

AEK Delegation Visits the Ecumenical Patriarch



An official delegation of AEK Football Club visited the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the Phanar in Constantinople on the morning of Thursday, 8 July, with the purpose of presenting the trophy for the club's 2025–26 Championship to His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

The Patriarch received the AEK delegation with great joy and emotion, speaking warmly of the club's sporting achievements and of what AEK represents and symbolises for the Greek community of Constantinople and for Hellenism of refugee origin more broadly.

During the visit, a video call took place between the Ecumenical Patriarch and AEK's administrative leader, Mr Marios Iliopoulos.

His All-Holiness congratulated Mr Iliopoulos on winning the championship and emphasised the joy and pride this achievement had brought to the Greek community of Constantinople.

Mr Iliopoulos thanked the Patriarch for the affection he expressed towards the entire AEK family and stressed, among other things, his own and the club's unwavering commitment to the principles of fair play.

The head of the AEK delegation, Mr Nikos Pantermalis, a member of the club's

Board of Directors, thanked His All-Holiness for his warm welcome and for the enduring bond of affection and shared journey between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and AEK.

Address by Mr Marios Iliopoulos

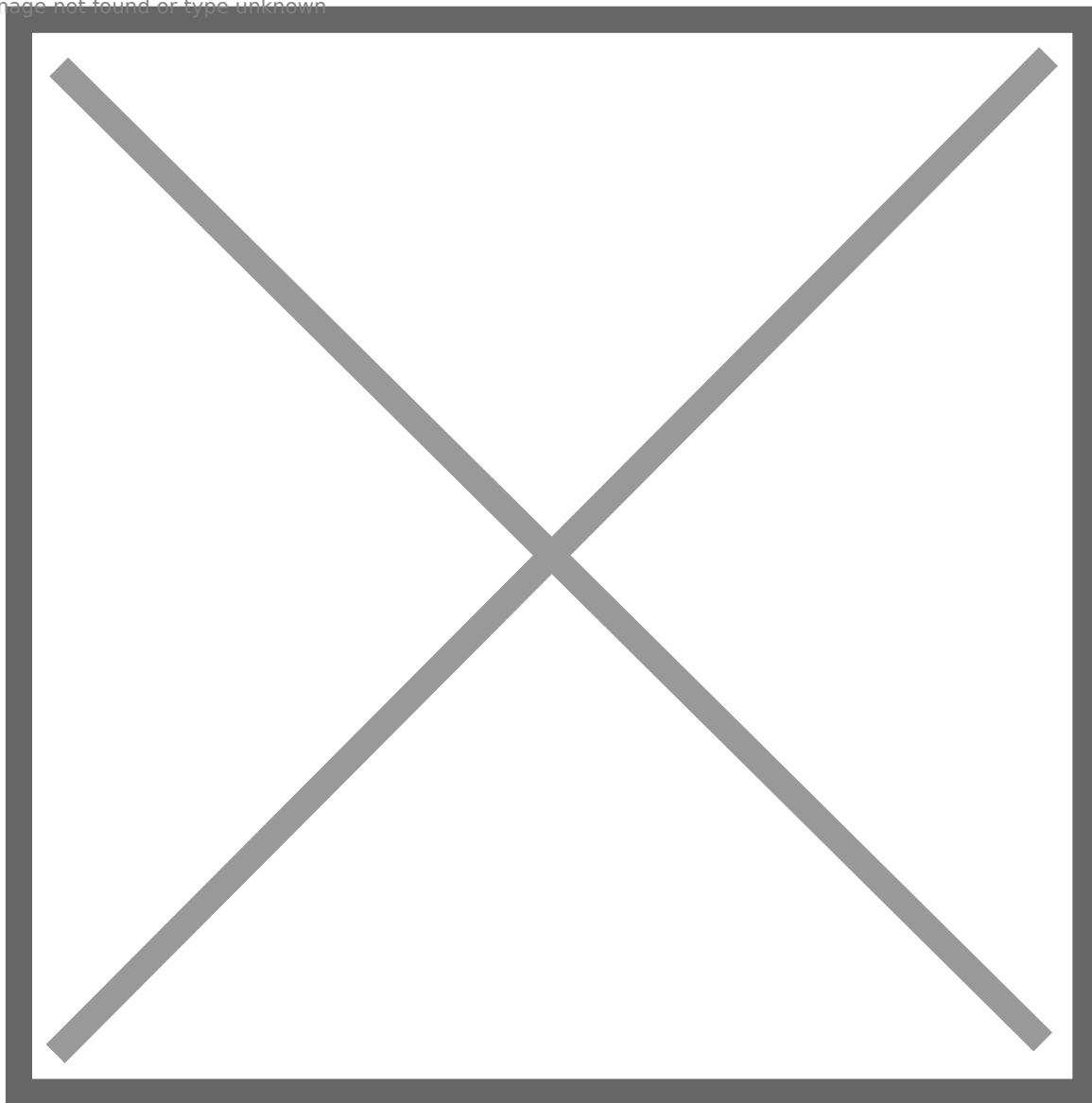
In his address, AEK's administrative leader, Mr Marios Iliopoulos, said:

“Good morning, Your All-Holiness.

