03/02/2026

Ecumenical Patriarch: “The Great Church is continually being emptied, humbled, and remains suspended upon the cross of debt”



On 1 February 2026, the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew presided at the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Metropolitan Cathedral Church of the Wisdom of God (Hagia Sophia) in Thessaloniki.

Present at the service were fellow Hierarchs, Archons of the Holy Great Church of Christ, Mr Nikolaos Androulakis, President of PASOK–Movement for Change and Leader of the Official Opposition; the Deputy Minister of the Interior Mr Konstantinos Gioulekas, responsible for matters of Macedonia–Thrace, Deputy Minister of Development Mr Stavros Kalafatis, Deputy Minister of Education and Religious Affairs Mr Nikolaos G. Papaiōannou; Members of Parliament; Ms Athena Athanasiadou–Aidona, Regional Governor of Central Macedonia; Mr Evangelos Venizelos, Emeritus Professor and former Deputy Prime Minister of the Hellenic Government; the Chief of the Hellenic National Defence General Staff, General Dimitrios Houpis; the Rector of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Professor Kyriakos Anastasiadis; University Professors; members of the Armed Forces and the Security Services; and a multitude of the faithful.

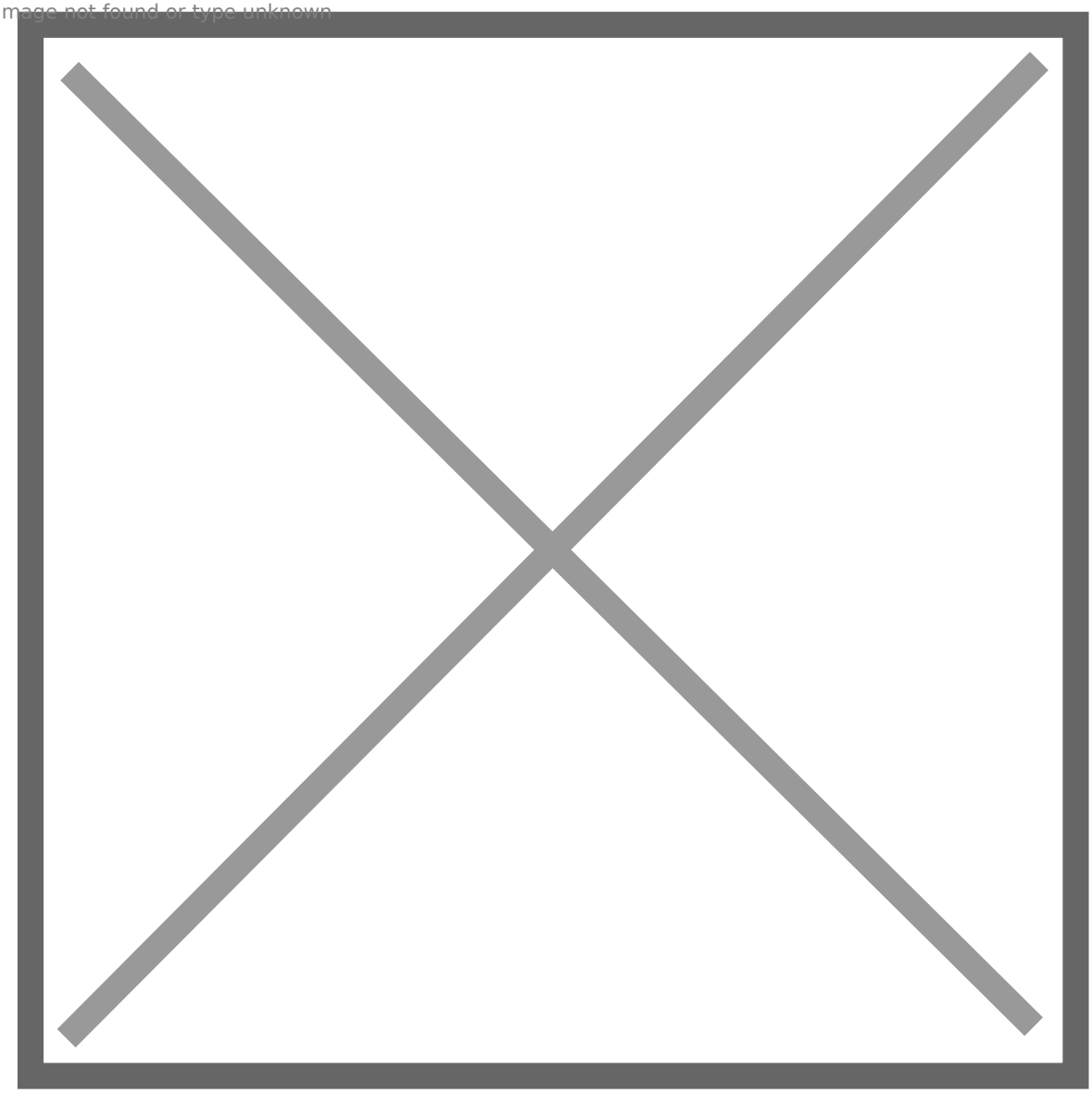
At the conclusion, the Shepherd of the local flock, His Eminence Metropolitan Philotheos of Thessaloniki, addressed His All-Holiness with warm words. In his reply, the Ecumenical Patriarch referred to the historic Cathedral Church of the co-reigning city and emphasised:

“In this sacred place, for centuries the prayer and hymnody of our Orthodox Church and the worship of the Triune God have resounded, through which the apostolicity, martyrdom, and ecumenicity of our Church are most clearly demonstrated. A Church which does not merely live from the past, but is inspired by it and bears witness to the light of Christ, which reveals the past, illumines the present and the future, and dispels darkness and gloom. This is the light of the Wisdom of God.”

The Patriarch referred to the Publican and the Pharisee and added: “Behold, the first lesson of the Holy Triodion: not only fasting, not only achievements, but humility. Fasting without repentance becomes Pharisaism. Asceticism without contrition becomes pride. Humility is Grace, it is wisdom, it is power, it is peace.

The Triodion is not a period of sorrow, but a period of return. It calls us to descend into the depth of our hearts, to see ourselves ‘face to face’. Not unto despair, but unto reconciliation, through the mercy of the almighty and philanthropic God.

Image not found or type unknown



Christ calls us to be ‘the light of the world’ and ‘the salt of the earth’. To transform our faith into a testimony of life. The great figures of the Church do not hide in the silence of history, but shine through the ages as lamps upon the lampstand.”

Elsewhere in his address, the Ecumenical Patriarch referred to the personality and contribution of Patriarch Joachim III the Magnificent, Patriarch from Thessaloniki, whose statue he unveiled immediately after the Divine Liturgy in a special ceremony in the courtyard of the Metropolitan Residence of the city. He praised the initiative of His Eminence Metropolitan Philotheos of Thessaloniki to install the statue of the great Patriarch and spoke of the witness of the Great Church:

“Your Holiness’s initiative, holy Bishop of Thessaloniki, to erect and unveil the bust of one of your predecessors and of our predecessor, gives Our Modesty the opportunity to speak before you, brethren and children, not about a statue, but

