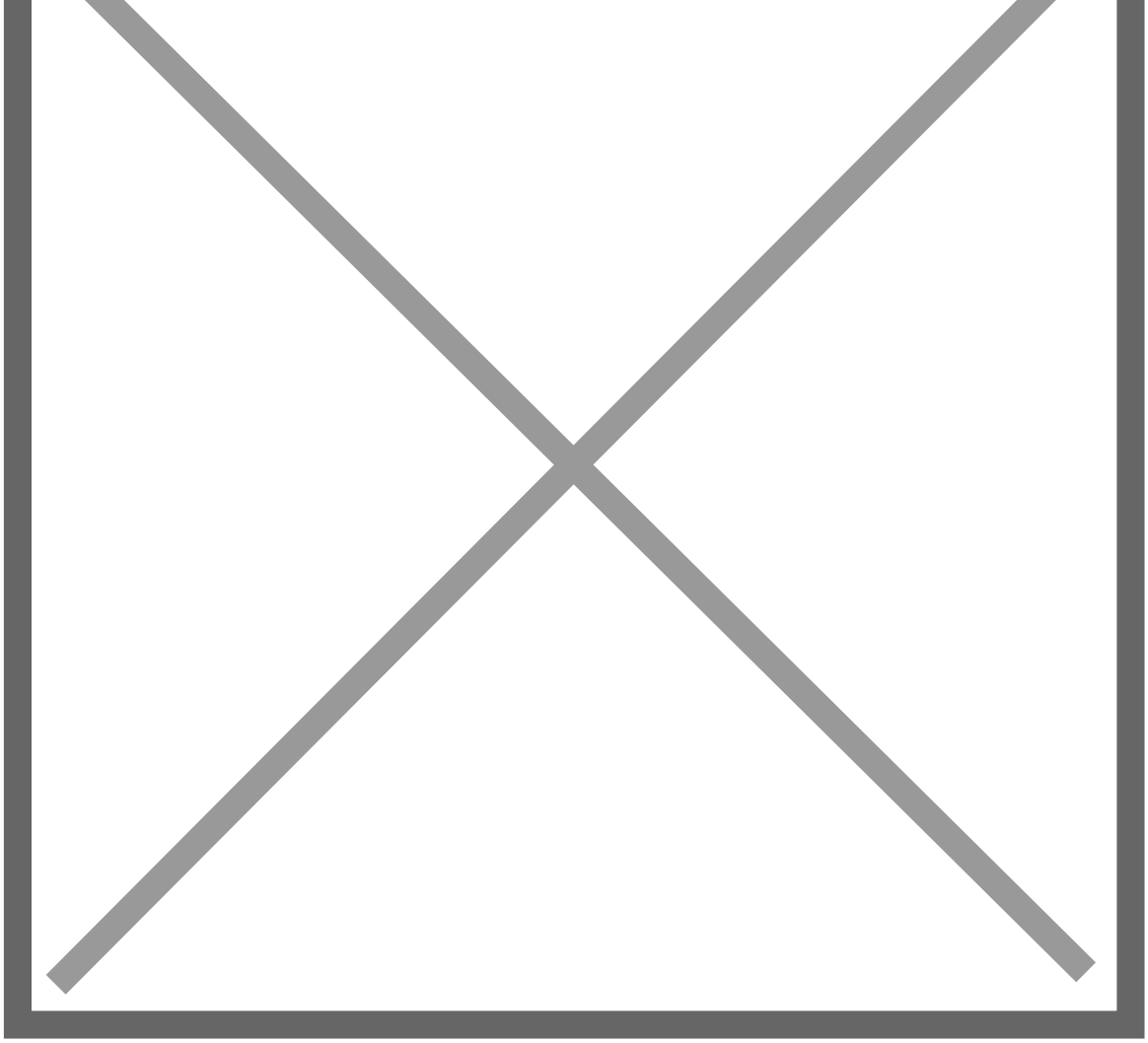


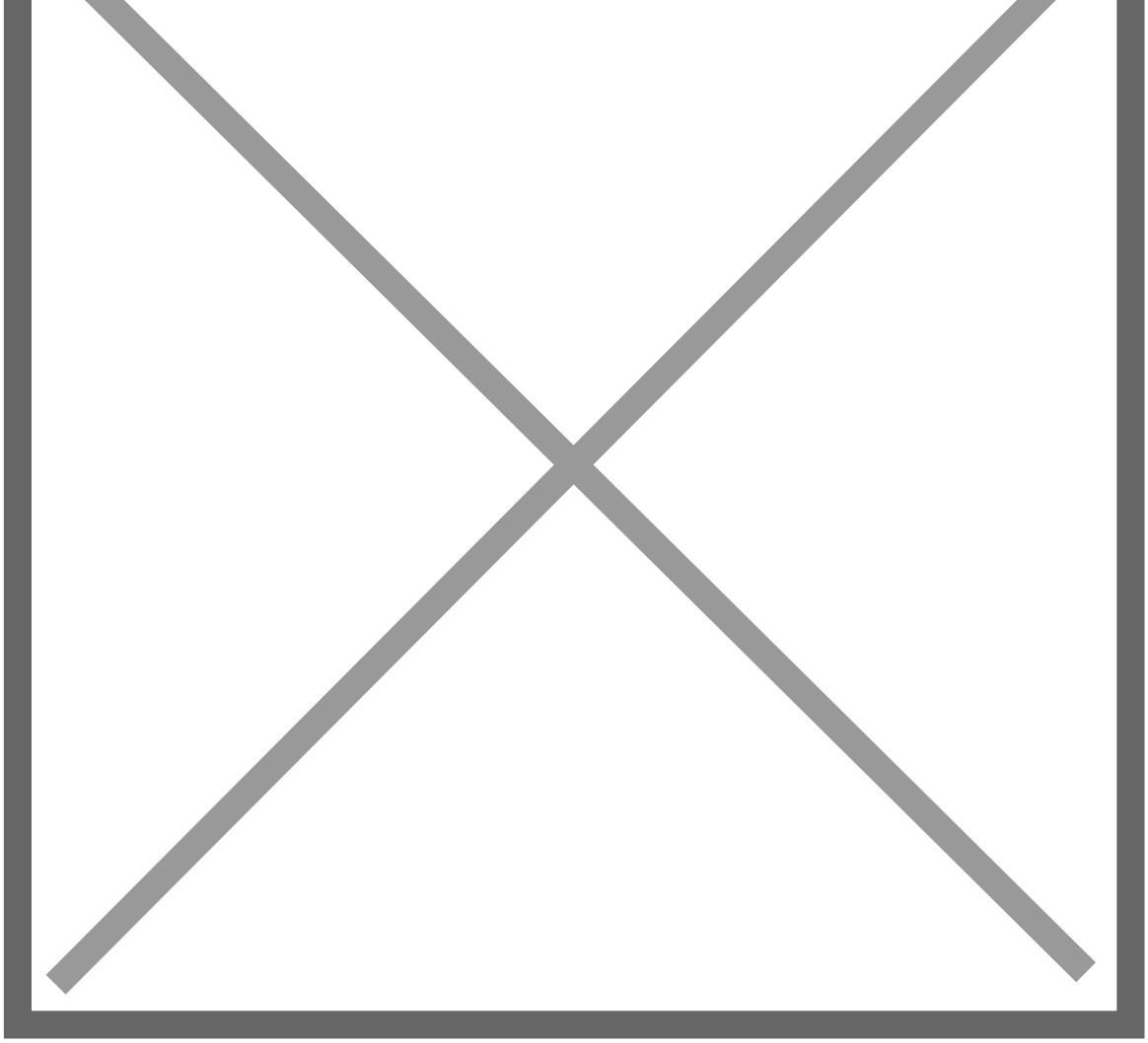
In the afternoon of the same