You have the privilege of leading Orthodoxy while serving here in Constantinople, the heart of Christianity. We, too, are privileged to be Greeks, to be Christians, and to have you as our Patriarch. Those who know me understand that I do not speak merely to flatter. Everything I say comes sincerely from my heart.

We are deeply grateful to share with you the values, principles, ethos, and culture that unite us. Sadly, as the years pass, our world increasingly drifts away from these principles. Instead, conflict and instability prevail. We are witnessing devastating wars that have created profound global imbalance, while money too often dictates the course of events.

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For this reason, we need leaders such as Yourself, who inspire us, give us courage and strength, and nourish our deepest spiritual needs. We need leaders who help us raise our children with values that will make both their families and society proud.

One of the most critical areas in which we must invest is sport, which forms an essential part of education. A nation cannot look confidently towards the future—especially for its young people—without education, sport, and health.

What AEK accomplished this year carries profound symbolic significance. Beyond winning the championship, the club succeeded after confronting long-established systems and entrenched practices. Our struggle was immense.

Our weapons were patience, perseverance, faith, and passion. Together they enabled us to demonstrate the true path of victory, a path marked by principles,

dignity, and fair play. These are ideals inherited from ancient Greece, although today they are too often neglected.

This trophy therefore represents dignity, strength, faith, passion, patience, perseverance, and remembrance. It also honours the memory of the refugees whose courage transformed ashes into hope, suffering into opportunity, and tragedy into inspiration for future generations. This is truly a trophy of fair play and of the victor's path.

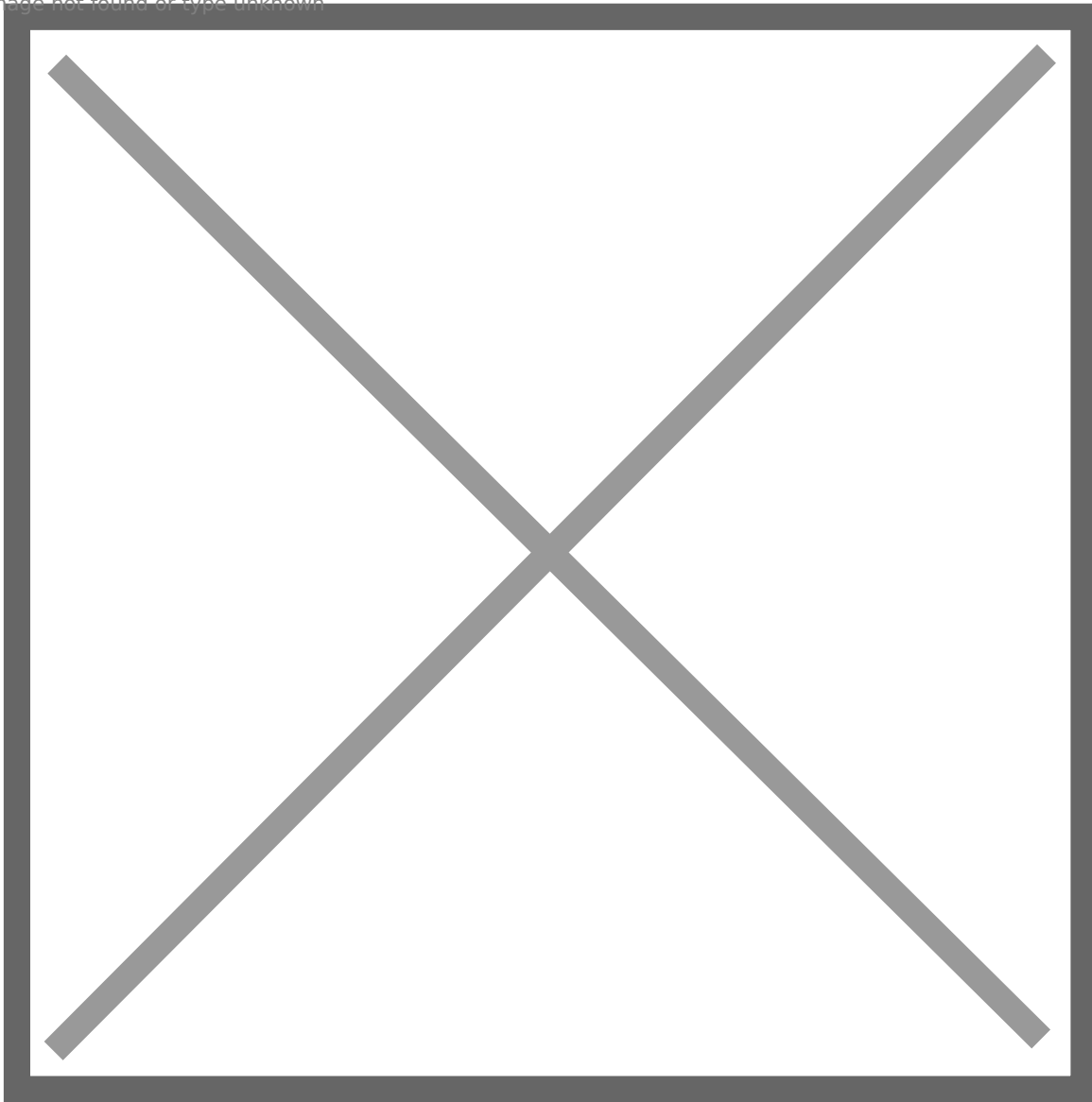
Above all, I wish to express how deeply we honour and love Your All-Holiness. Every day I seek to communicate to the wider society, and especially to young people, the spark of inspiration, love, and optimism. I want them to understand that success comes through vision, goals, self-knowledge, dignity, integrity, and determination, never through violence.