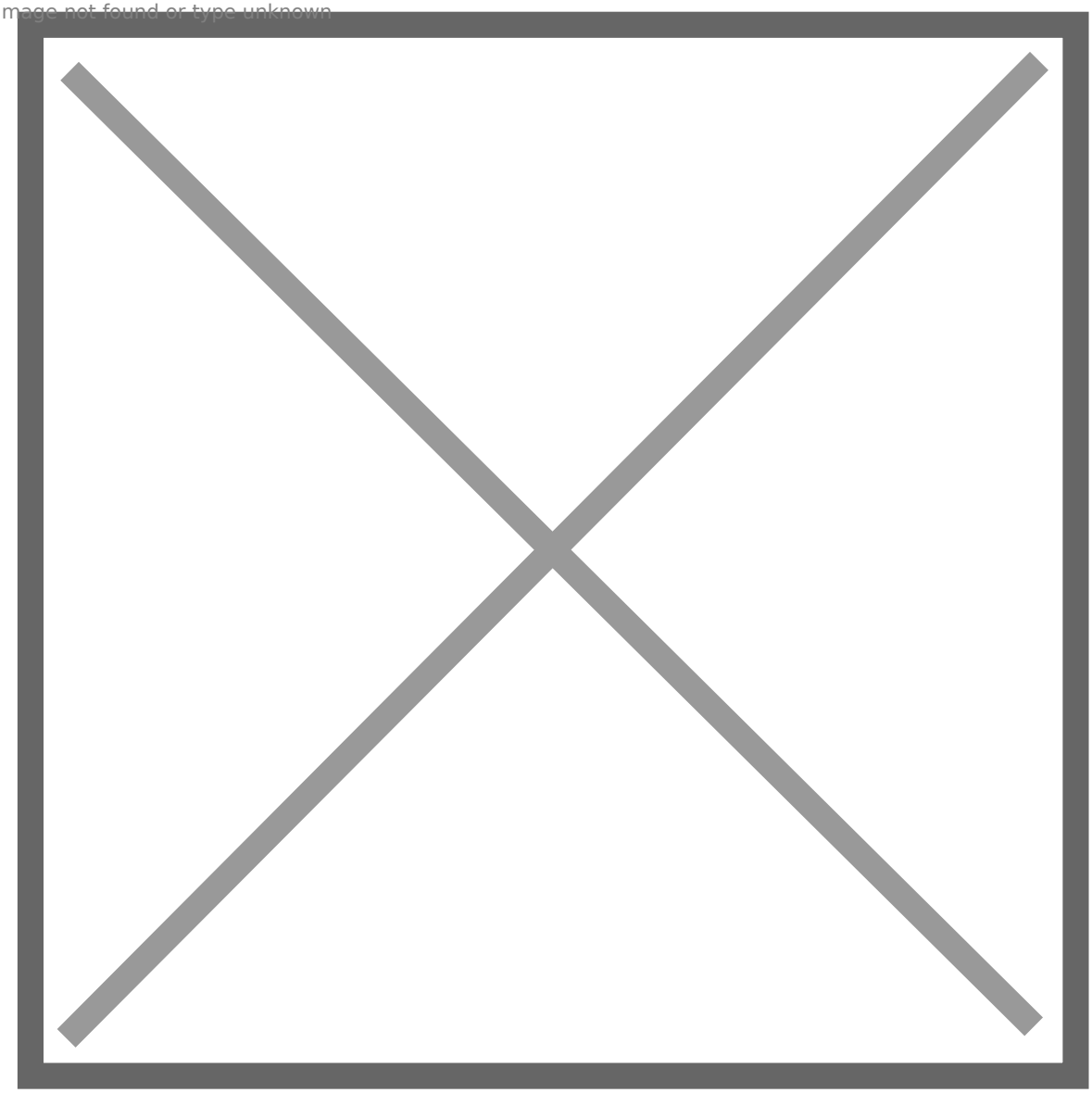
about a witness, at a moment when a new world is emerging. This witness is the civilization of the Wisdom of God, of the Great Church. The civilization of modesty and grandeur, of gentleness and serenity, which permeates and sanctifies the whole human being and the whole creation of God. Everything, through the word and the silence, the work and the ethos of our Mother Church of Constantinople, reveals the same divine-human reality.

The dissemination of the Faith by the Great Church is accomplished as preservation and transfiguration, not as conquest and enslavement of the Christianised peoples of the Slavs. When the Empire falls, the Great Church remains as the ethnarchic force of the Orthodox peoples. The imperial splendour is lost, and the blessing of trial is gained. It is a mystery how she wept, how she sang her pain, how she built her homes and her churches, how she organised education, how she struggled, how she sacrificed herself, ever bearing within her womb the modest, the great, and the true element of the Orthodox people, whose ark is the Church of Constantinople.

In today's reality, the Great Church is continually emptied, humbled, and remains suspended upon the cross of debt. And she proceeds divinely and sacredly. There appears, quite literally, the truth of another logic: the final glory of the spirit, which is identified with utmost humility; the power which is perfected in weakness. And the Mother Church understands the pain of the weak and shares in their infirmities. Her duty and the manner of its fulfillment are given. She does not belong to herself, but to a sacred mission, defined by the witness of her Patriarchs. It is divinely sacred and all-holy that the first in rank among the Orthodox Bishops be clothed in a 'scarlet mantle'."

Thereafter, His All-Holiness conducted a Trisagion for the repose of the soul of the ever-memorable Patriarch Joachim.

Image not found or type unknown



After the Dismissal, the Ecumenical Patriarch bestowed the title of Archon Referendarios of the Holy Great Church of Christ upon Mr Stelios Angeloudis, Mayor of Thessaloniki.

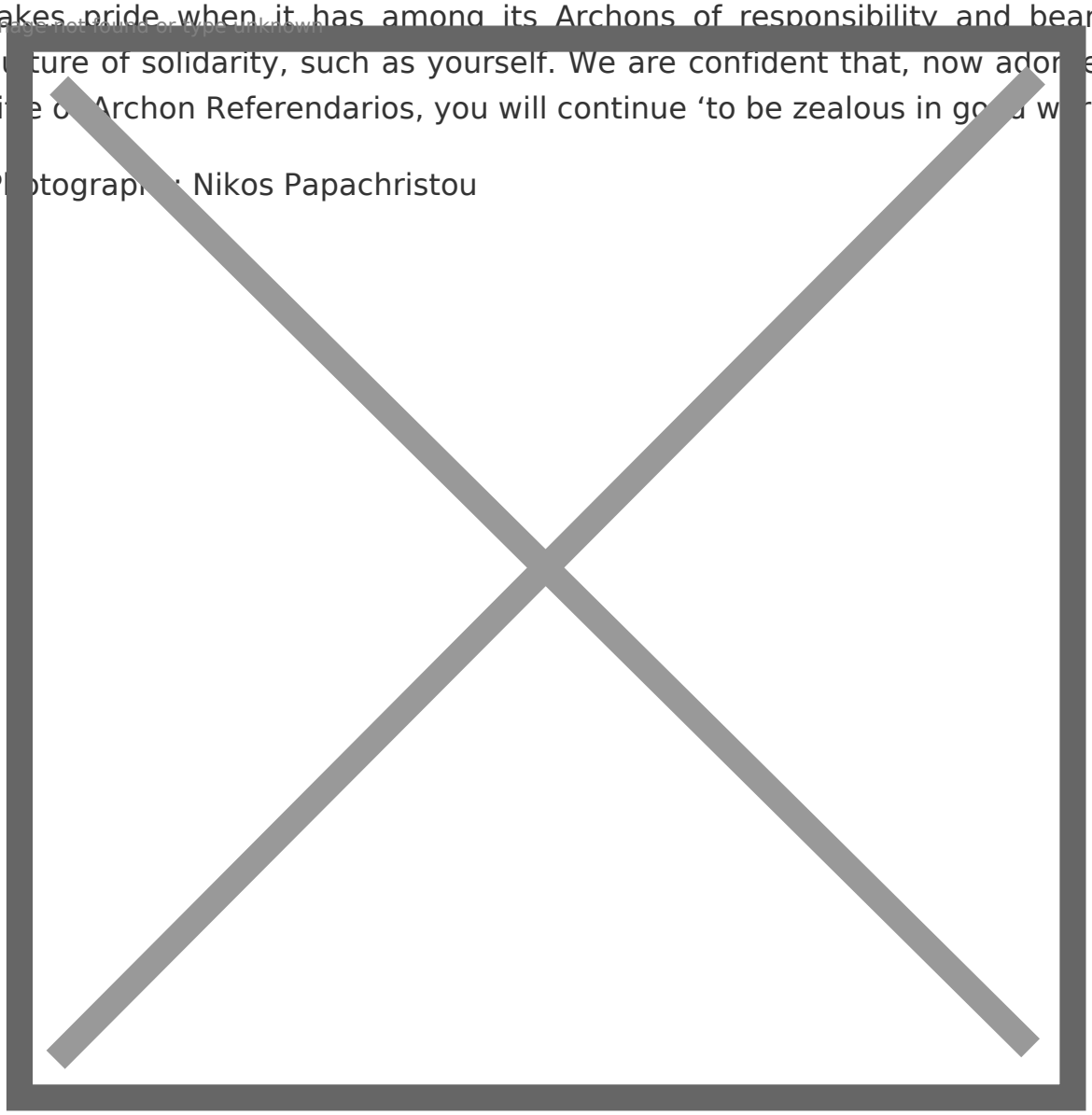
Addressing the new Archon, His All-Holiness referred to his contribution to society, saying:

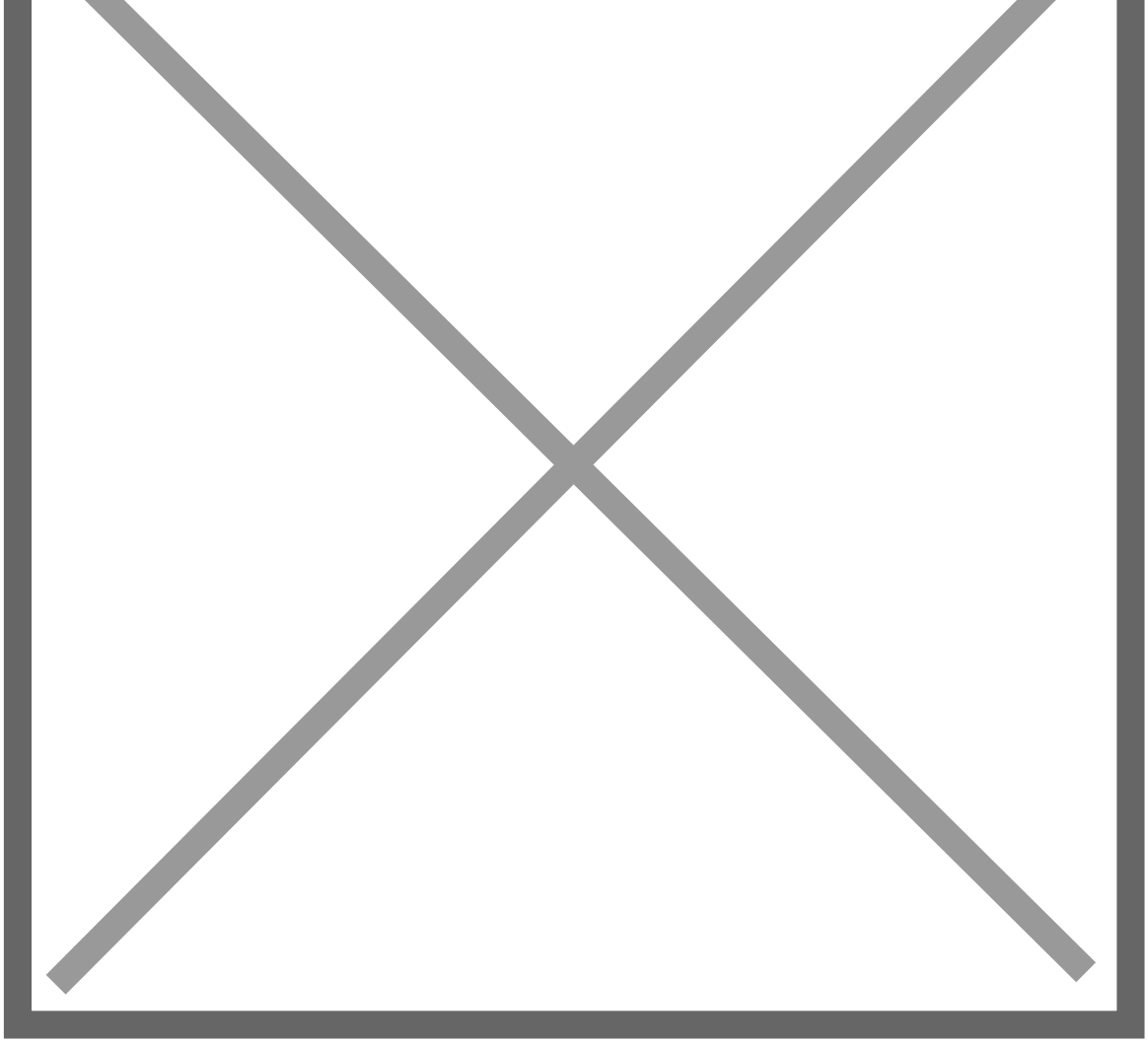
“You have, most honourable Archon, a creative presence in public life, in the Ministries of Culture and Development, in the field of Sports, in the Olympic Movement, as a member of the Hellenic Olympic Committee and of the Organising Committee of the Olympic Games ‘Athens 2004’, and in other responsible positions. You offered significant service to the City of Thessaloniki even prior to your election as Mayor. We rejoice in your many initiatives in the Municipality of Thessaloniki, as well as in the fact that, in this capacity, you are President of the

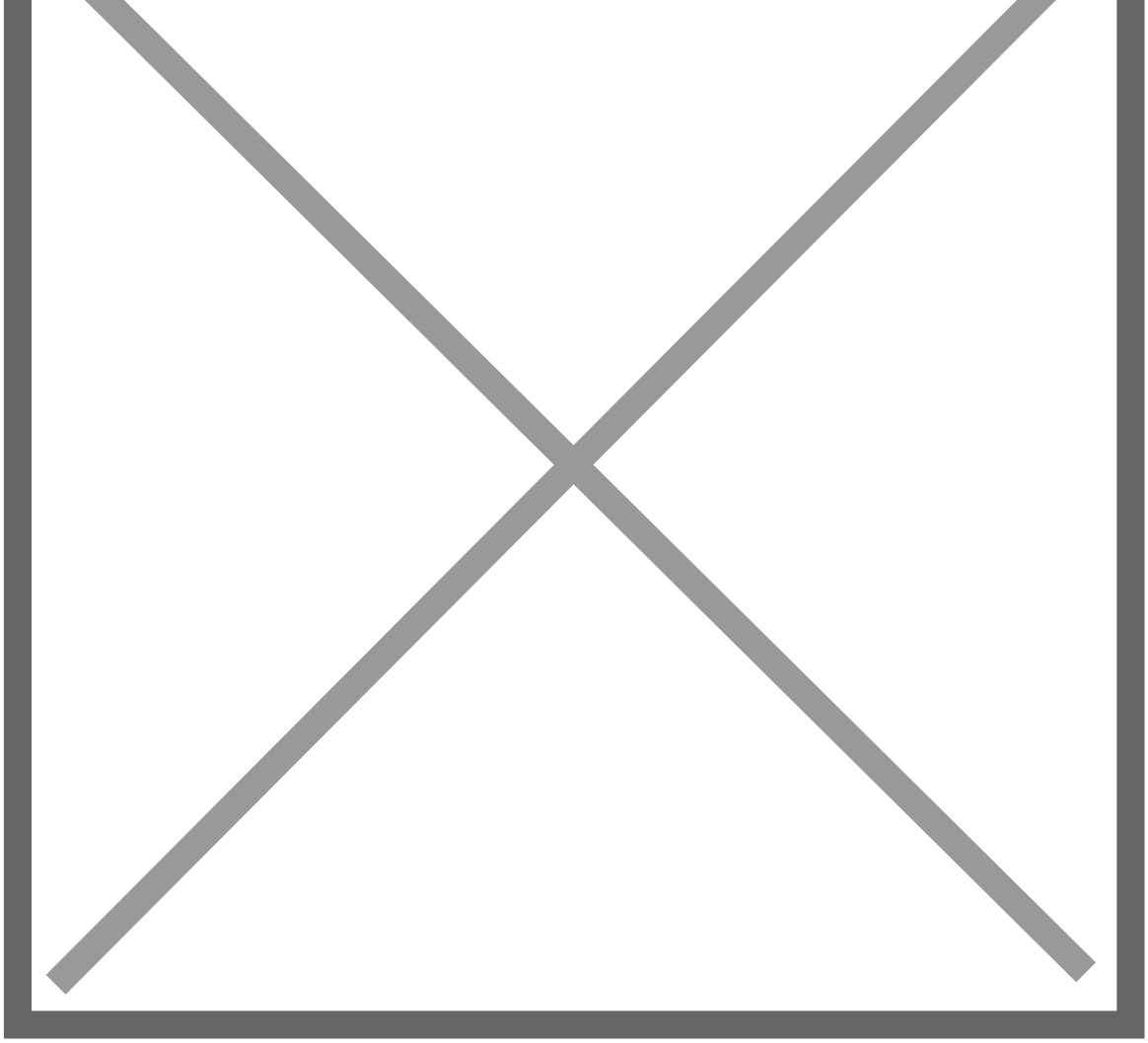
Board of Directors of the Athonite Centre, whose work we particularly esteem.

We honour those who labour with a high sense of responsibility for the common good. Good witness in this field always presupposes the will to offer and a spirit of cooperation. You possess this spirit abundantly, Mayor Angeloudis. Our most sacred brother, the holy Bishop of Thessaloniki, confirms this. We express to Your Honor our Patriarchal satisfaction for this good work. The Holy Great Church of Christ takes pride when it has among its Archons of responsibility and bearers of the culture of solidarity, such as yourself. We are confident that, now adorned with the title of Archon Referendarios, you will continue 'to be zealous in good works'."