day, the Patriarch visited the Baloukli Nursing Home, where he was informed by Mr Konstantinos Ioannidis, President of the Board of the Nursing Institution, about the completion of the restoration works of the building, w

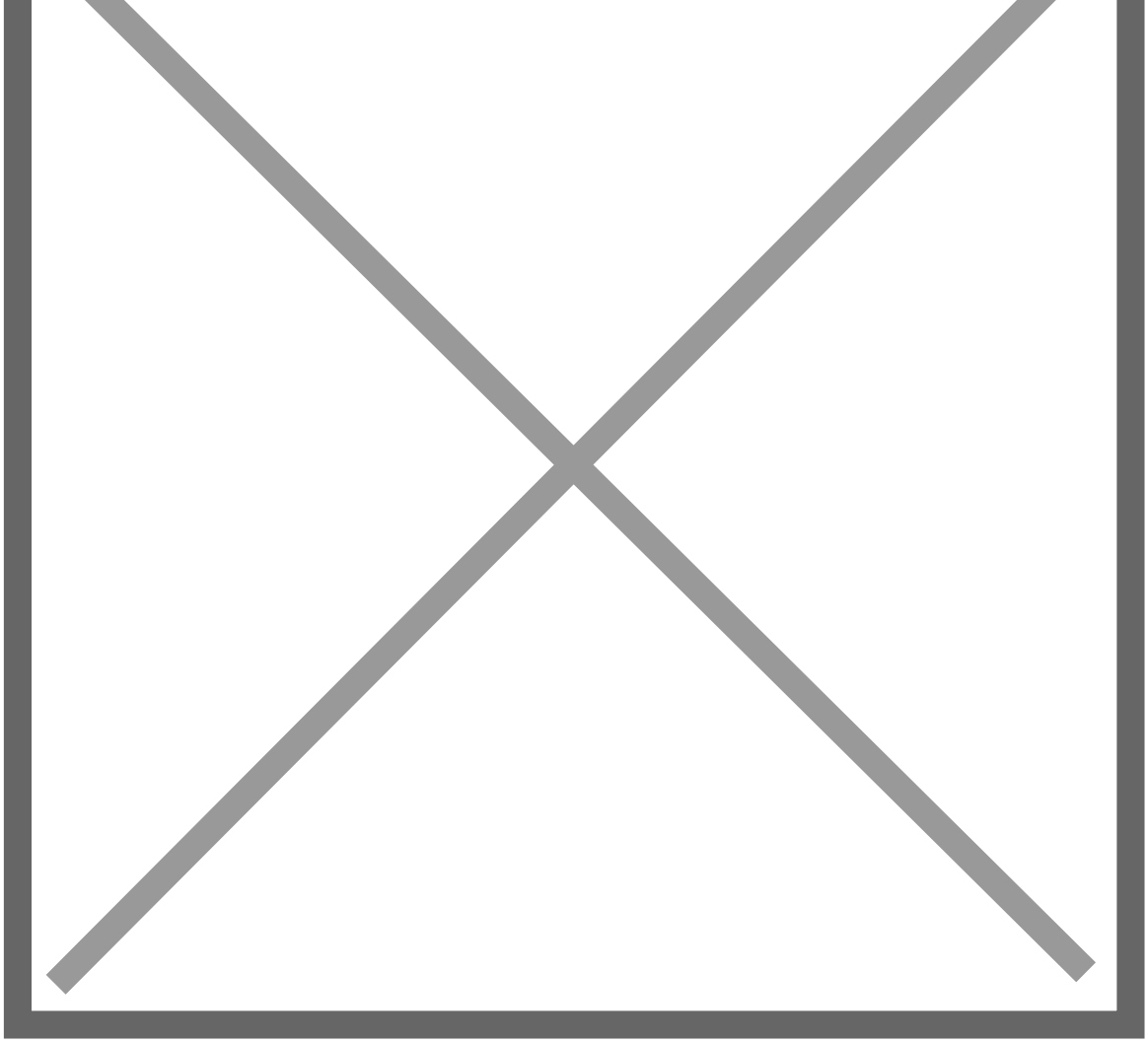
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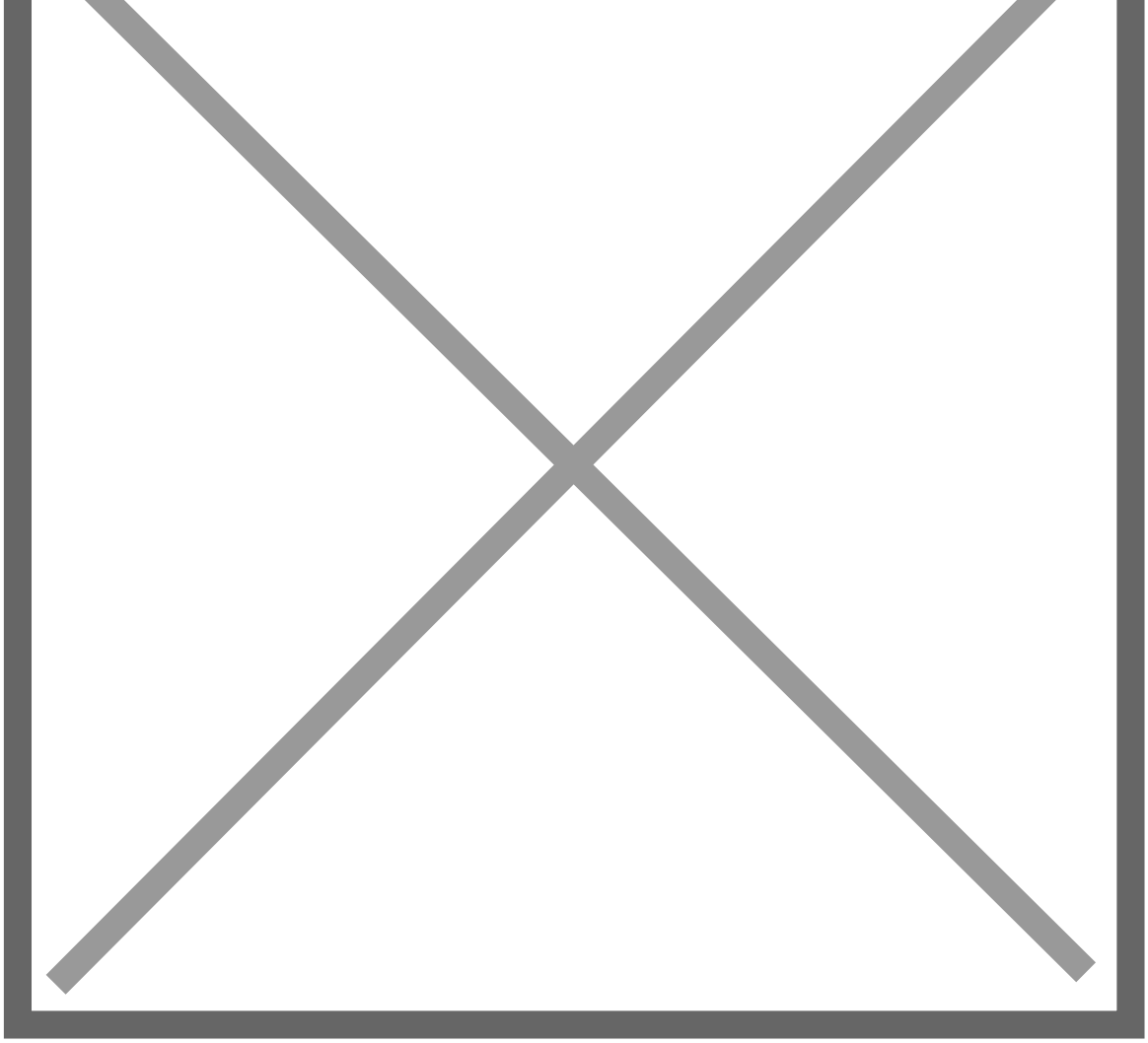