We must educate our children to make us proud, not through selfish ambition, but through selfless love. In doing so, we preserve Christianity, our traditions, our culture, and the values that define us.

Thank you for the love you continually show towards AEK. Without exaggeration, AEK embodies the ideals that make you proud, because we never forget our roots. If we lose sight of our roots, we lose our direction entirely.

I thank you sincerely. Please receive this trophy, touch it, and I hope it conveys, even in a small way, everything I have spoken about concerning fair play, which remains the guiding principle of our mission, not only in Greek football, but across every sport represented by AEK and throughout Greek athletics."

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Responding to Mr Iliopoulos, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew said:

“Thank you very much, Mr President.

I listened carefully and with great interest to everything you have said. From your words I conclude that we walk together and uphold the same ideals and values. This is only natural, since they originate from this historic City whose centuries-old tradition continues to teach these very principles.

I remember my official visit to the Holy Metropolis of Nea Ionia and Philadelphia, where all of you from Constantinople were received with exceptional generosity. I also recall our more recent meeting.

I have followed your work and your many initiatives, all of which are founded upon

the principle of fair play, as you have repeatedly emphasised. Behind those two words lie all the ideals and values that both the Mother Church of Constantinople and AEK seek to uphold.

I once said that AEK is an idea, and ideas never die. Not only do they endure, but they also win championships, strive for excellence, and bear witness to our faith and our nation. For this I warmly congratulate you, because these successes are the fruit of your hard work and dedication.

As the Mother Church, I congratulate the entire AEK family and all its supporters wherever they may be. Here in Constantinople, where the club's roots lie, the Pera Athletic Club continues this glorious tradition. Despite limited resources, its President, Mr Mouhlidis, and his colleagues continue to preserve AEK's historic legacy.

Today, as visitors from both Constantinople and Athens gather at the Sacred Centre of Orthodoxy, we have the joy of sharing in this great achievement with paternal pride. We thank you for giving us this cause for celebration through your championship victory in 2026.

I wish you many more successes. Please convey my greetings to my beloved brother, the Metropolitan of Nea Ionia and Philadelphia, your energetic shepherd. During my visit to Athens in May, when I was honoured by the Hellenic Red Cross, I greatly admired the Ionian Centre, established through his vision. I am certain that in the years to come it will host many distinguished activities that will honour both Hellenism and Orthodoxy.

From my heart I offer you my blessing and pray that God grants you every good gift. To you personally, Mr President, I wish health, long life, and continued success. You are worthy."

The conversation concluded with the following exchange:

MARIOS ILIOPOULOS: "In closing, I agree entirely with Your All-Holiness that AEK is indeed an idea, but it is more than an idea. It is a way of life, and it will become a movement capable of changing many things. Together we can achieve much. Thank you for listening so attentively. Has the trophy been brought to you?"

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH: "Yes, it is right here beside me. What a magnificent and

impressive trophy it is.”

MARIOS ILIOPOULOS: “And heavy as well!”

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH (lifting the trophy): “I can still manage—I am able to lift it.”

MARIOS ILIOPOULOS: “May God grant you many years! Simply by touching it, Your All-Holiness has given us inspiration and strength for the future.”

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH: “Thank you.”

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