Photographs: Nikos Papachristou







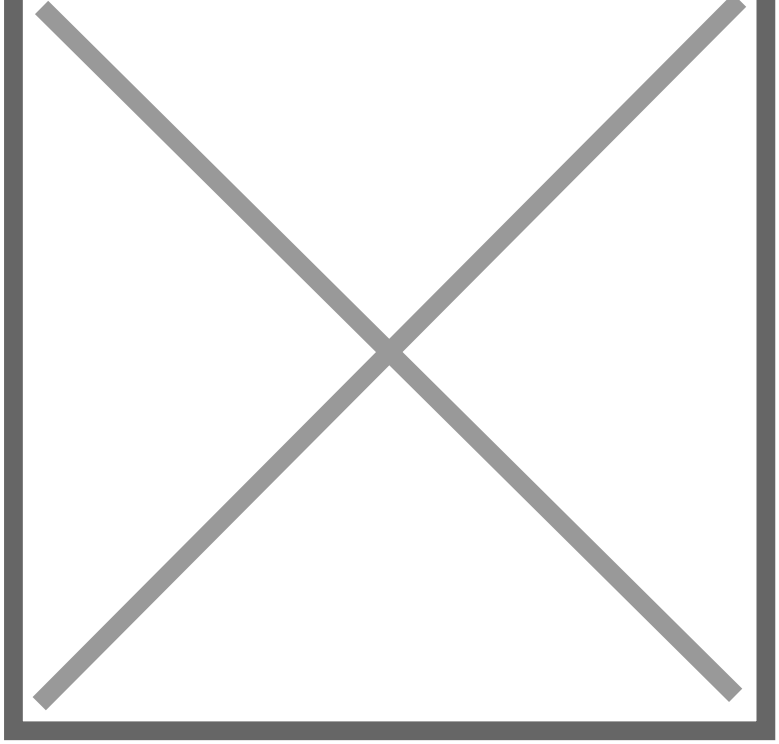
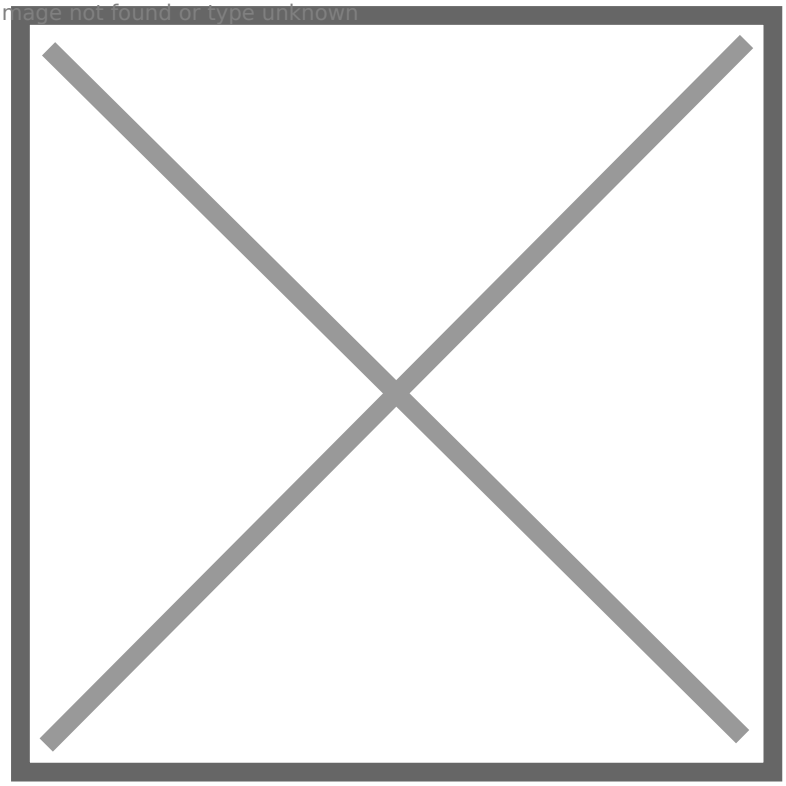