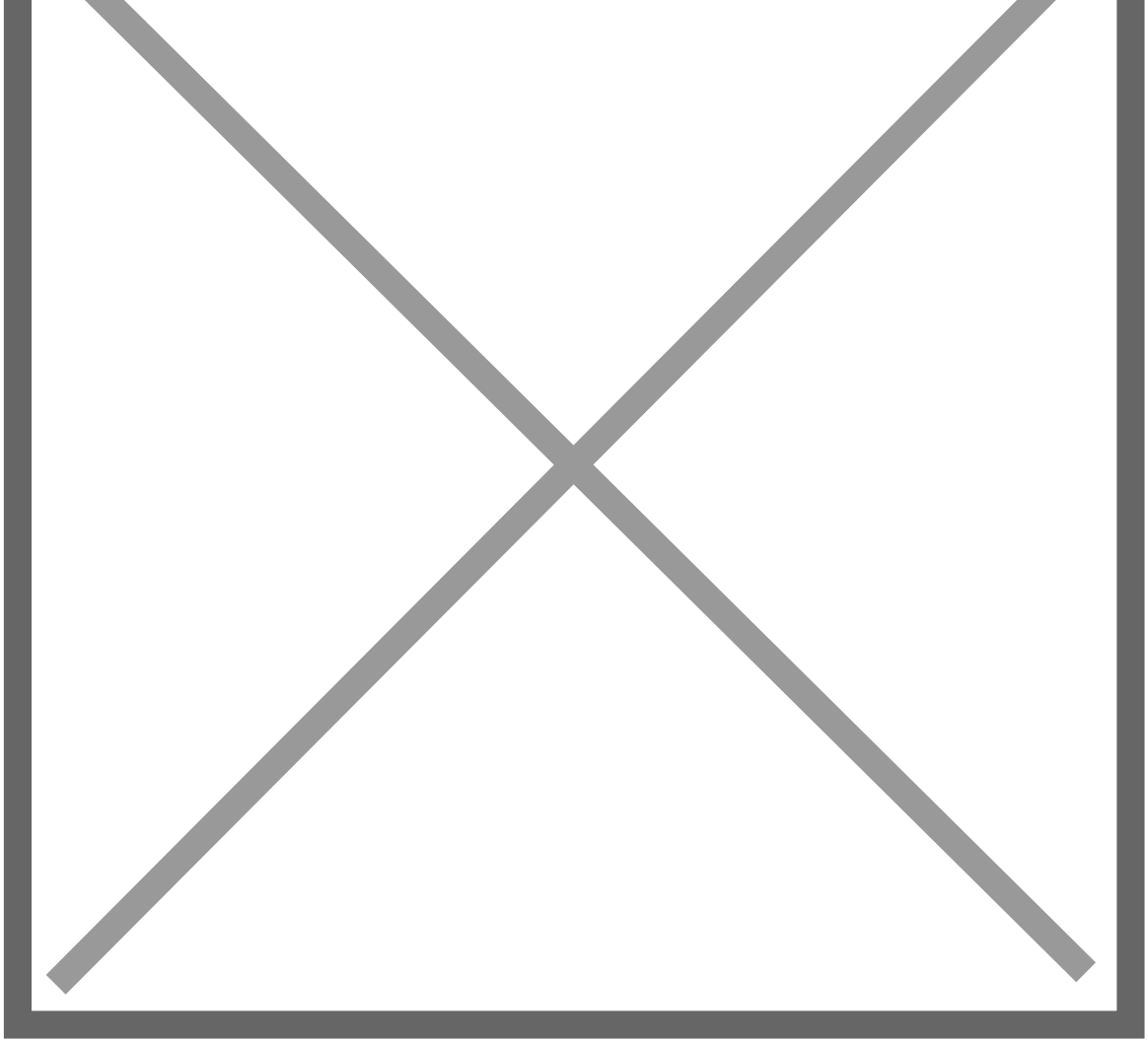
Photos: Nikos Papachristou

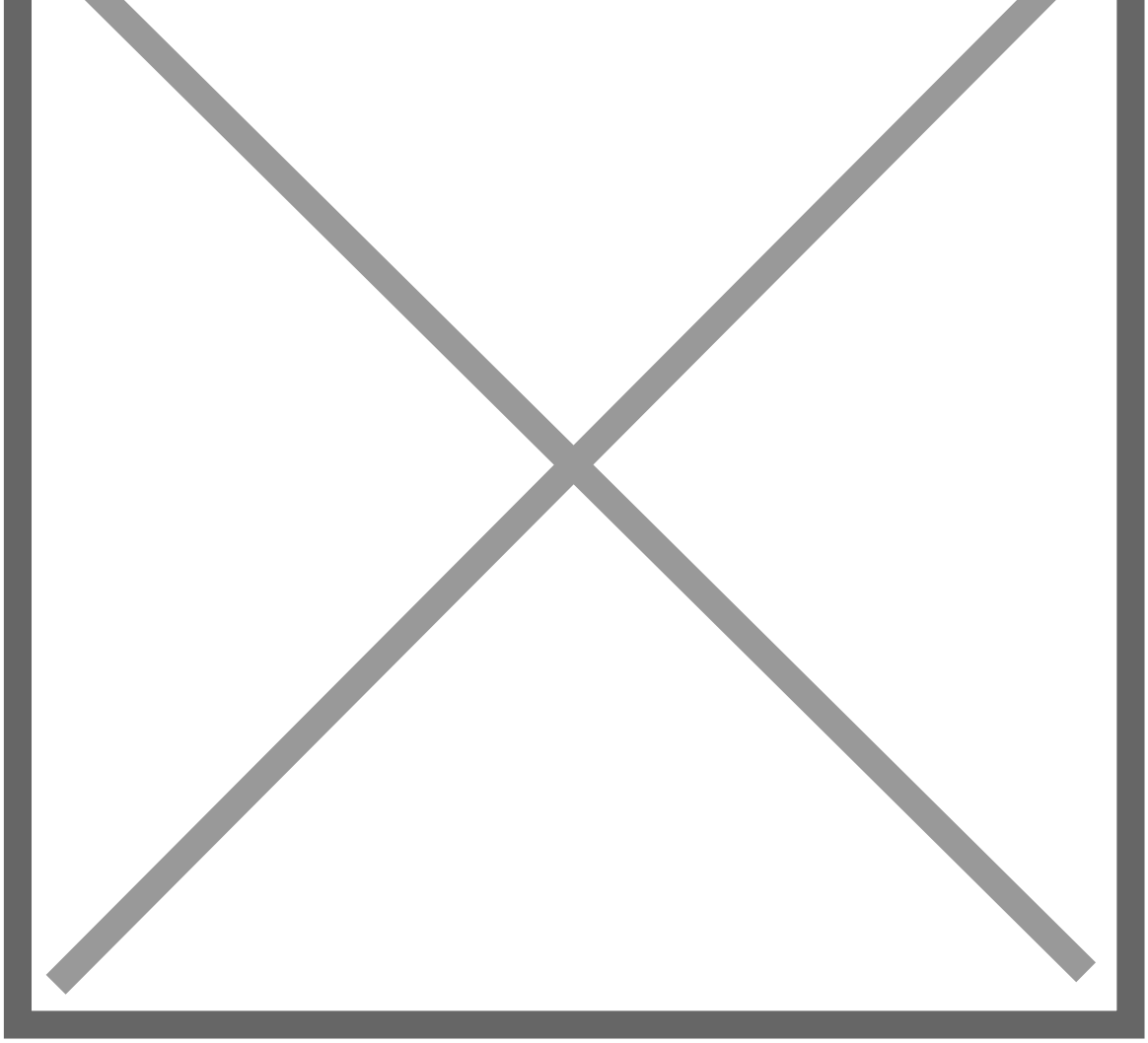


