

27/03/2023

## **The Ecumenical Patriarch at the Church of the Annunciation of the Theotokos in Vafeochorion**



His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew officiated on Saturday, 25 March 2023, on the feast day of the Annunciation of the Theotokos, at the celebrating Church of the Annunciation in the Vafeochorion area of the Bosphorus, the birthplace of the late Patriarch Ioakeim III.

The divine word was preached by the Grand Ecclesiarch Archimandrite Aetios, director of the Personal Office of the Patriarch.

Also present for the feast day were, His Grace Bishop Iakovos of Zinoupolis, Archons of the Great Church of Christ as well as a large congregation of faithful from the Bosphorus community and from overseas.

In his speech, after the dismissal of the Divine Liturgy, His All-Holiness referred to the great feast of the Mother of God of the Annunciation, pointing out that “today’s feast speaks to us more than any other feast of our faith about the need for cooperation between God and man”, from which, as he said, goods always arise for man.

“God works for our salvation, but He does not force us to be saved. He wants the cooperation of our freedom, because, according to the expression of the Fathers of the Church, salvation belongs to those who are willing and not to those who are forced! In this cooperation between the divine and the human factor, God gives His grace and man his preference. In ecclesiastical language we say that this union of God with man, the incarnation of God’s Word, is a “supernatural” fact. And this in principle means an act of freedom – detachment – of God and man from any natural predetermination. In the person of the Virgin Mary “nature’s conditions are overcome”. The Church recognises in the daughter of Nazareth that creation, which – alone in all creation, material and spiritual – reached the fullness of the purpose for which creation exists, that is, the fullest possible unity with the Creator, the Creator of everything. And from this point of view it is a model and example for all of us people and a constant call to union with our Maker. And even after the offering of the Saviour to the world, the Virgin Mary is always interested in all of us and intercedes for us and helps us.

Realise, therefore, dear children, how much gratitude the human race owes to the holy person of the Theotokos for her unique contribution to the work of its salvation. That is why we revere and honour her and always consider her as a mediator to her Son and a warm intercessor and an impregnable wall and a source of mercy and a refuge for the world. That is why we have come here today to her Church, to join the hymns of our devotion with the fragrance of the Bosphorus flowers of spring and with the sweet chirping of the birds, and to tell the Mother of God that the City in which we inhabit is her City and therefore we are her children principally, to whom we unceasingly record our thanks to our Mighty General”.

His All-Holiness then referred to his recent official visit to Lithuania.

“Our today’s celebration on the feast of the Annunciation, the anniversary of the birth and the recognition of human freedom, coincides in time with our return from our first visit to Lithuania, following a noble invitation of the honourable Government of the country, of which the people are proud of the victorious struggles they have waged over time in favour of their freedom, but also in favour of the defence and protection of fundamental human rights. During our stay there

we held official meetings with the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the Parliament and the Prime Minister, with whom we signed an important cooperation agreement in a number of fields of action with the aim of ensuring the religious freedom of the Orthodox believers of the country, who for reasons of conscience cannot continue to be spiritually housed under the Moscow Patriarchate and desire their return to the loving embrace of their Mother Church of Constantinople, from which they received their Orthodox faith. For this reason, after all, we satisfied the request of five former clergymen of the Moscow Patriarchate to join the clerical body of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, after the acceptance on my humble behalf, of their appeal and the overturning of their appeal to the detriment of the deposed under of the Church of Russia, due to the public disagreement expressed among them for the supportive stance of the brother Patriarch Kirill of Moscow against the declared unholy war by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and for his facilitation, on the other hand, and of the Russian troops and their invasion and occupation.

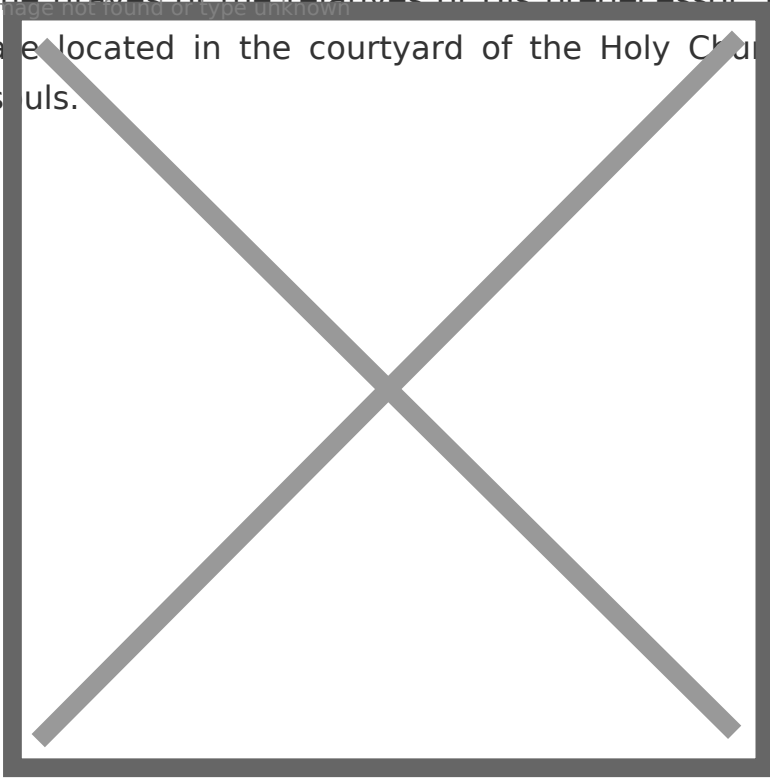
Our short stay in Lithuania was extremely enlightening, as it contributed the most to our understanding of the special reasons that make the heroic Lithuanian people an opponent of any form of imposition and scheming, especially when it comes from Russia. Our visit, on Wednesday afternoon, to the former offices of the KGB, now a memorial museum, and especially to the intact basements of the KGB building, with the horrible conditions of detention, with the places of inhumane and terrible torture, with the wall that bear the scars of the bullets that killed more than a thousand people, a permanent reminder of the tragic results of the loss of our humanity. Seeing all these horrors, the phrase “Never again!” spontaneously rose from within us. Never again war! Never again absolutism! Never again enslavement and violation of the sanctity of the human person!”.

