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The Romanian Delegations to the Holy Pan-Orthodox Synod of Crete (2016) and to Its preliminary Assemblies and Their Importance for Theological Discussions

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Abstract

In this research, the author presents the composition of the Romanian Delegations to the most important Pan-Orthodox assemblies, starting from the one that took place in Constantinople in 1923 and until the Pan-Orthodox Synod of Crete. The purpose of this prosopographical study is to show that the Romanian Orthodox Church has always treated with seriousness and responsibility these meetings, entrusting the mission of its representation to personalities belonging to the first rank of theology and church life such as Reverend Iuliu Scriban, Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală, Patriarch Justin Moisescu, Metropolitan Nifon Mihăiță, His Grace Visarion Bălțat of Tulcea, or Rev. Viorel Ioniță, and always wanted to contribute to the proper functioning of inter-Orthodox relations and the good of the church life, but without betraying any faith.

Keywords

Constantinople, Crete, Iuliu Scriban, Antonie Plămădeală, Patriarch Justin Moisescu, Synodality.

I. Foreword

The Pan-Orthodox event that took place in Crete between the 16th and the 27th of June 2016 was very important for Orthodoxy. Its relevance is highlighted both by the participation of important delegations from almost all contemporary Churches and by the contradictory echoes that the event had. Many articles and studies have been already written on this subject, despite the relatively little time that has passed since its end. This, together with the for and against attitudes, demonstrate its importance¹. Downright “Taliban” attitudes, which, resulted in the refusal to pray for signatories Hierarchs, along with fervent apologetic texts and conferences which addressed the synod’s decisions, have been the subject of many reports.

This entire multicoloured picture does nothing to highlight the importance of the event and of the fact that, largely, Orthodoxy was not yet ready for it. However, it is not the purpose of this paper to talk about the echoes of the Synod. We will just try to talk about the Romanian delegations to the event and to the preliminary Pan-Orthodox assemblies. Using documents, studies and articles published before and during the event², we

¹ Some of the most important titles and attitudes dedicated to this subject are: <http://www.teologie.net/2016/06/26/cu-ce-ne-am-ales-dupa-sinodul-din-creta/>; accessed 12. 01. 2017; His Holiness Andrei Andreicuț, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe*, in “*Renașterea* 7 (315), 2016, p. 1; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h76rEIHZ3CE>, accessed 23. 09. 2016; <http://www.apologeticum.ro/2016/06/dovezi-clare-sinodul-din-creta-este-unul-talharesc-anathema/>, accessed in 23. 09. 2016; <http://www.apologeticum.ro/2016/07/comunicat-ierarhi-preoti-monahi-si-mireni-se-dezic-de-hotararile-sinodului-panortodox-din-creta/>, accessed 23. 09. 2016; <http://www.flac-araortodoxiei.ro/2016/06/monahul-teodot-despre-sinodul-pan-ortodox-apostat.html>, accessed in 23. 09. 2016; <http://manastirea.petru-voda.ro/2016/05/28/comunicat-al-manastirii-petru-voda-despre-sinodul-din-creta-din-iunie-2016/>, accessed in 23. 09. 2016; <http://www.rostonline.ro/2016/06/concluziile-sinodului-panortodox-din-creta/>, accessed 12. 01. 2017.

² For example: ***, *Enciclica Sfântului și Marelui Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe – Creta 2016*, translation in Romanian Language by Răzvan Perșa, Cristian Sonea and Paul Siladi, in “*Tabor*” 7, 2016, pp. 3-5; <https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents>, accessed 23. 09. 2016; Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009 – Spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe*, Bucharest: Basilica Publishing House, 2013; Iuliu Scriban, *Conferința interortodoxă de la Constantinopol*, in “*Biserica Ortodoxă Română*” 3, 1923, pp. 169-171; Sebastian Stanca, *Recăsătorirea preoților*, in “*Renașterea*” 13, 1923, pp. 1-2; Sebastian Stanca,

will try to emphasise the composition of these delegations and to show its importance for the event. The research will be rather a prosopographical study and, highlighting aspects of their biography, we will try to present the competence of the members of these delegations to the Pan-Orthodox events and to speak about the way in which, by using their experience, they contributed to the establishment of peace and communion, but also to the consistency of the cultic and doctrinaire questions across the Orthodox World.

II. The Romanian Delegations to the Holy Pan-Orthodox Synod of Crete (2016) and to its preliminary assemblies, and their importance for theological discussion

In its attempt to apply the most accurate model of Jerusalemite synodality³, the Orthodox Church from all around the world has tried to rediscover, in the 20th century, the importance of Pan-Orthodox assemblies. The idea of a Pan-Orthodox Synod itself started to be put into practice only from the 70ties onwards, when its first preliminary conference took place between the 21th and the 28th of November 1976, at Chambesy⁴;

Recăsătorirea prooșilor văduvi, in “Renașterea” 41, 1924, pp. 1-3; Sebastian Stanca, *Schimbarea calendarului*, in “Renașterea” 50, 1924, pp. 1-3; Viorel Ioniță, *Participarea profesorilor români la congrese, consfătuiri și întruniri inter-ortodoxe*, in “Ortodoxia” 4, 1981, p. 559 et passim; Antonie Ploieșteanul (Plămădeală), *O privire asupra pregătirii Sfântului și Marelui Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe*, in “Ortodoxia” 2, 1977, pp. 246-249; Antim Nica, *A doua conferință Panortodoxă de la Rhodos (26-29 septembrie 1963)*, in “Biserica Ortodoxă Română” 9-10, 1963, pp. 896-899; N. I. Nicolaiescu, *A treia Conferință Panortodoxă de la Rhodos*, in “Biserica Ortodoxă Română” 11-12, 1964, pp. 1009-1012; Constantin Rus, *The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church. A canonical evaluation*, in Casian Rușeț (coord.), “Statutul actual pentru organizarea și funcționarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române – Simpozion Internațional, Caransebeș, 6-8 Octombrie 2015”, Cluj-Napoca / Caransebeș: Cluj University Press / Press of the Caransebeș Diocese, 2016, pp. 282-322.