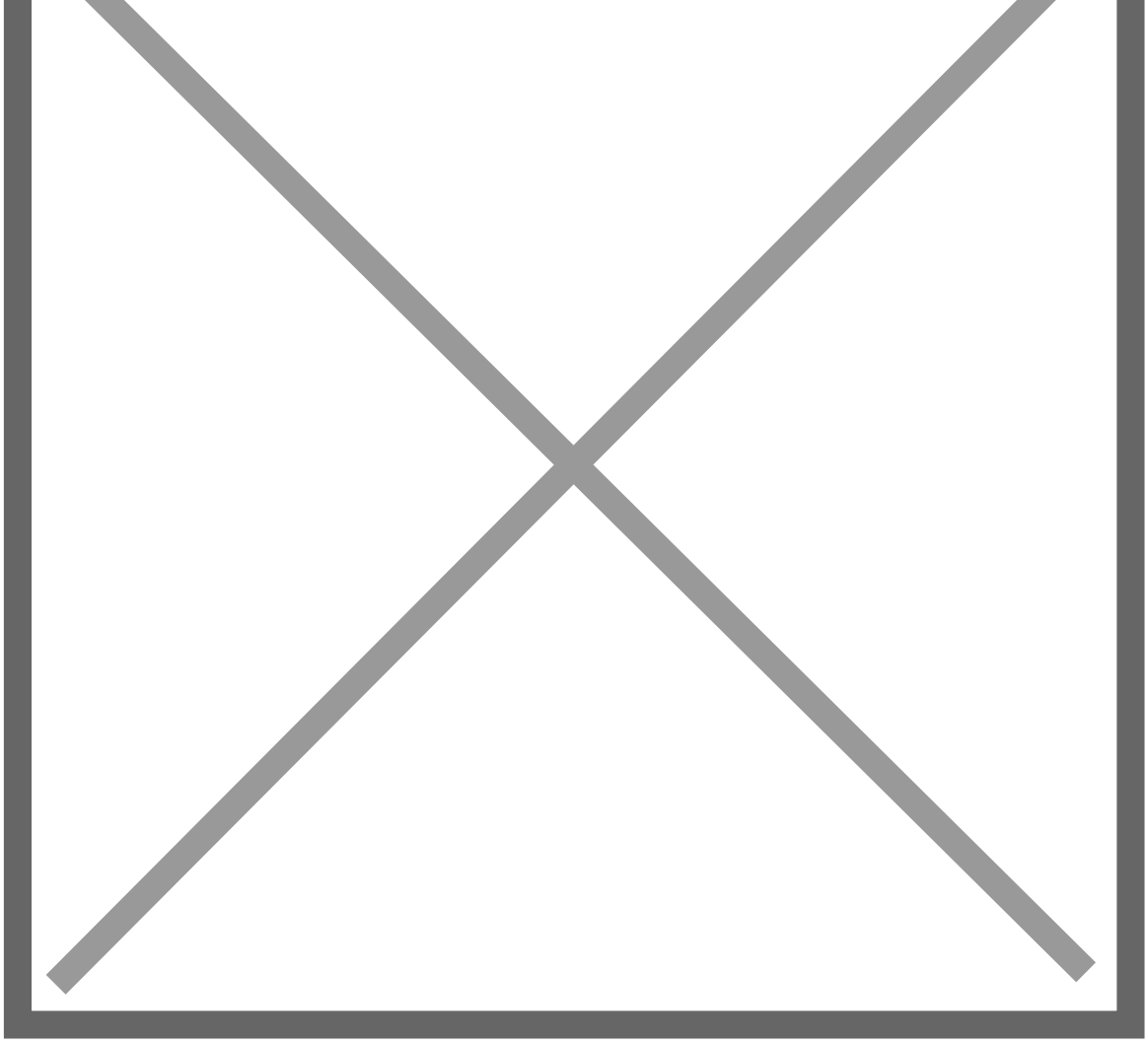


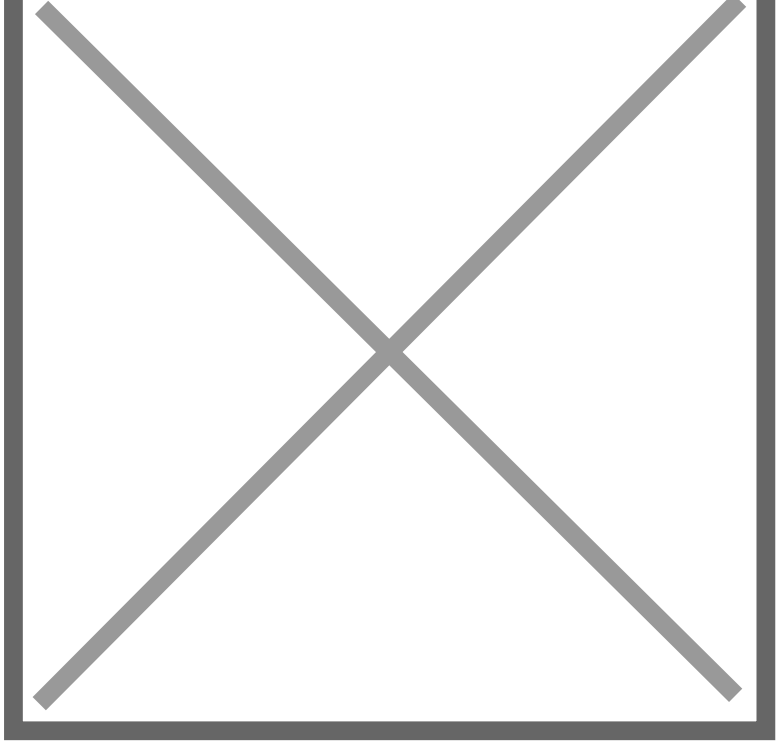