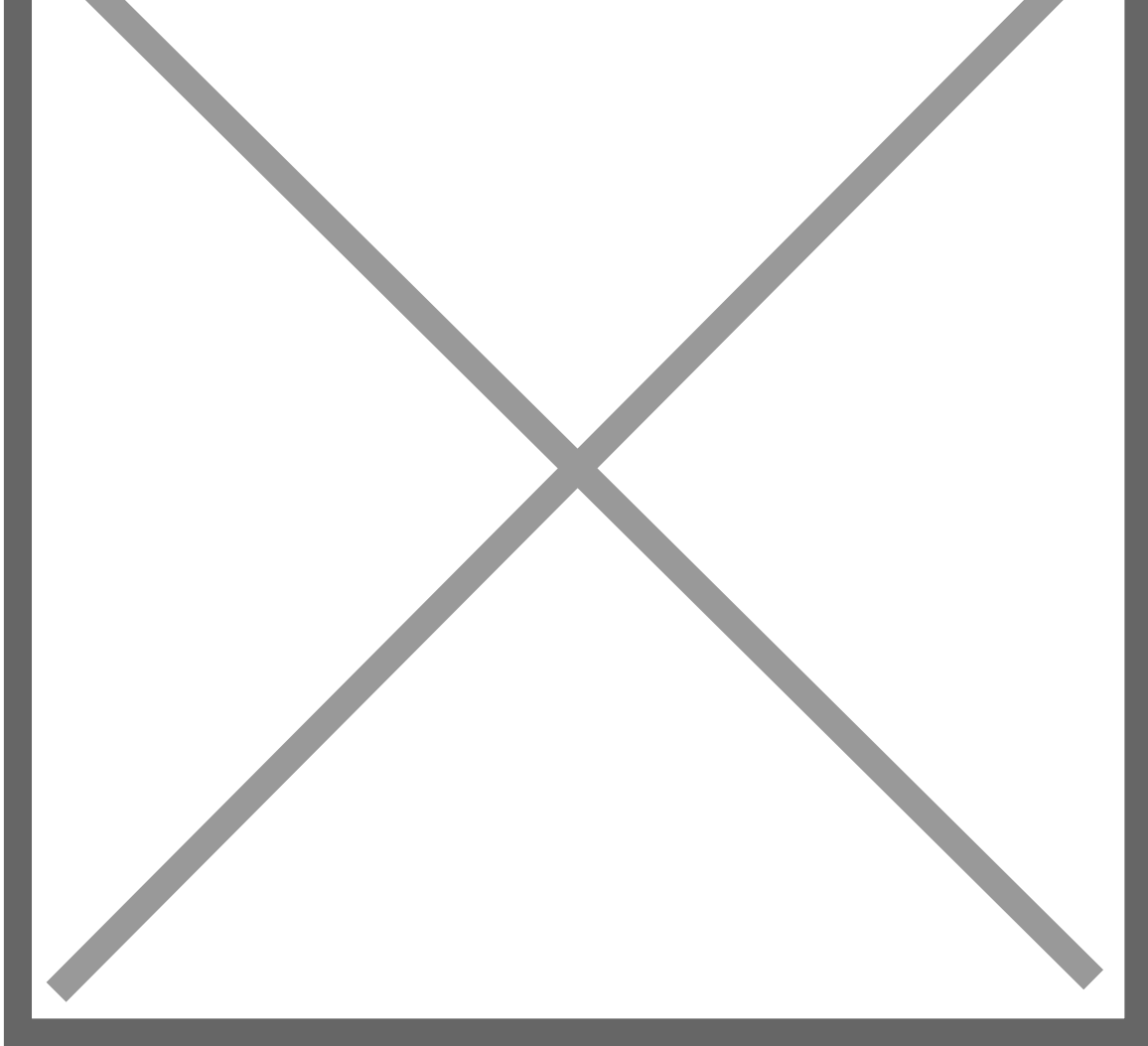
Then His All-Holiness prayed that the Lady Theotokos would protect and care for the Community of Vafeochorion, and “give her abundant blessing and motherly blessing to the eloquent, tireless and efficient worker and Overseer of the Bosphorus Region, Metropolitan Athenagoras of Kydonia, to the competent and active Parish Priest of the Community, Archimandrite Timotheos, to the new Ecclesiastical Committee chaired by the Honorable Mr. Chrysovalantis Tzavidos, the working secretary of the Patriarchal bureaux, as well as to all those who love and are interested in the continuation of the local Greek Orthodox Community and ecclesiastical presence here”.

Previously, His All-Holiness was welcomed with warm words by His Eminence Metropolitan Athenagoras of Kydonia, and the President of the Ecclesiastical

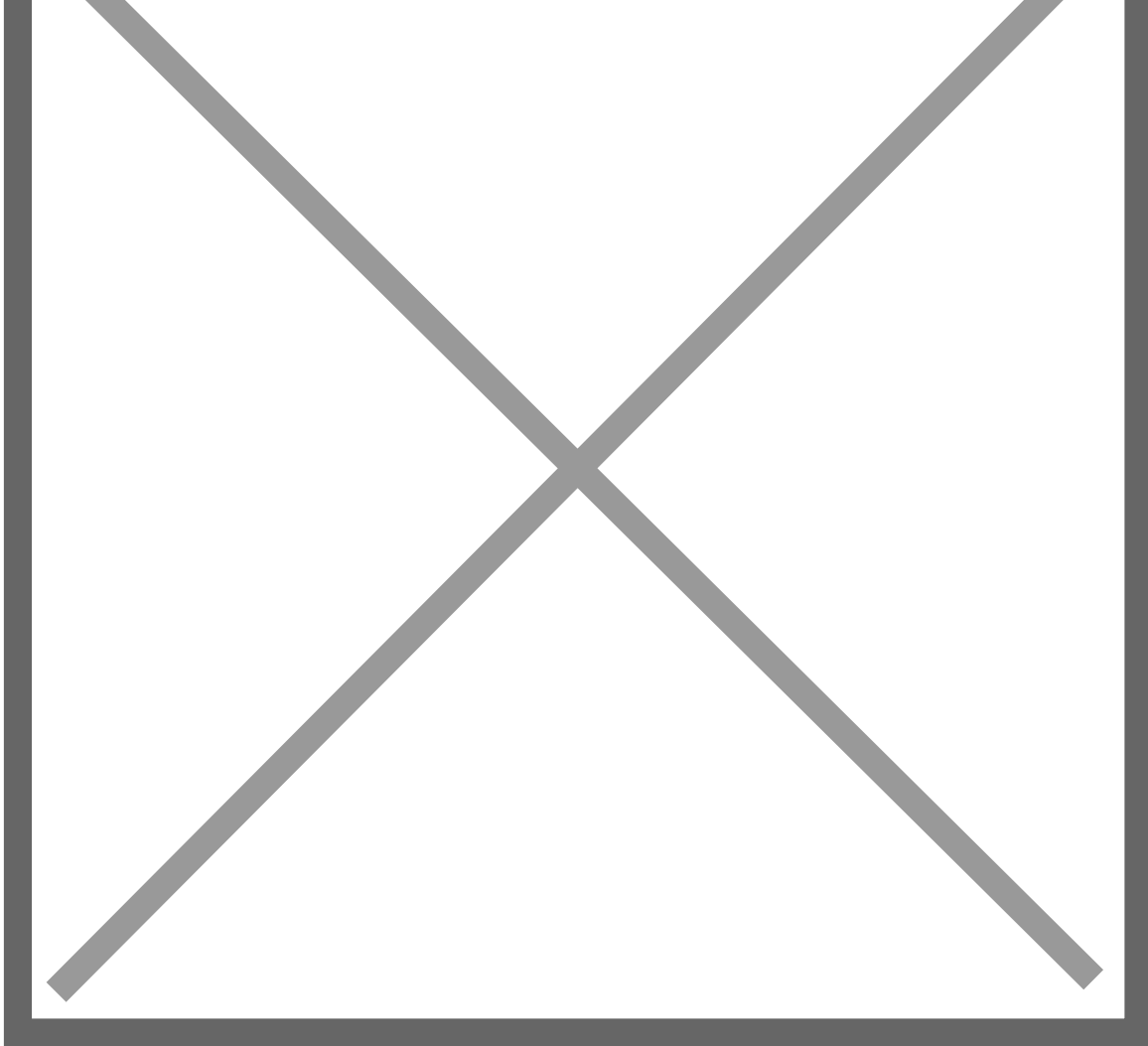
Committee.