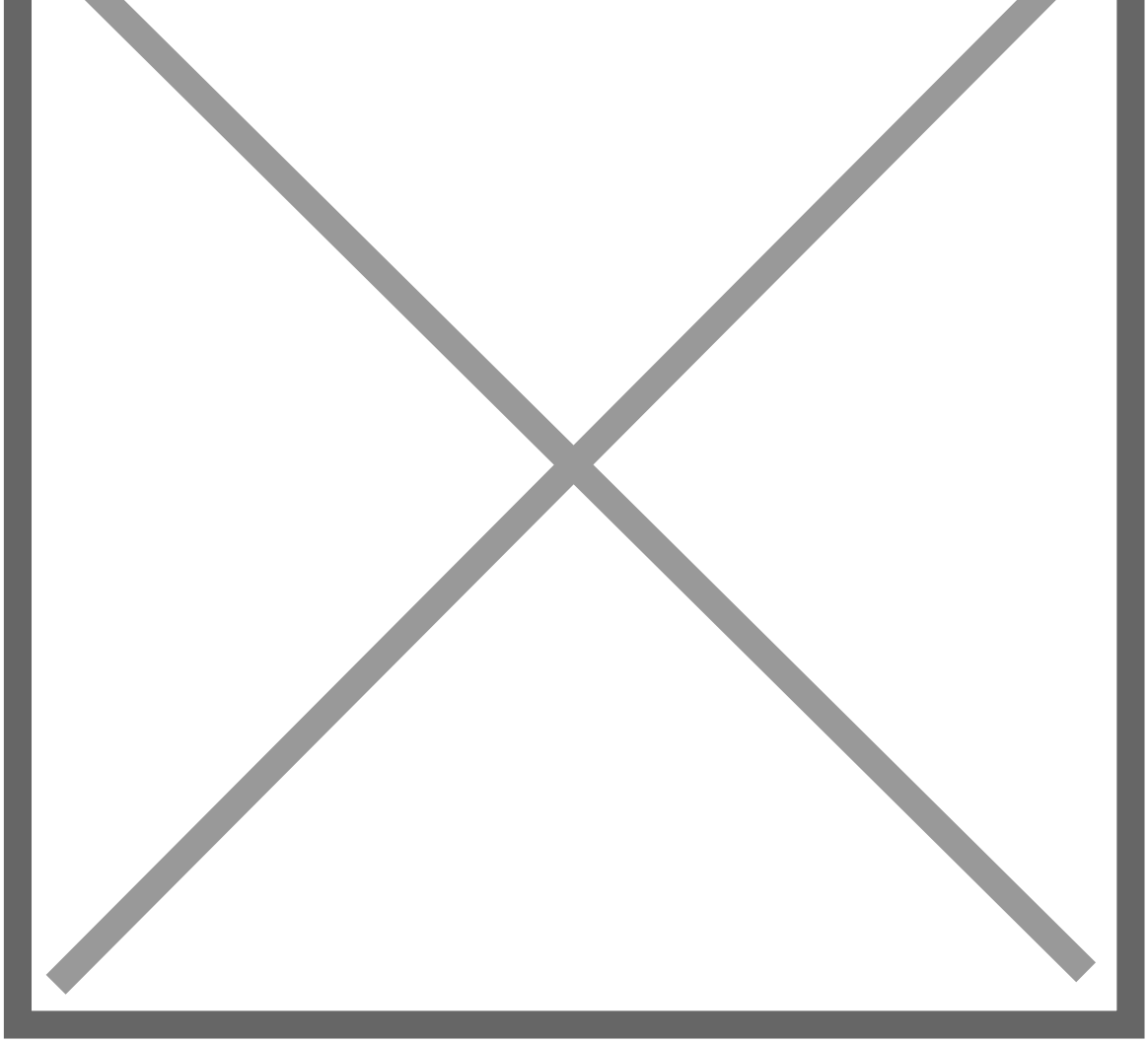
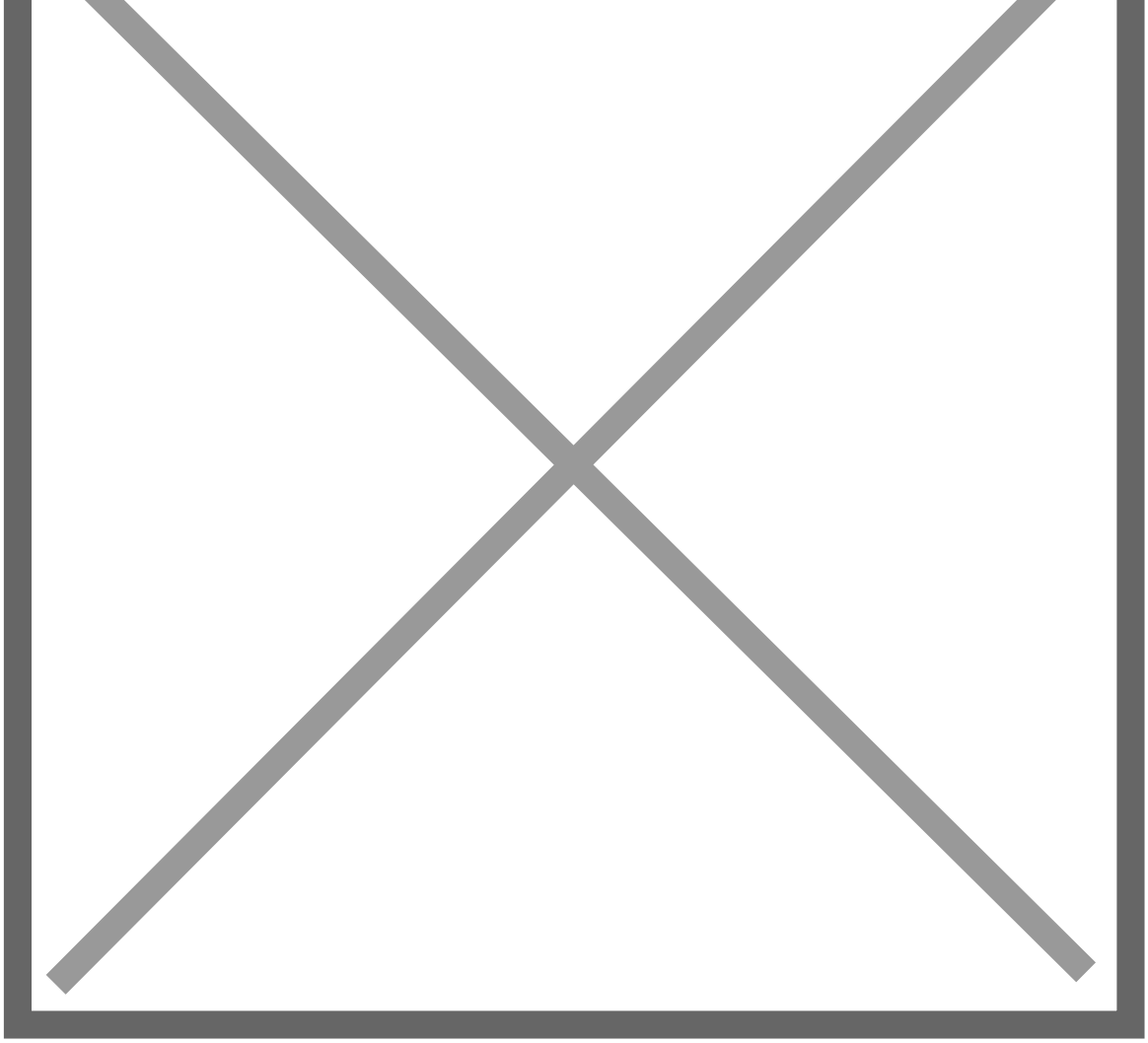
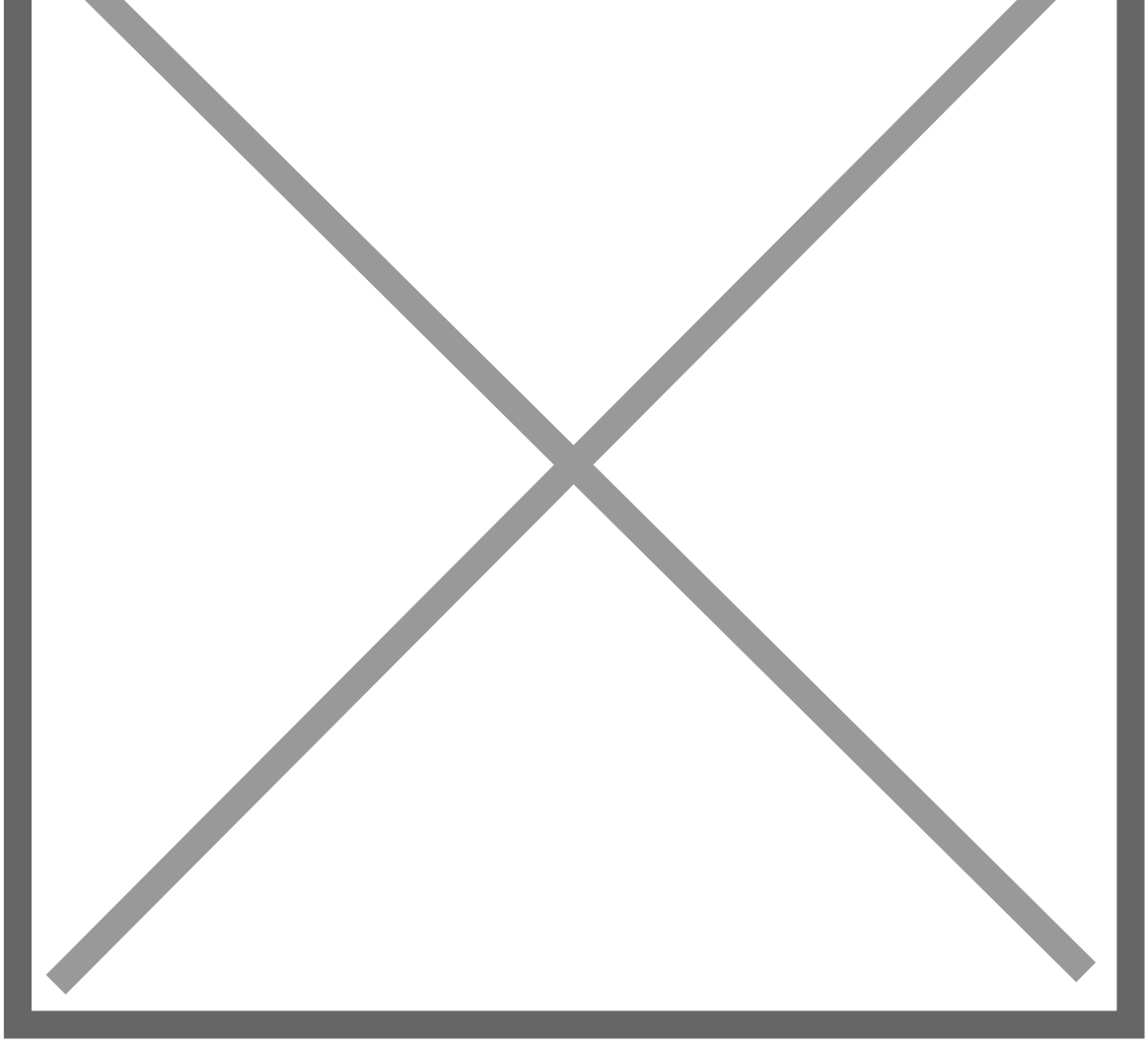