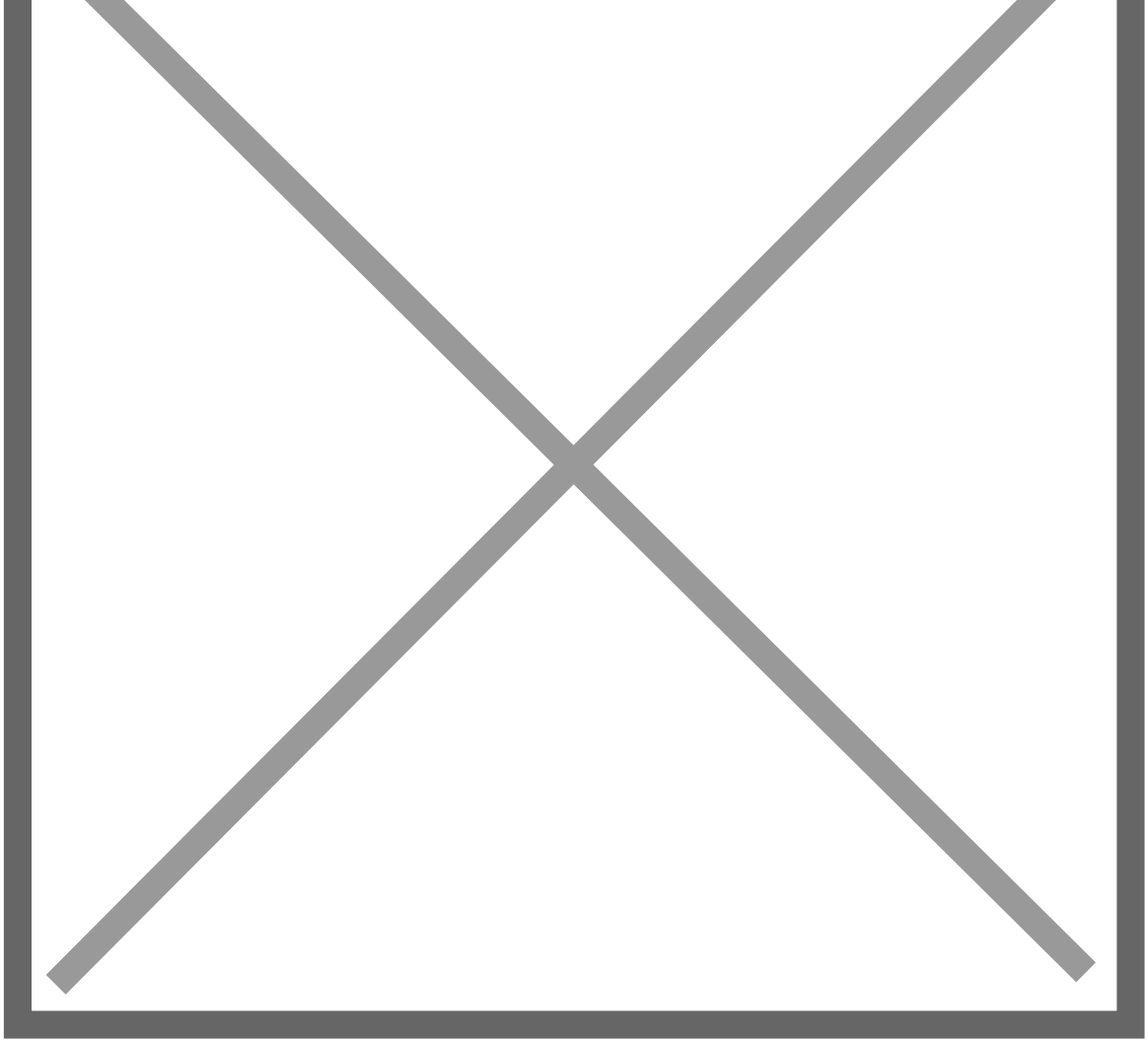


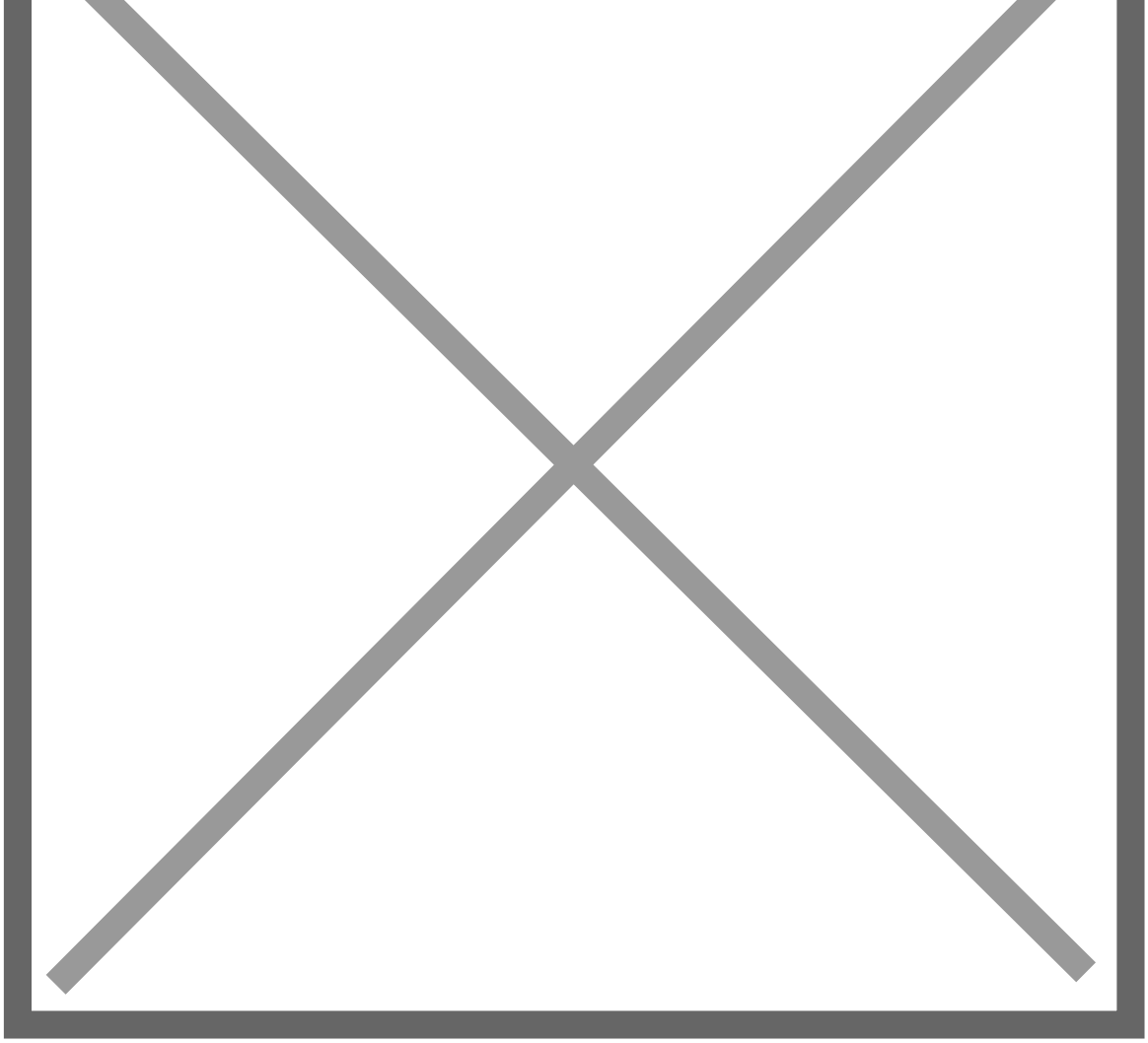












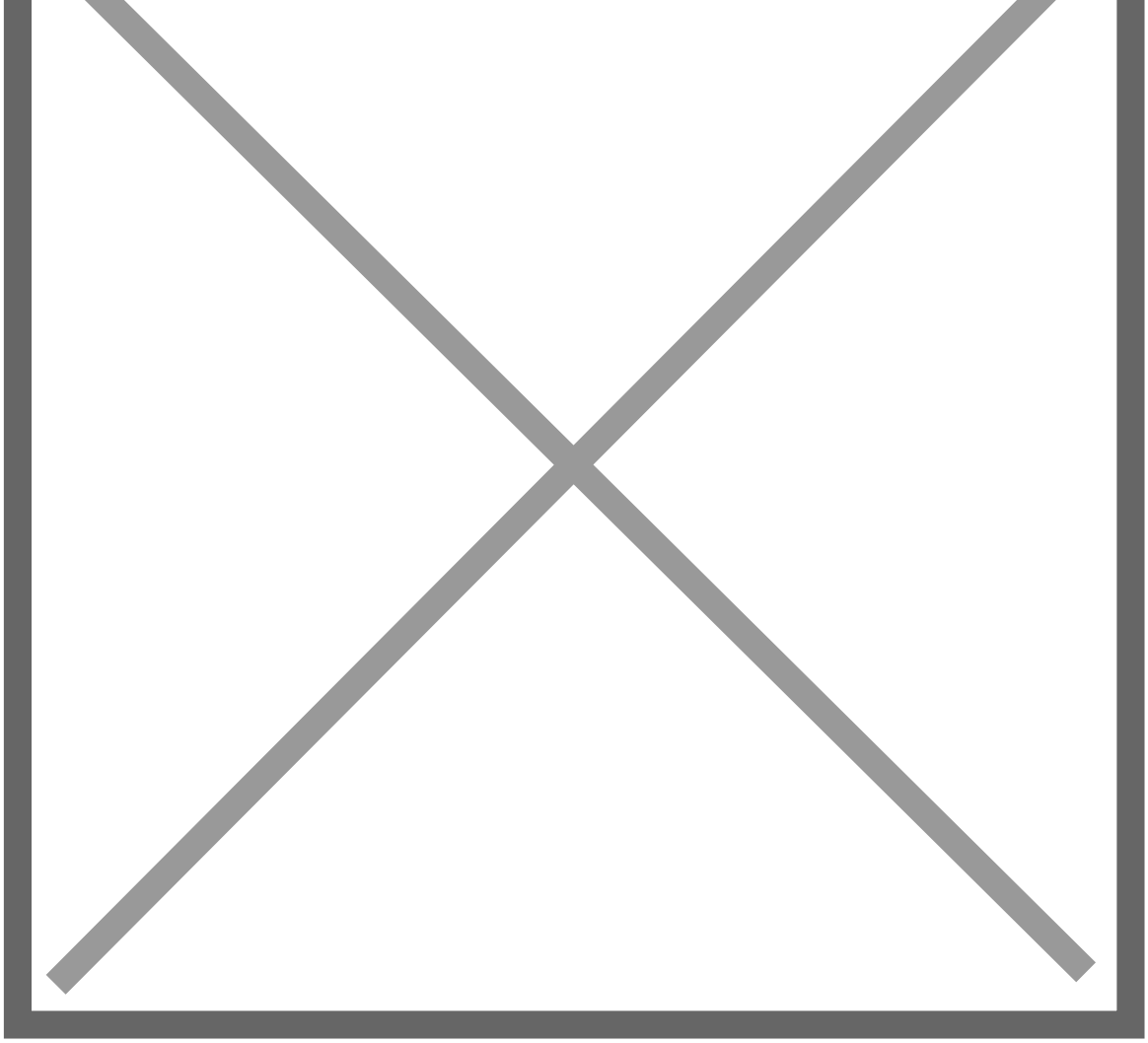