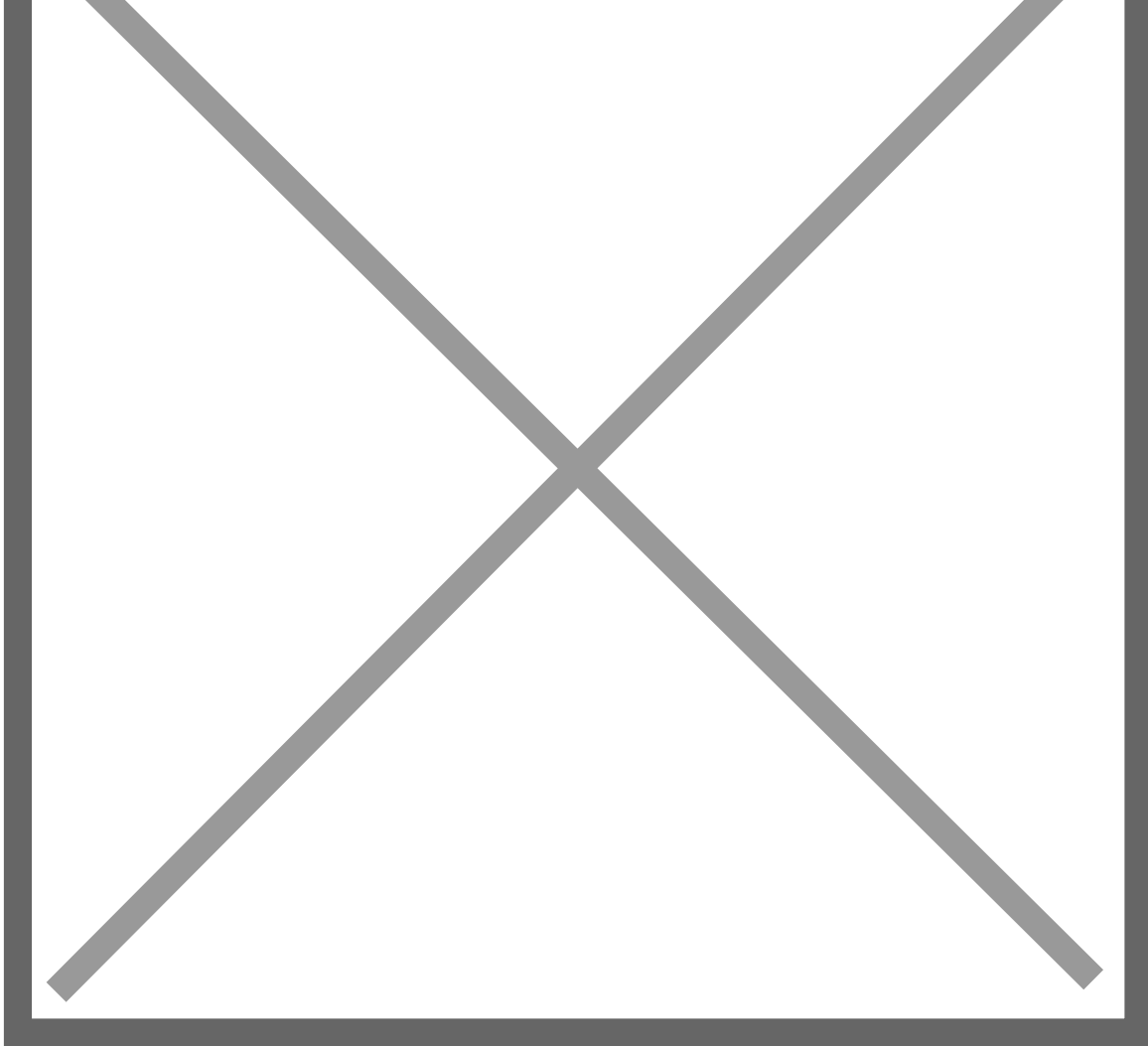
Subsequently, the Ecumenical Patriarch performed a Trisagion Memorial Service at the graves of the relatives of His predecessor, the late Patriarch Ioakeim III, which are located in the courtyard of the Holy Church, praying for the repose of their souls.