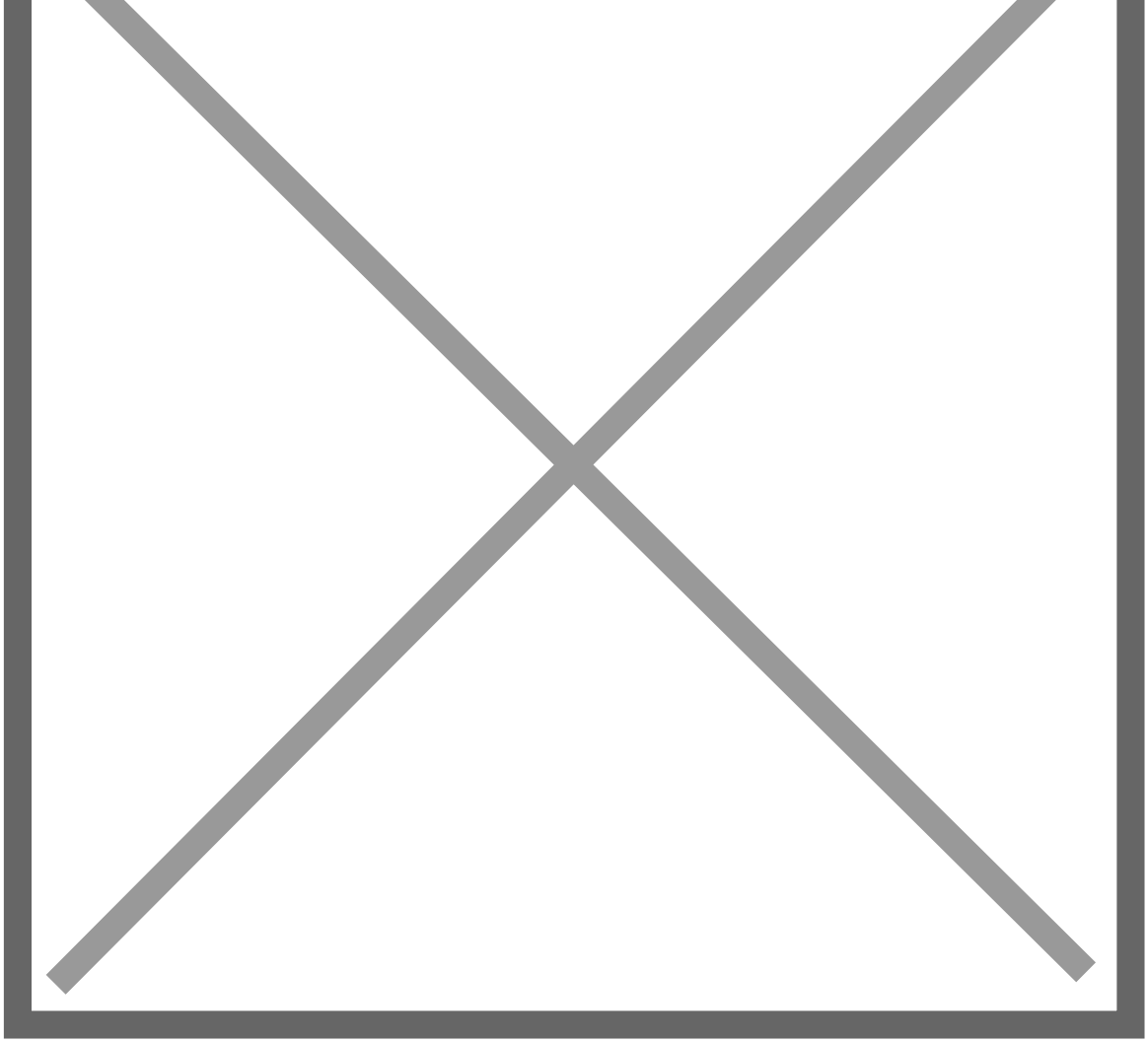
Image not found or type unknown

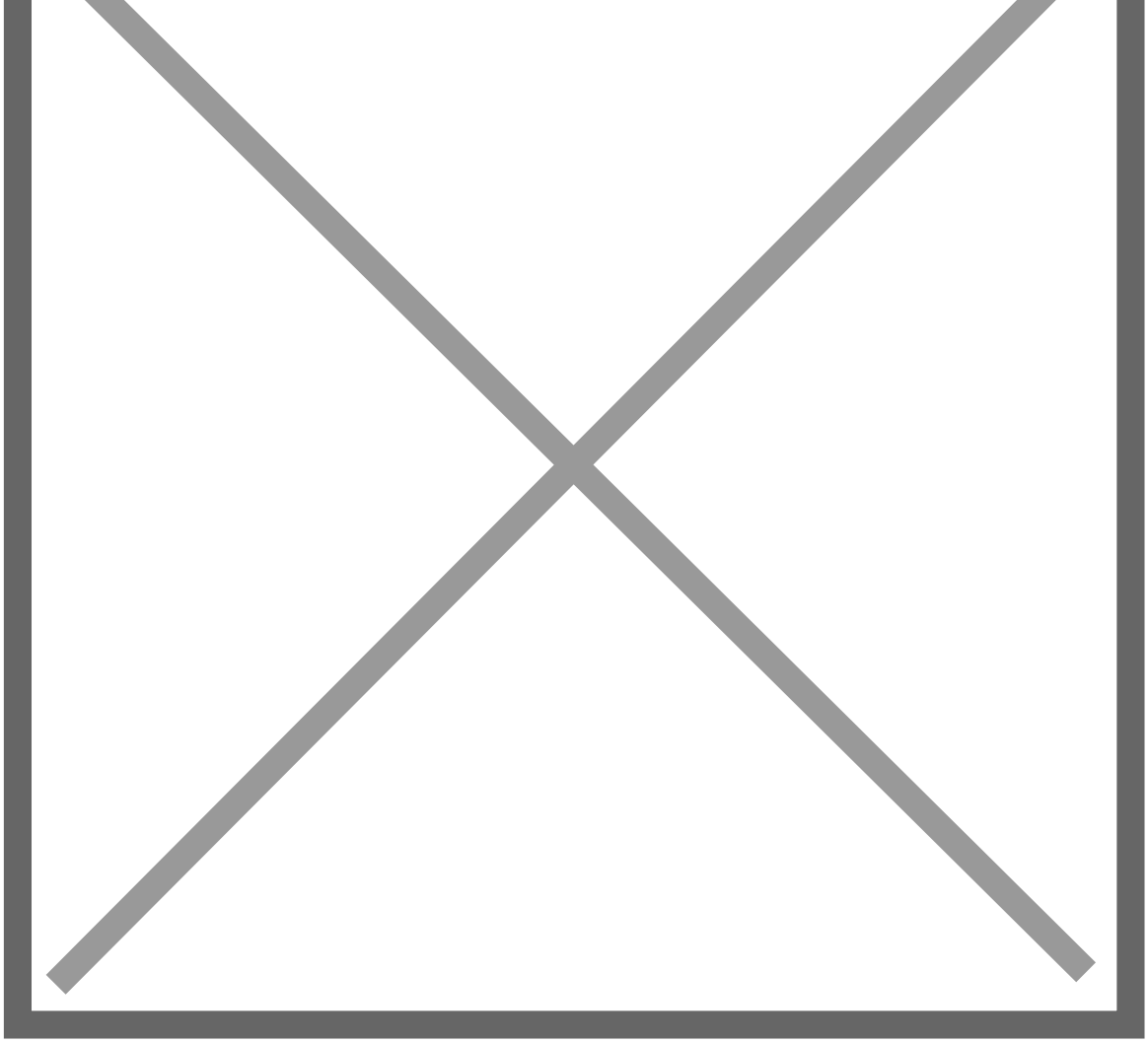


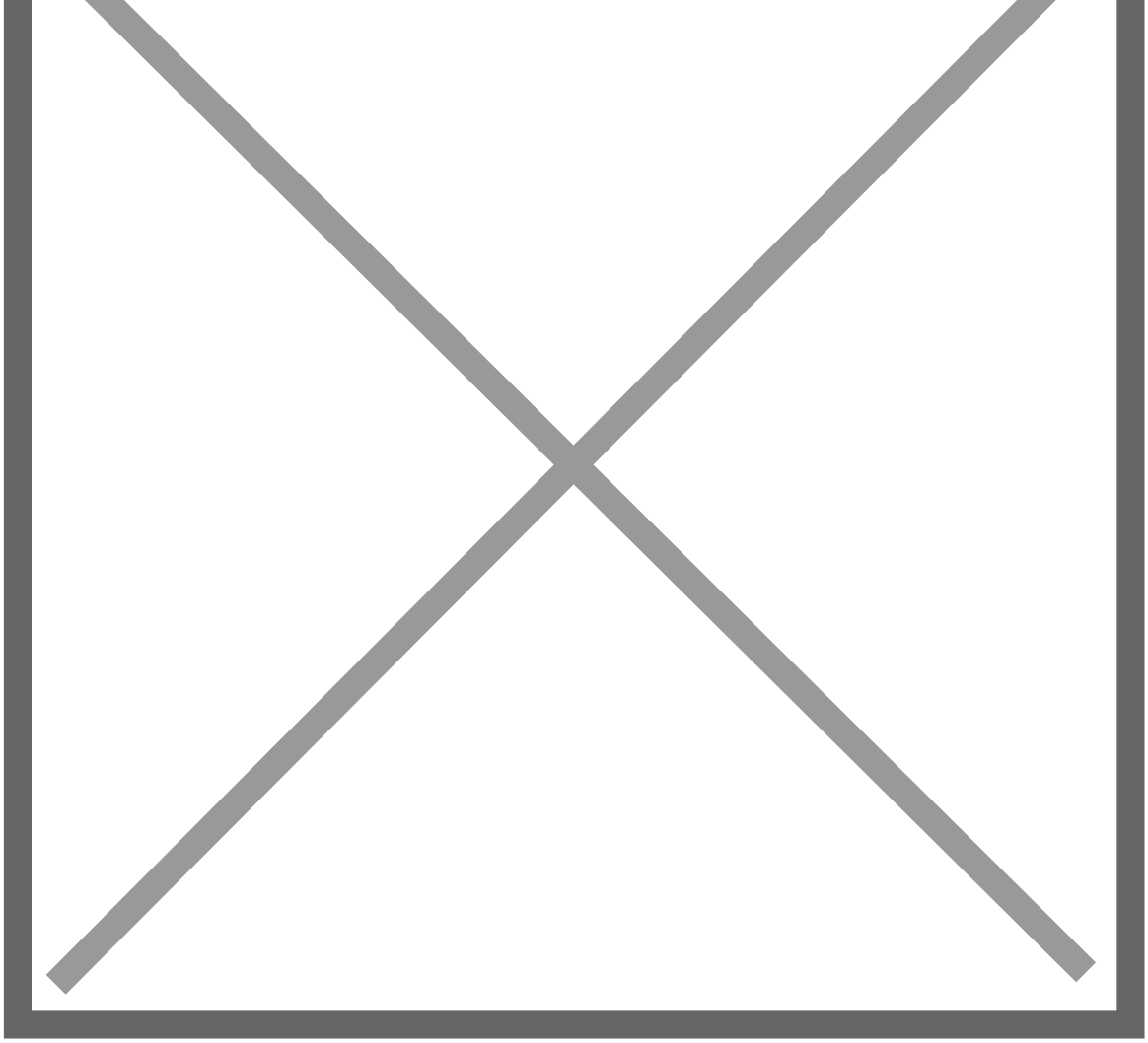