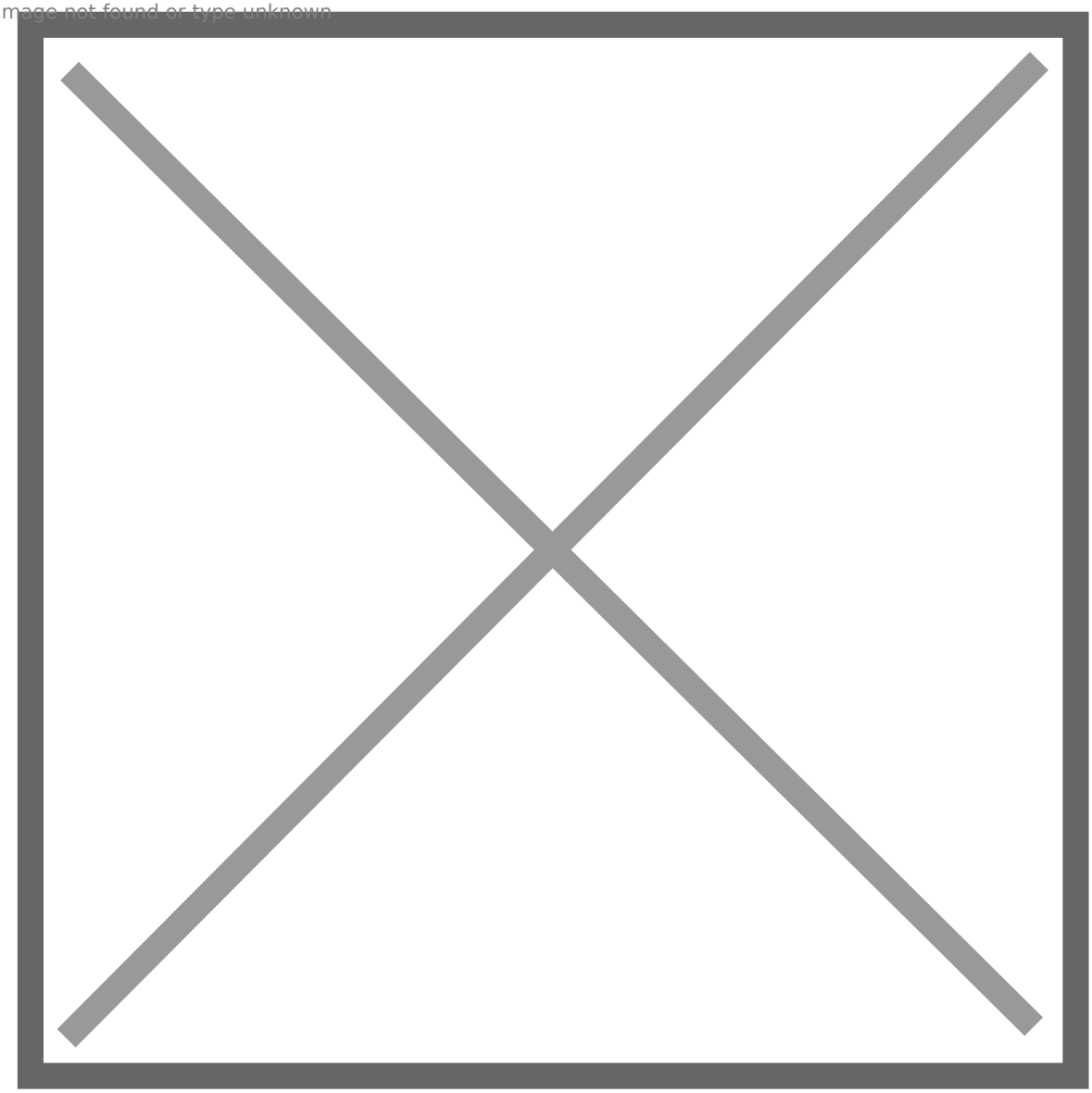


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