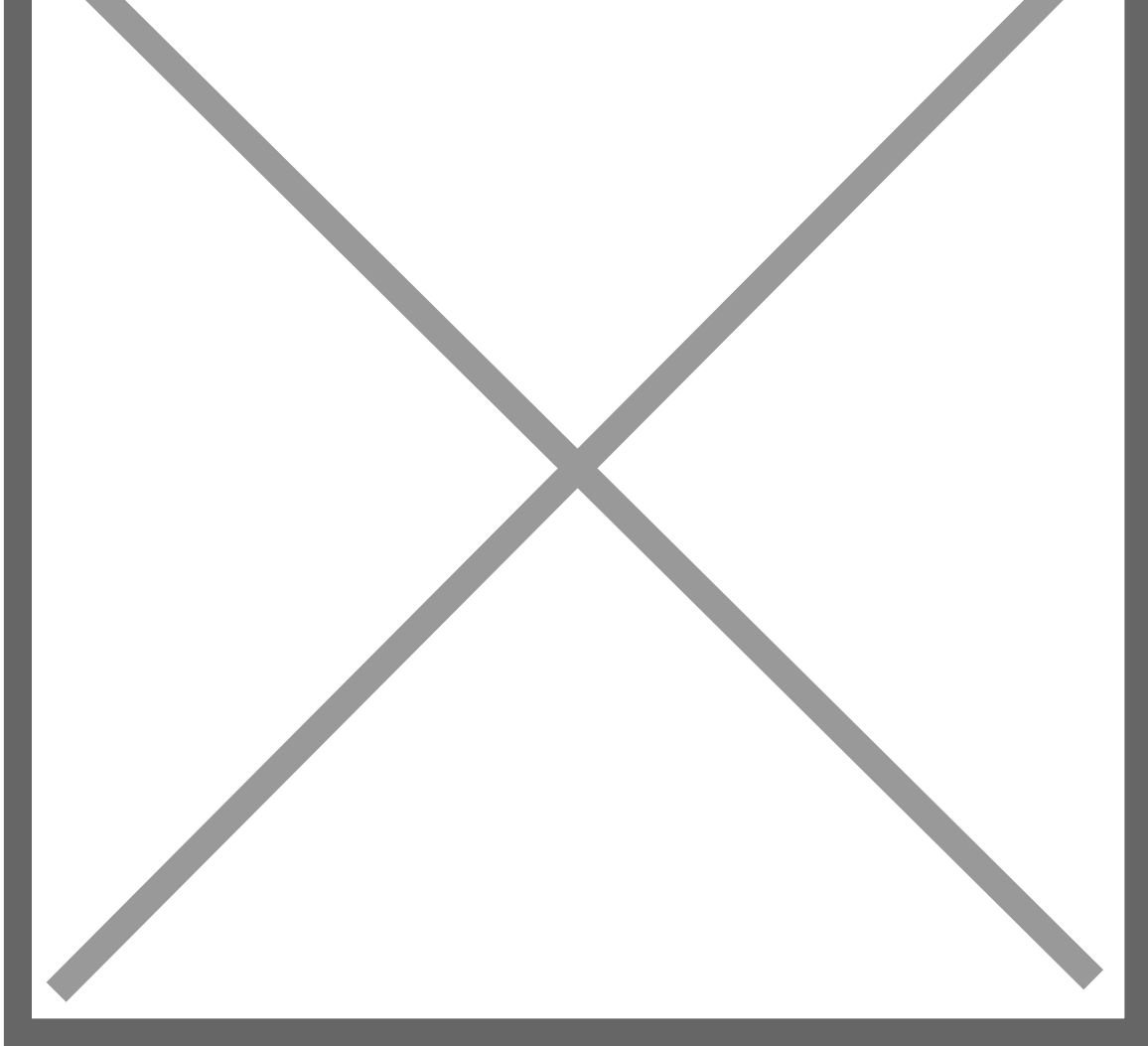


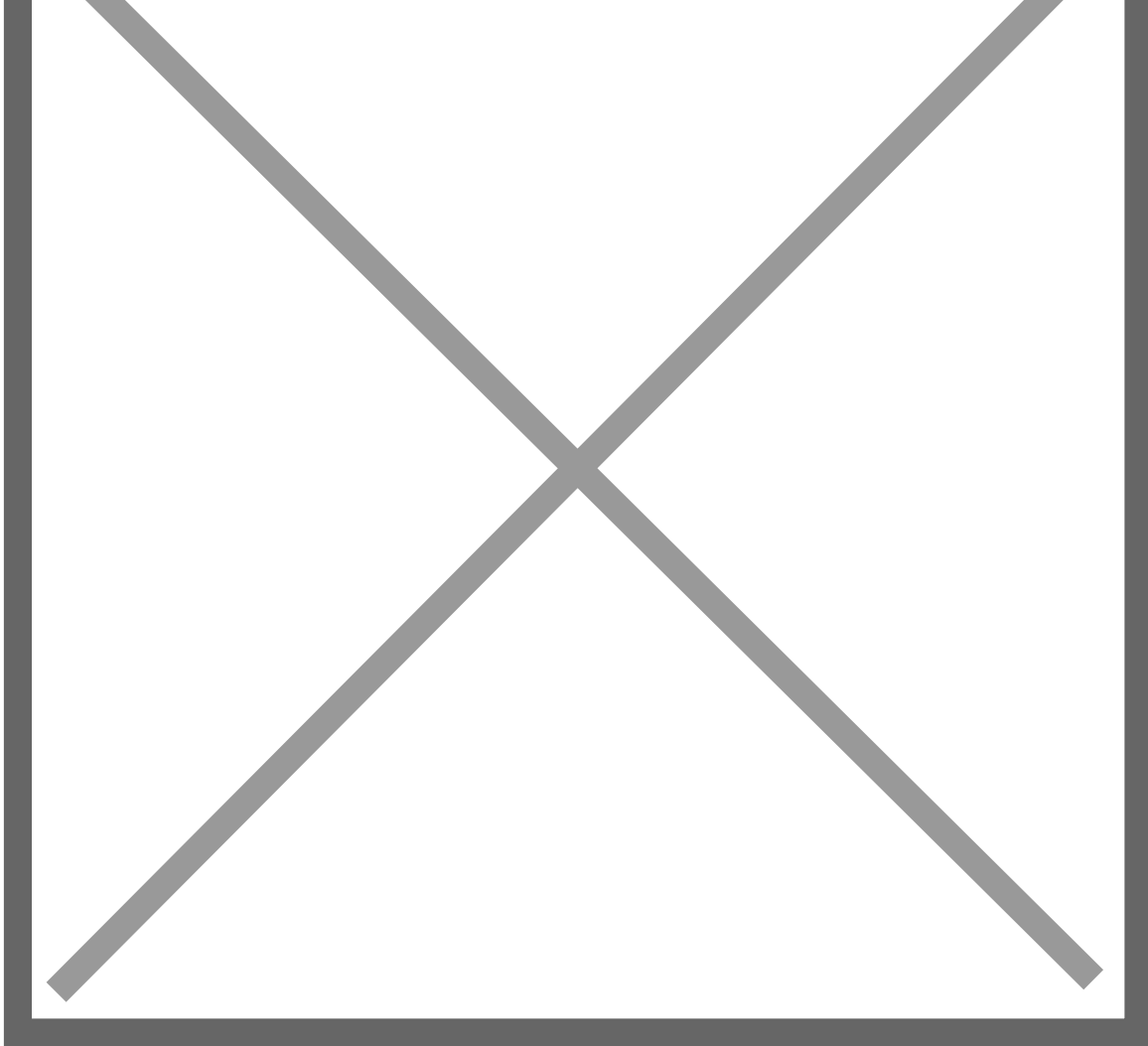




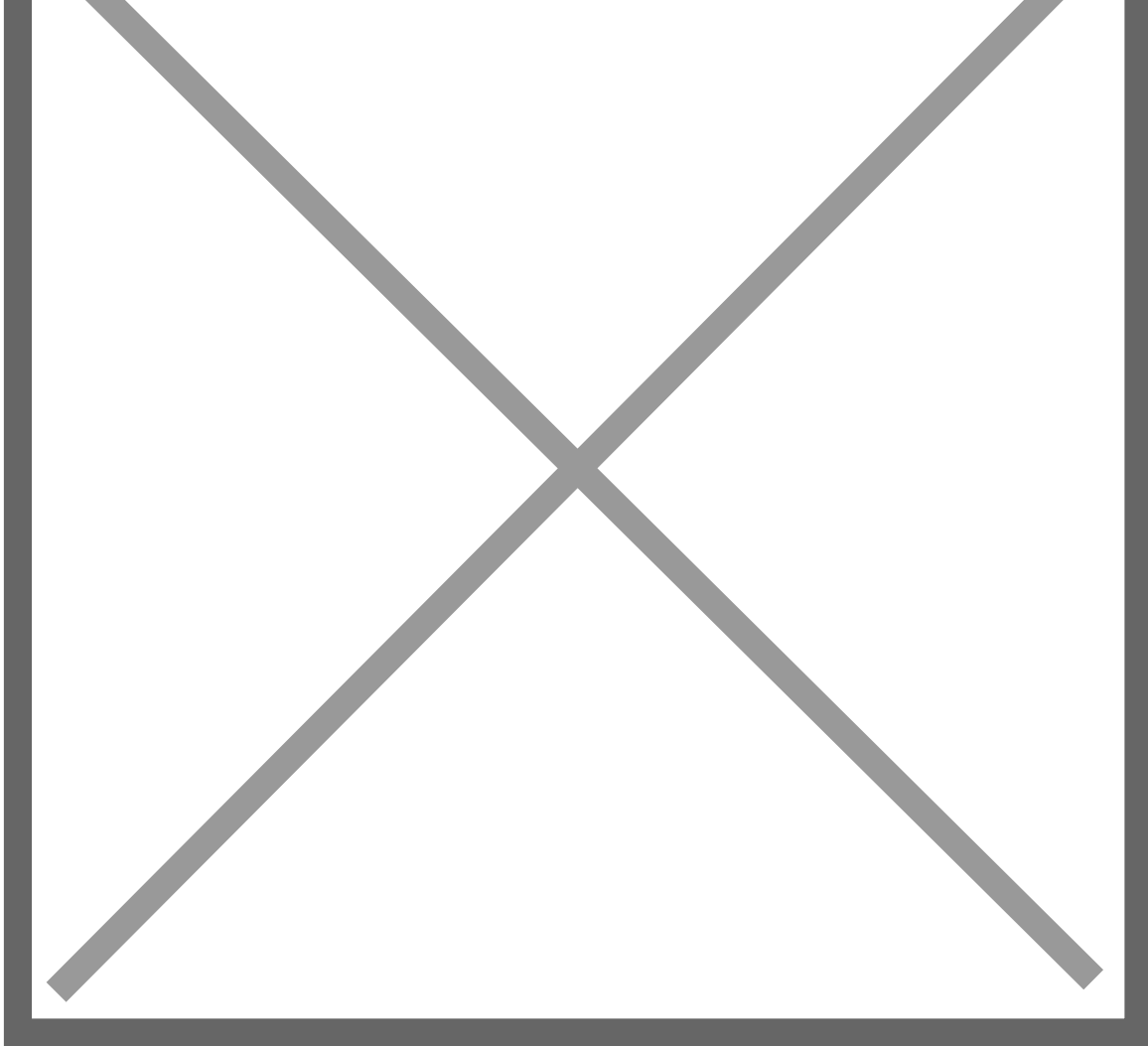