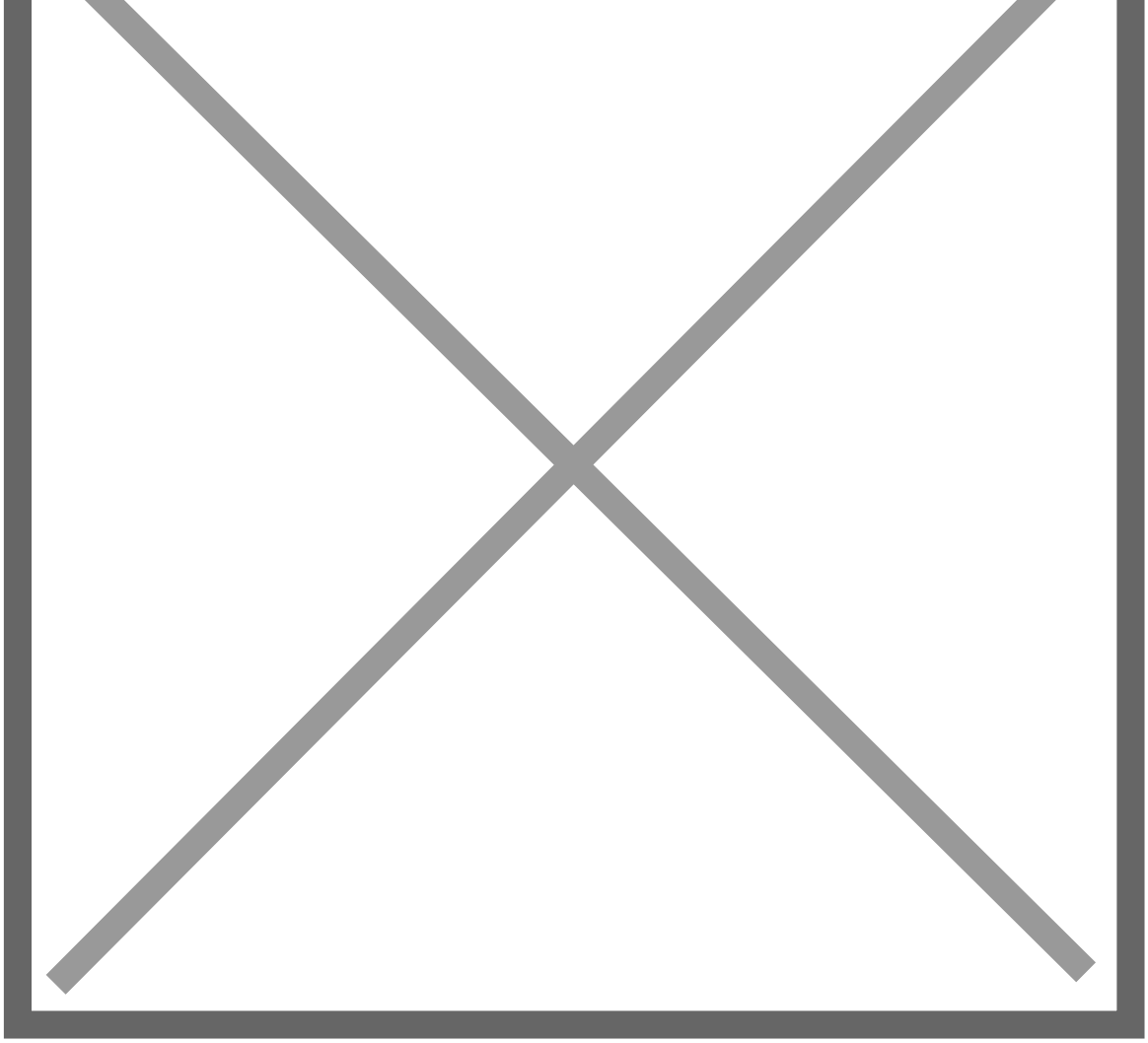


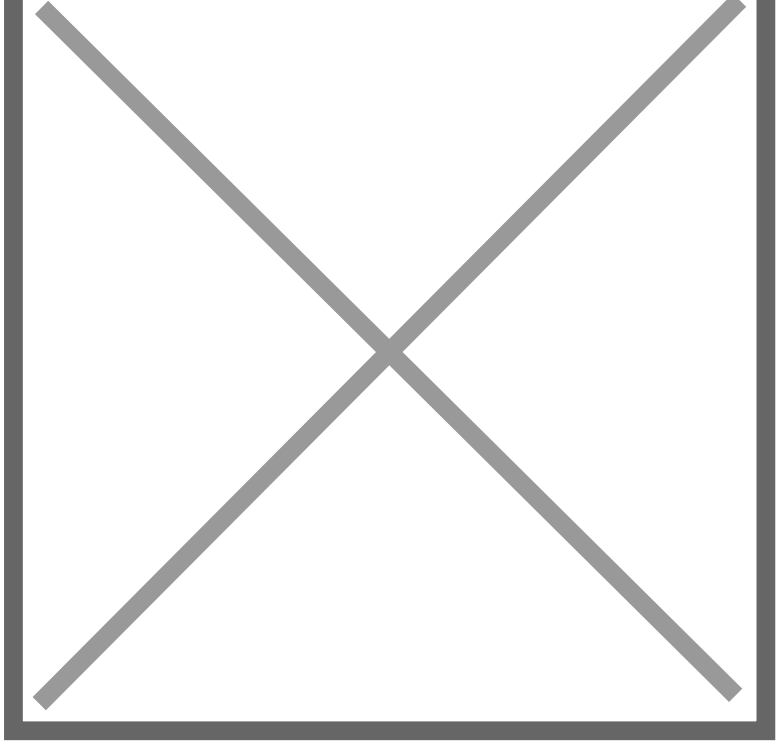


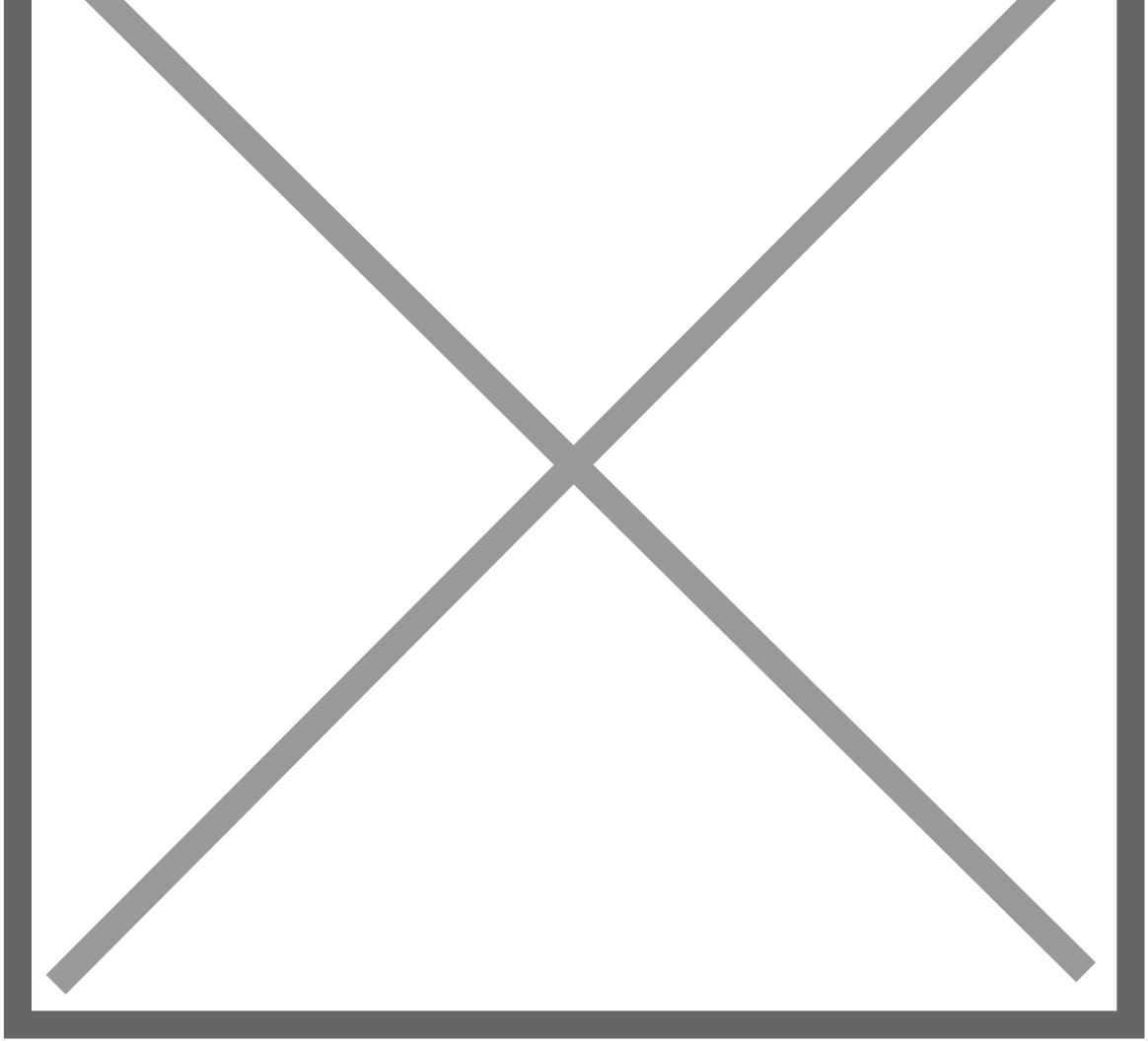


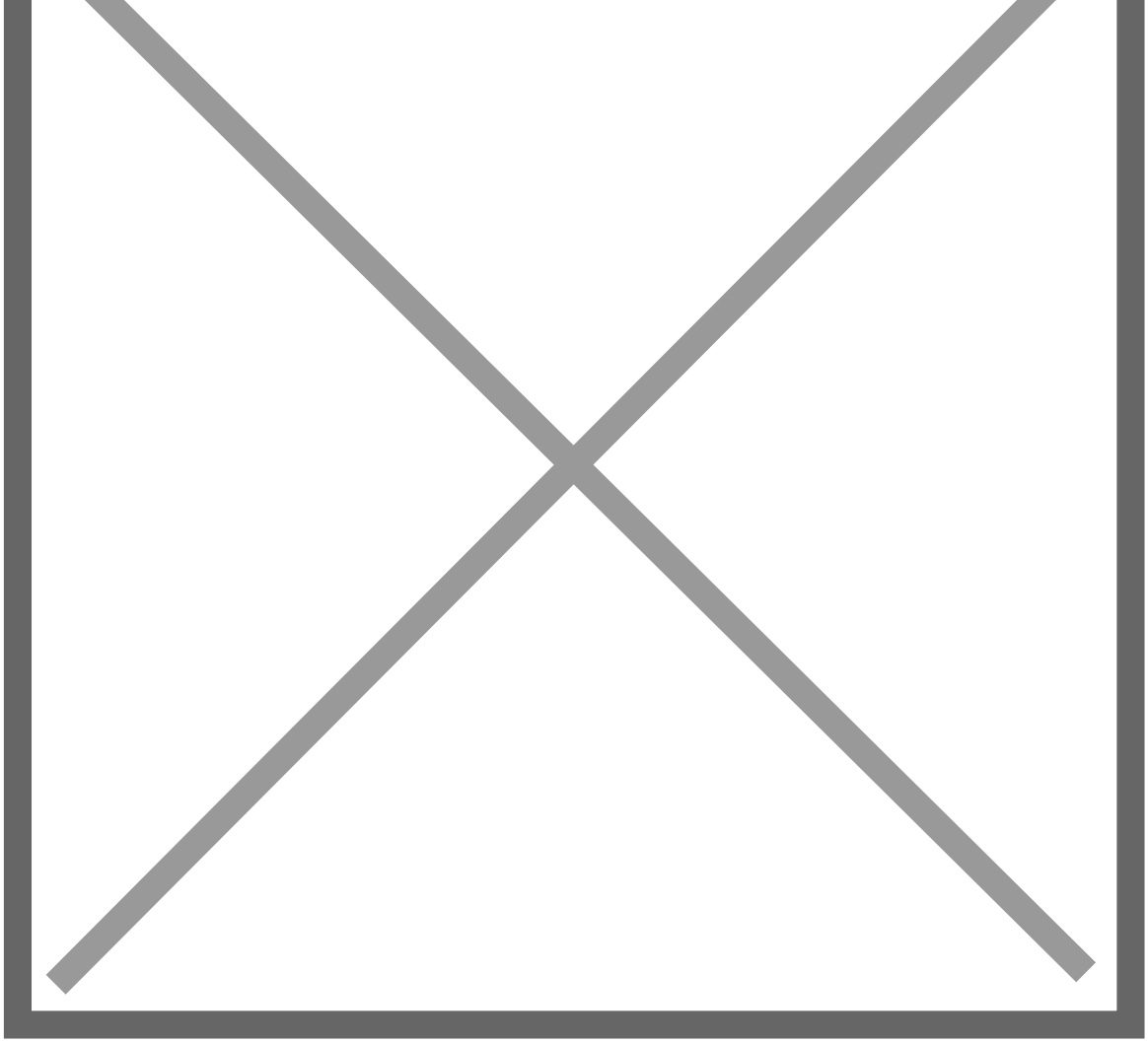












