

Greek minister's comments over govt demands for Church-state dialogue cause concern



A weekend television interview by Greece's relevant education and religious affairs minister has caused annoyance within the Church of Greece's ranks, as the minister, Costas Gavroglu, blamed Church hierarchs for a suspension of a dialogue between the government and the Church.

A source close to the standing Holy Synod told the Orthodoxia news agency that the minister's comments aggravate relations between the two sides. The same source said the Holy Synod's position - to decline any discussion over the government's insistence on changing the payroll regime for clergymen in the country - is absolute.

Displeasure with Gavroglu's interview to the state-run broadcaster - without an opposing viewpoint offered - also reportedly extended to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

In his comments, the minister claimed that the Patriarchate has "... adopted the

positions of the Church of Crete, and as such, missed the opportunity for a historic agreement”.

The Orthodox Church of Crete, governed by its own Holy Synod, has ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the large island of Crete, while the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece has ecclesiastical jurisdiction over roughly half of the predominately Orthodox Christian nation of 11 million.

In a related development, a so-called “policy declaration” between ruling SYRIZA party and a tiny out-of-Parliament party last week pointed clearly to an intent to promote “...religious neutrality by the state, towards the direction of a separation of Church and state.”