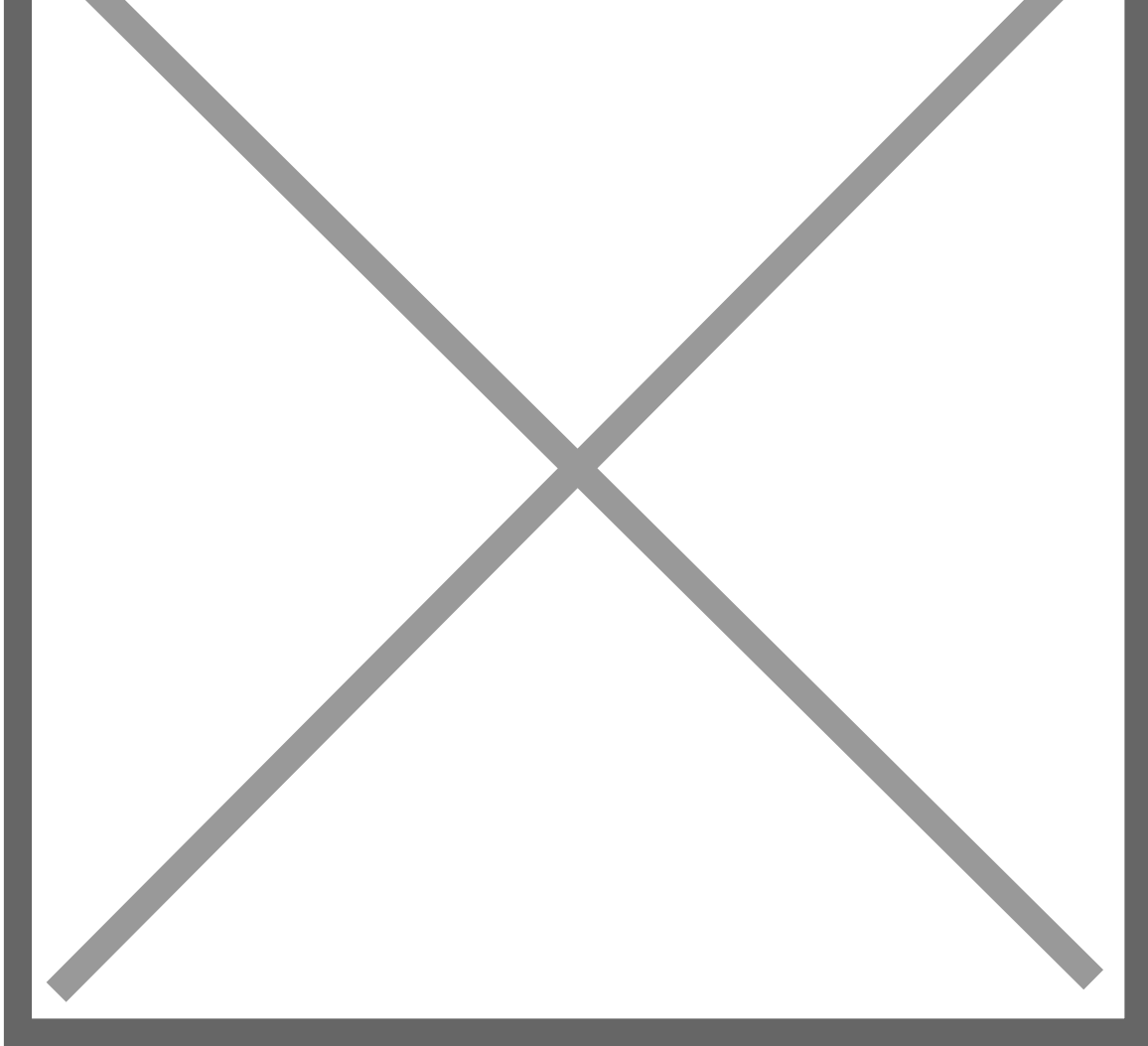


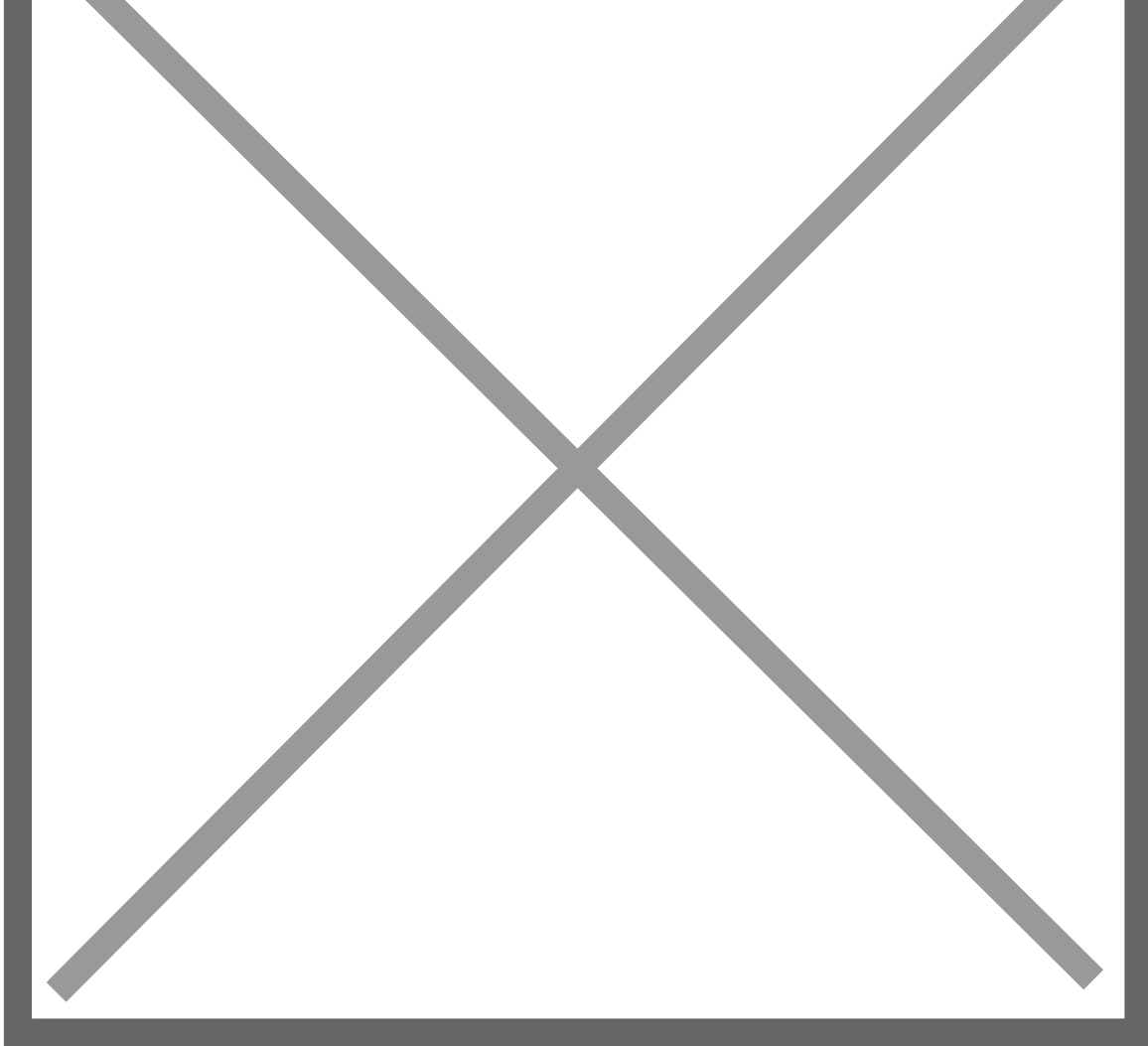