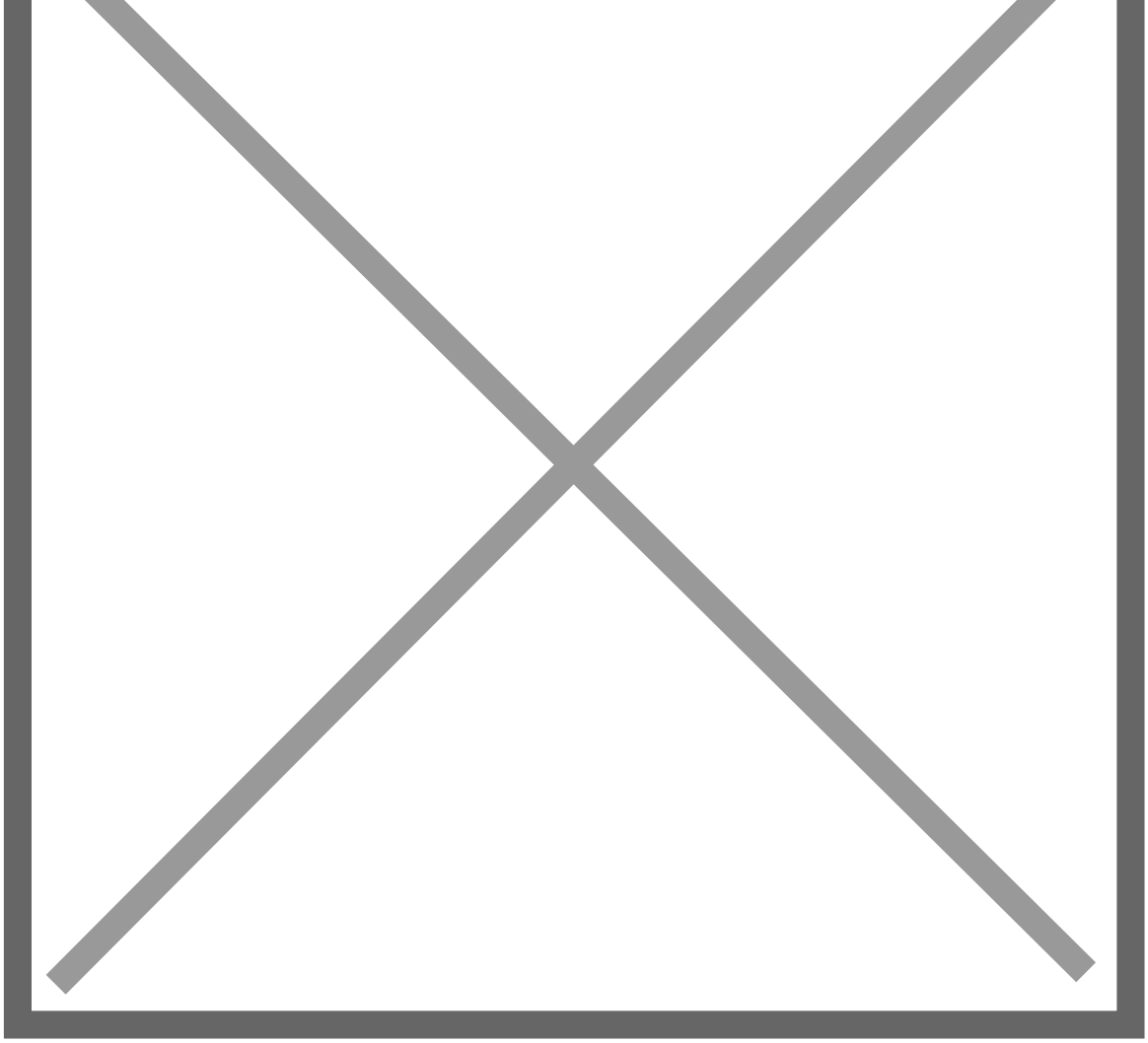
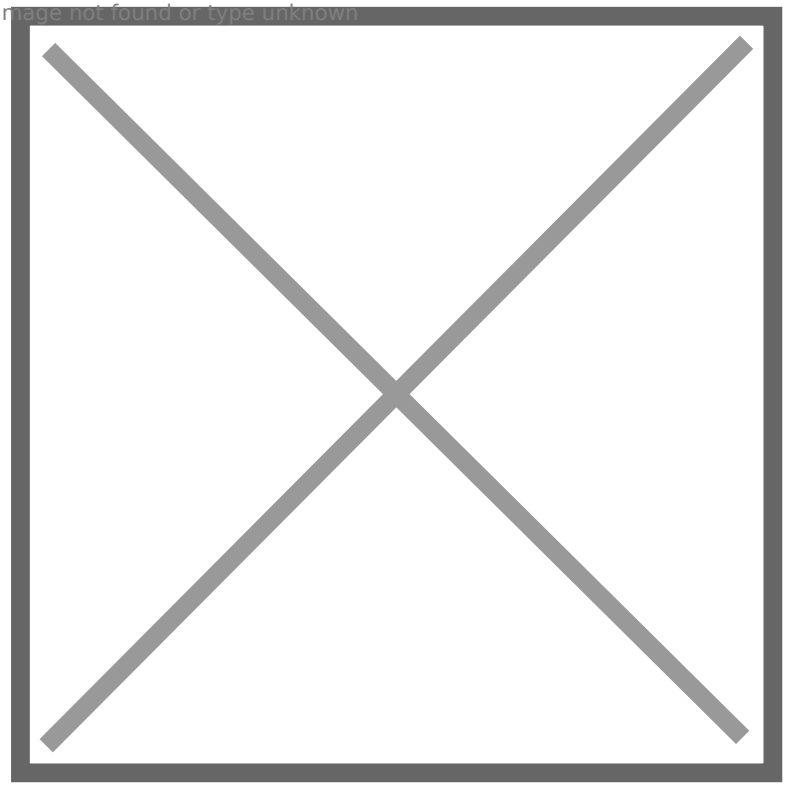


Image not found or type unknown



vema.com.au