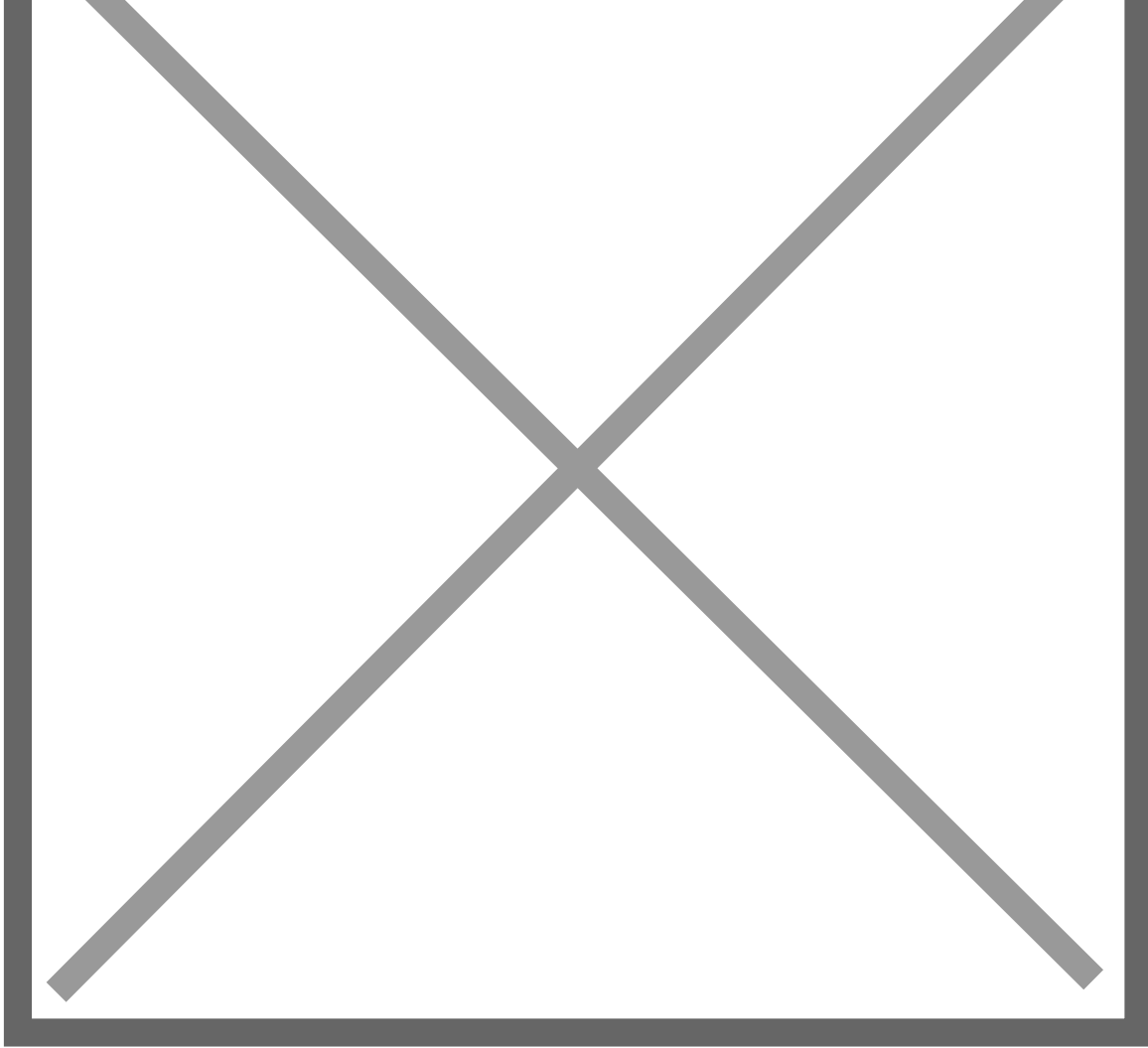


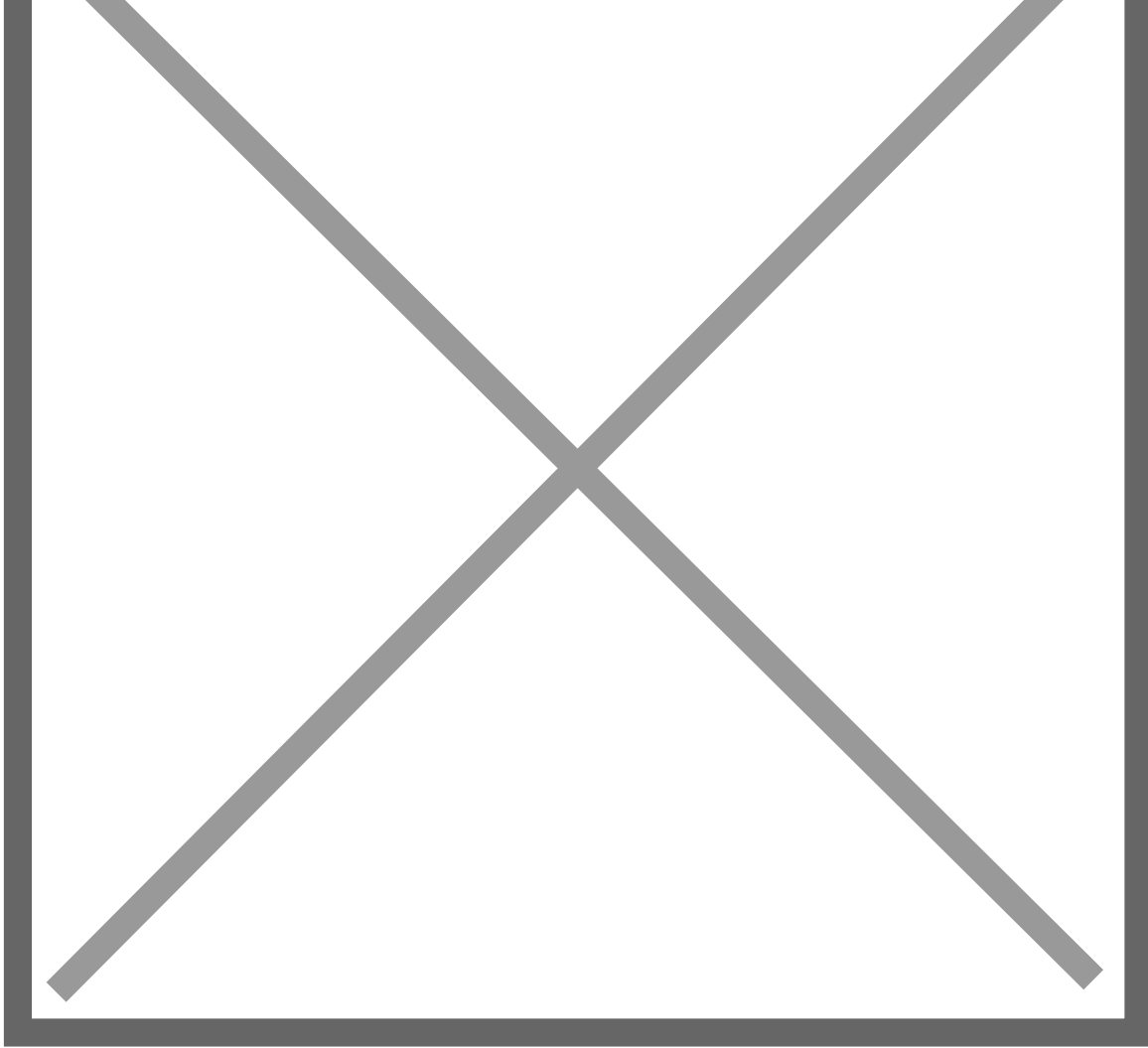


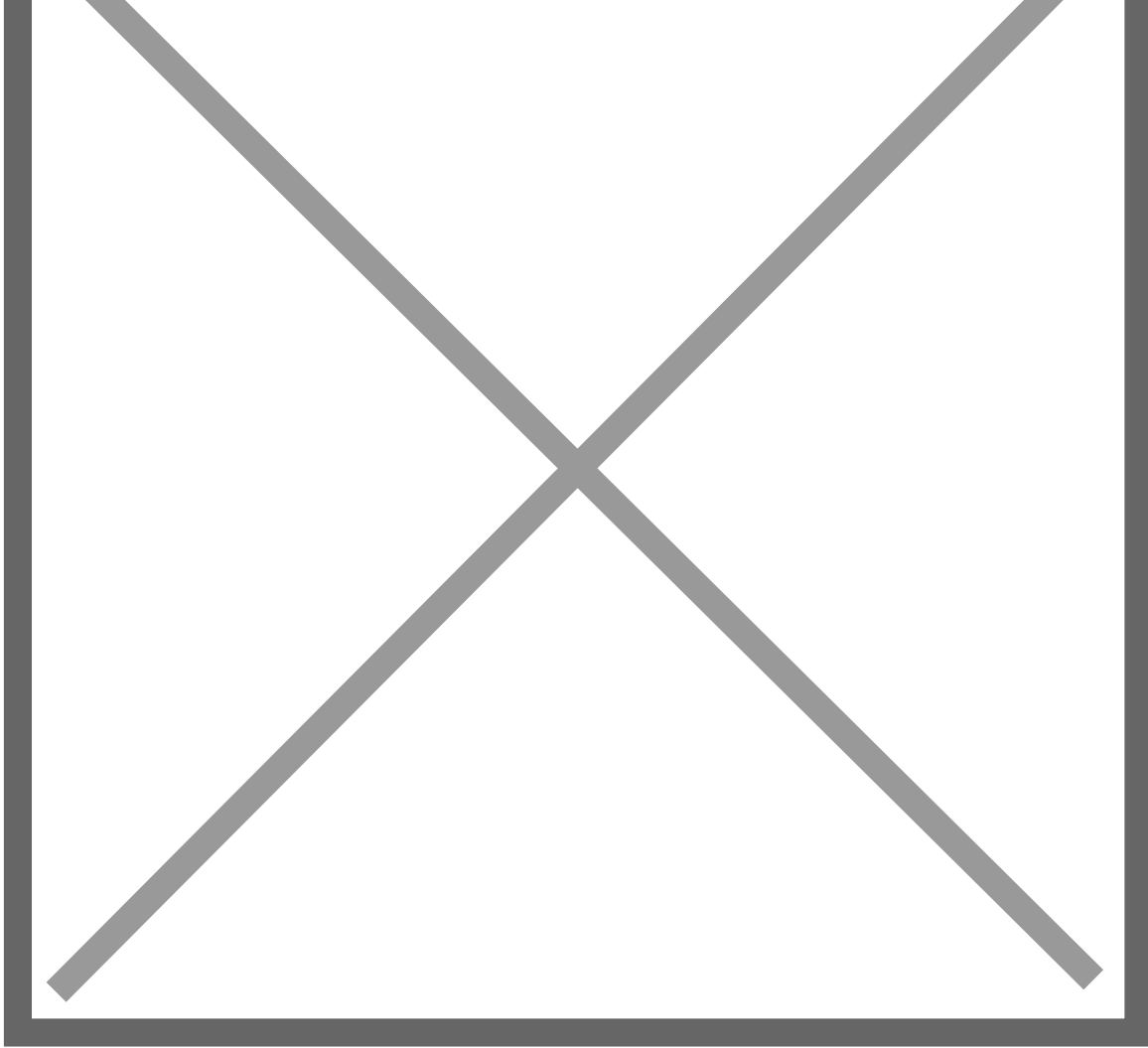




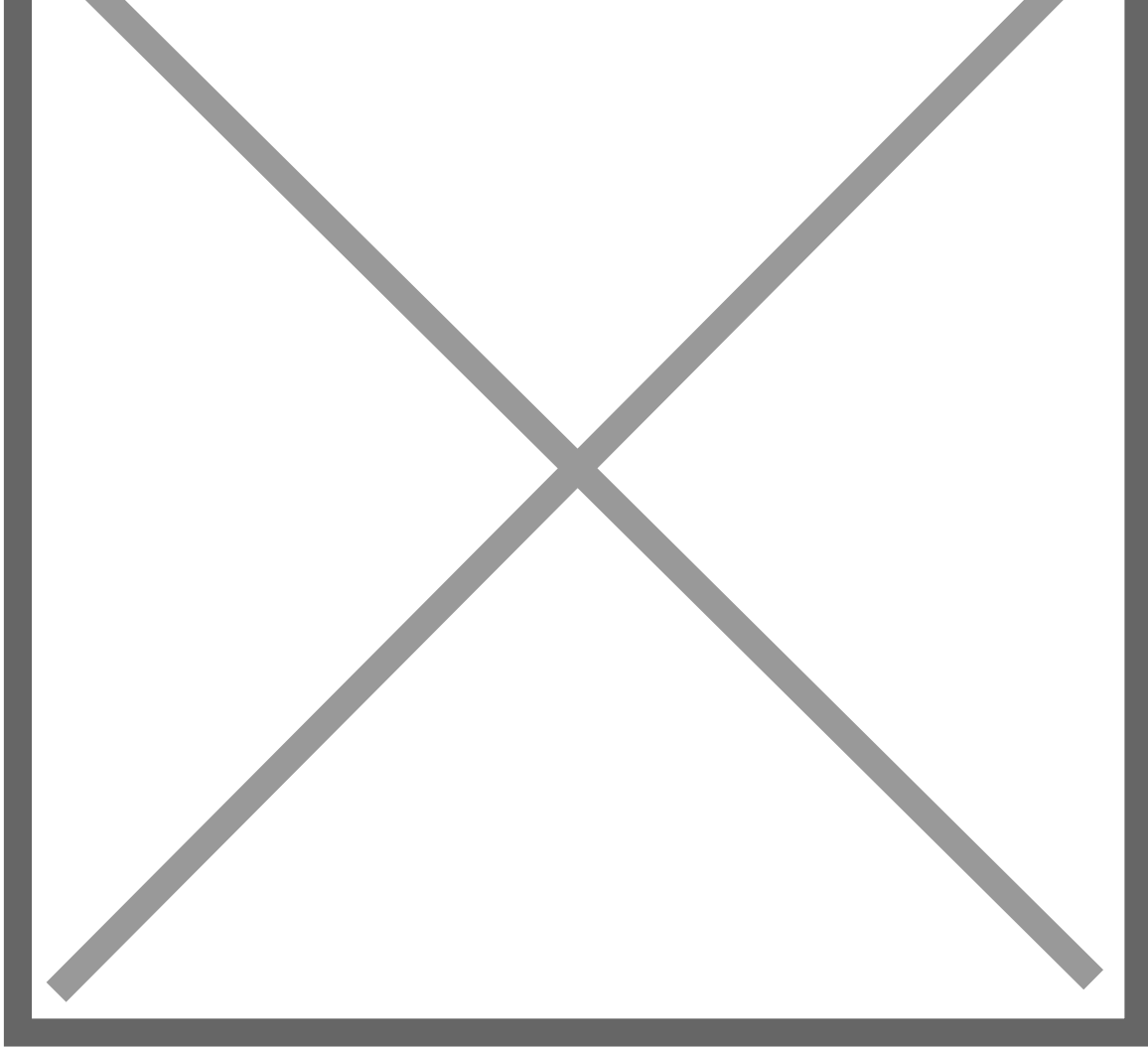


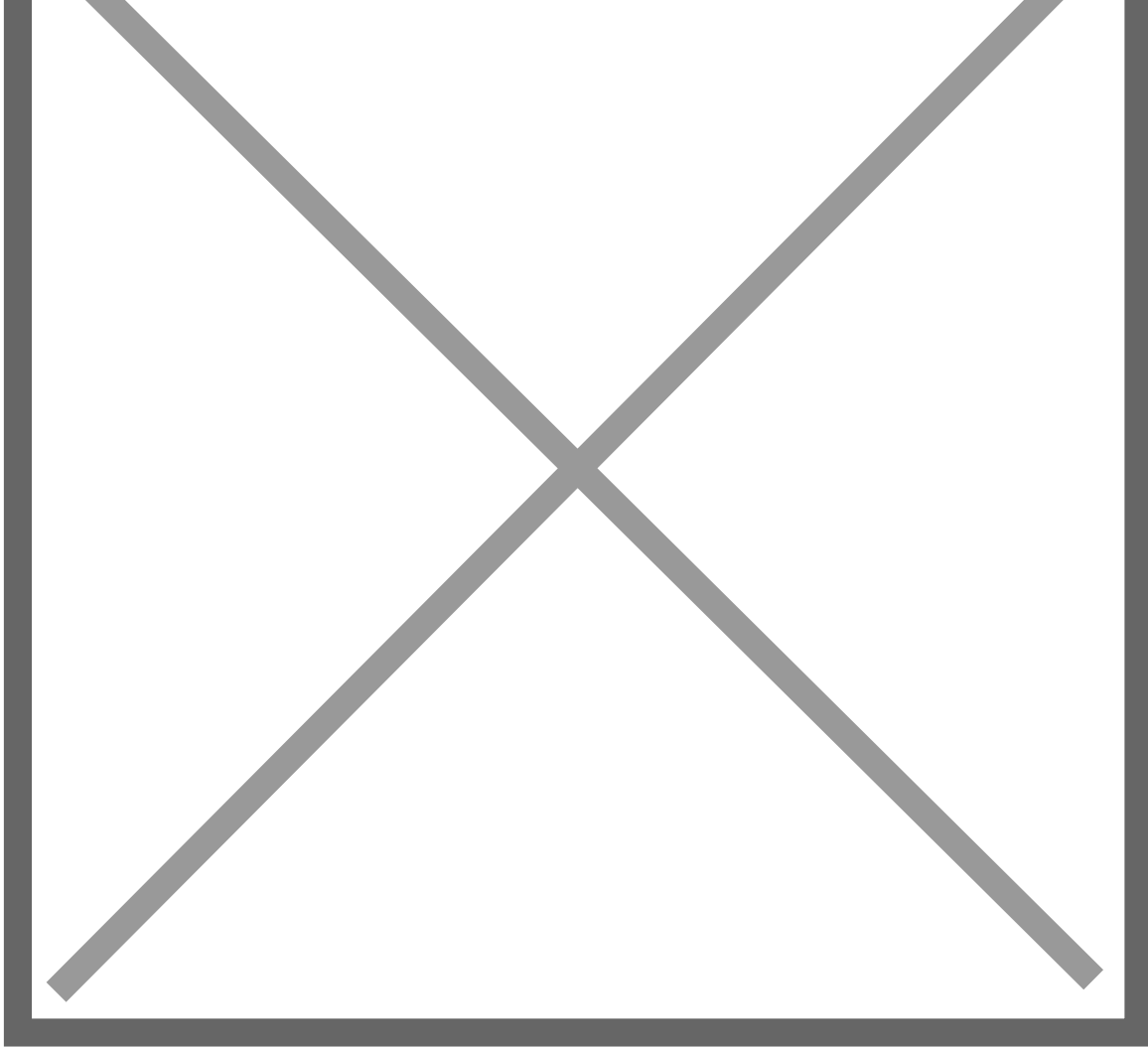




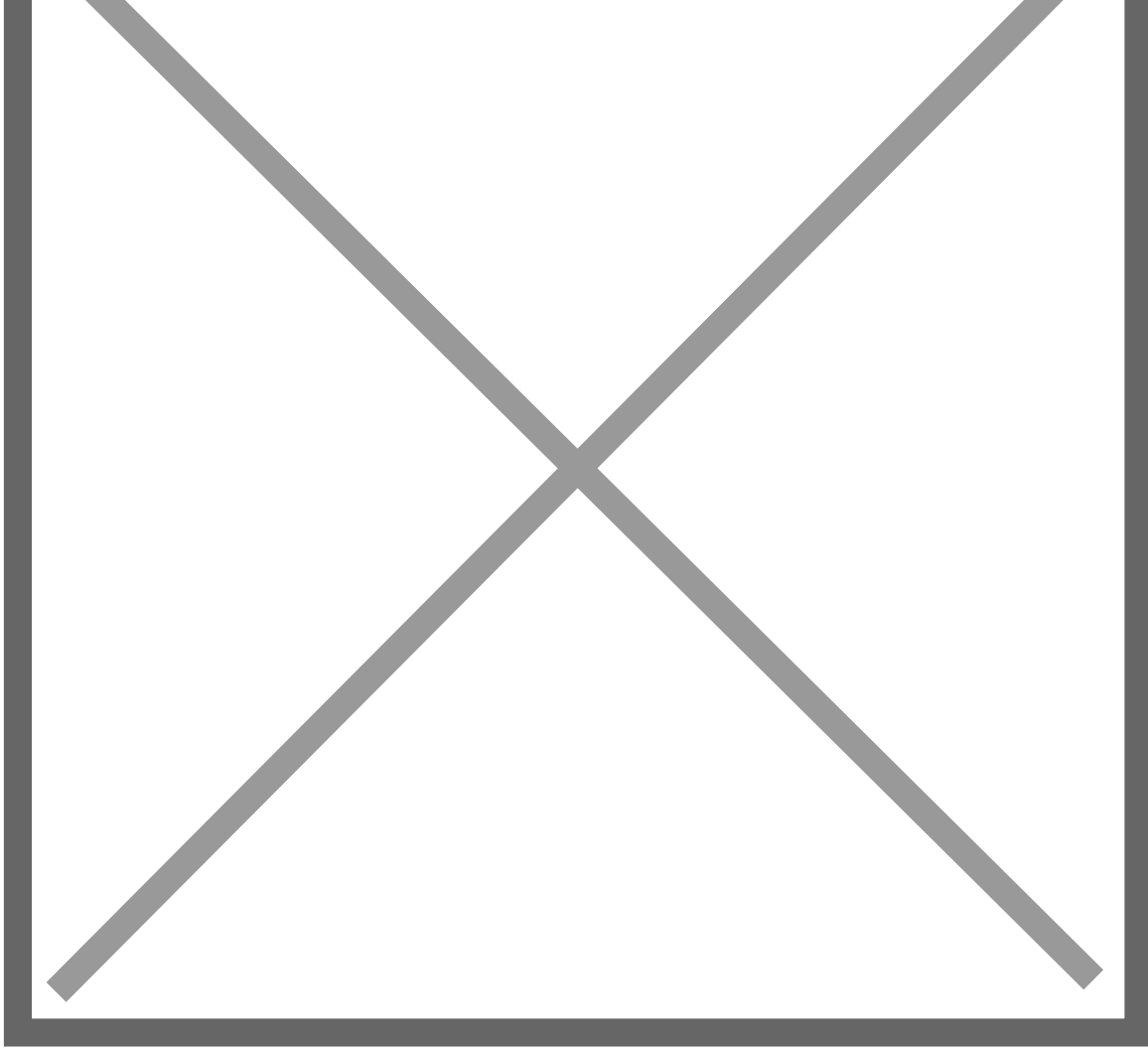


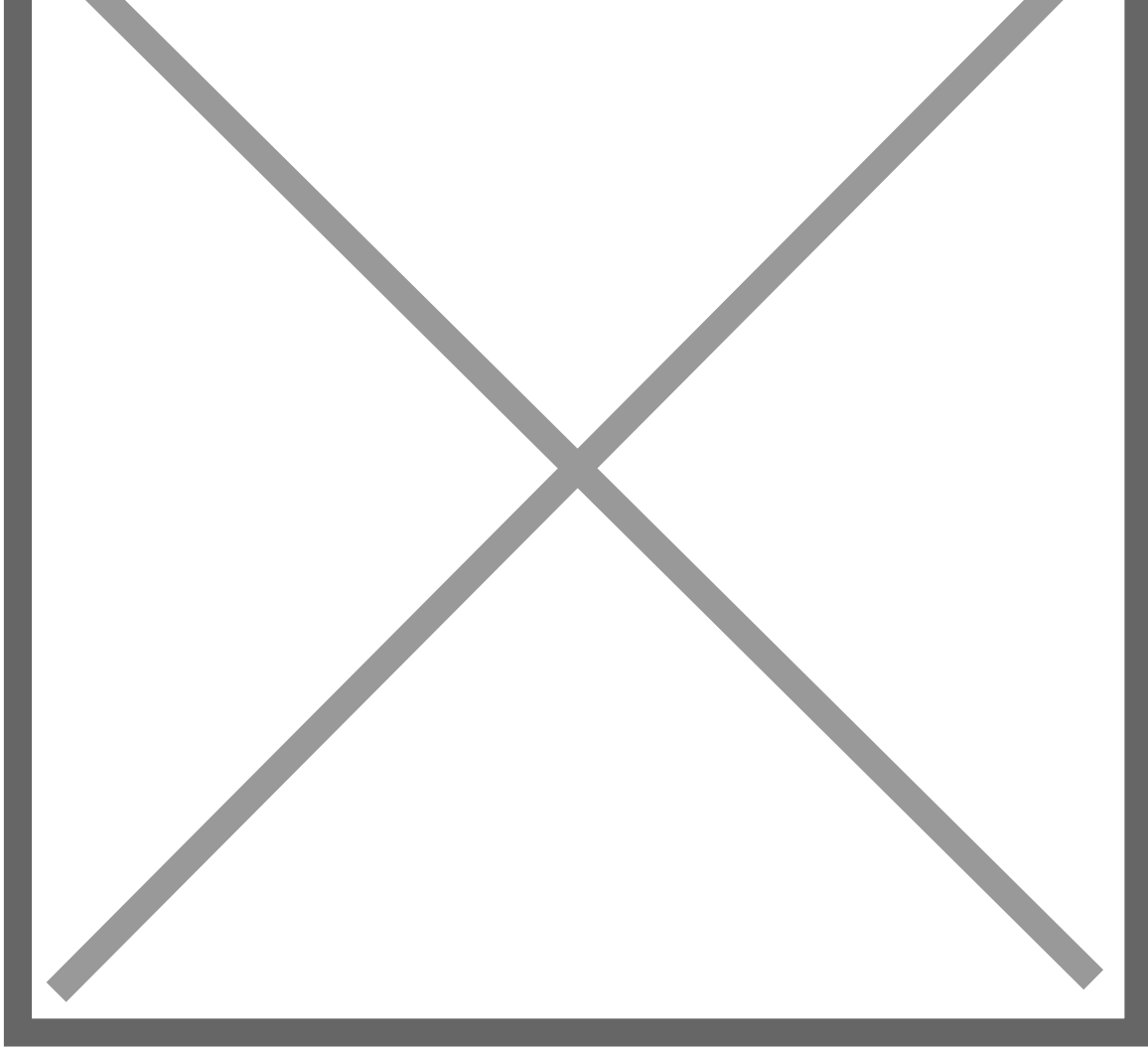














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