³ For more information about this topic, see: His Beatitude Daniel Ciobotea, *Cuvânt înainte*, in V. Ioniță, “Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009 – spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe” Bucharest, Basilica Publishing House, 2013, pp. 5-7.

⁴ Rev. V. Ioniță, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe – documente pregătitoare*, Bucharest, Basilica Publishing House, 2016, p. 10.

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there had been many such assemblies before, starting from 1923⁵, when an assembly was hosted in Constantinople by the Ecumenical Patriarchy. Starting from this year, several assemblies were held until the 2016 Synod of Crete. All of them can be considered, in a way, preliminary assemblies of a Pan-Orthodox Synod.

If Churches like the Russian one refused the dialogue from the very first assembly⁶ and gradually considered retiring from the debates, the Romanian Orthodox Church was an active party in the dialogue from the beginning and until the event took place. Our delegates were always important theological personalities, prepared to understand the topics of discussion and to expose the opinion of the represented institution. For example, in 1923, the delegation nominated by Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan, who also had a rich experience in Pan-Orthodox and ecumenical dialogue⁷, was made up of the erudite archimandrite Iuliu Scriban and of senator Petre Drăghici. After the event, the former wrote an extensive chronicle of what happened, describing in detail the structure and conduct of the discussions⁸ and therefore illustrating their active involvement during the event.

Later, at the Rhodos conferences that took place in 1961, 1963 and 1964⁹, the Romanian delegation was coordinated by the erudite theologian Justin Moisescu, who became the 4th Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church (between 1978-1986). Then, as Metropolitan of Moldavia and professor of the New Testament at the Theological Institute from Bucharest, he had interesting interventions in the discussions. He was also our rep-

⁵ Rev. V. Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe...*, p. 16.

⁶ Patrick Viscuso, *Quest for reform of the Orthodox Church. The 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress. An Analysis and Translation of its Acts and decisions*, Berkeley-California, Inter Orthodox Press, 2006, p. 18.

⁷ Cf. Bishop Macarie Drăgoi (ed.), *Artisan of Christian Unity between North and East: Nathan Soderblom. His correspondence with Orthodox personalities (1896-1931)*, Stockholm: Felicitas Publishing House, 2014, pp. 437-438; Nicolae Bălan, *Texte alese*, ed. Ioan Pinteă, Bistrița, Arcade Press, 2004, pp. 115-122. The Metropolitan has also proposed the 6th point of the program of discussions proposed by the Romanian Delegation, namely the anniversary of 1600 years from the Nicaea Council. Rev. V. Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe...*, p. 22.

⁸ Rev. I. Scriban, *Conferința interortodoxă de la Constantinopol*, in "Biserica Ortodoxă Română" 3, 1923, pp. 169-171.

⁹ Rev. Timotei Aioanei, *Slujind lui Dumnezeu în Catedrala Patriarhală*, Bucharest, Basilica Publishing House, 2013, p. 30.

representative at the Chambesy conference from 1971¹⁰. Together with him, there were bishops like Antim Nica (in 1963) or theologians like Nicodim Nicolaiescu (now, bishop of Severin and Strehaia), who also wrote detailed chronicles of the event¹¹.

After the election of Metropolitan Justin as Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, his place was taken by bishop Antonie Plămădeală, later bishop of Buzău and Metropolitan of Transylvania¹², who was a great fighter for ecumenical peace and the welfare of the entire Orthodoxy, being part of important assemblies and writing about relevant aspects from other theologies¹³.

Nonetheless, despite the 1976 assembly from Chambesy, the real preparation for the Pan-Orthodox Synod started, as father Viorel Ioniță shows, only in 2014¹⁴. Starting from this moment, the Romanian Orthodox Church had a representative delegation to all the discussions. At the first meeting, our delegates were: His Holiness Nifon Mihăiță, the Archbishop of Târgoviște and Honorary Metropolitan, and Rev. Ioniță¹⁵. They would be our representatives for the next four assemblies that took place in the same location (the second between the 3rd and 12th of September 1982, the 3rd between the 20th of October and the 6th of November 1986, and the 4th between the 6th and the 13th of June 2009¹⁶). While the first one is known for his contributions to Orthodox missiology¹⁷, the second one is

¹⁰ T. Aioanei, *Slujind lui Dumnezeu...*, p. 30.

¹¹ See: Antim Nica, *A doua conferință Panortodoxă...*, pp.896-899; N. I. Nicolaiescu, *A treia Conferință Panortodoxă...*, pp. 1009-1012.

¹² Cf. Antonie Ploieșteanul (Plămădeală), *O privire asupra pregătirii...*, pp. 246-249.

¹³ See, for example: Antonie Plămădeală, *Ideea de sacru la Rudolf Otto din punct de vedere catolic și ortodox*, in "Ortodoxia" 3, 1958, pp. 430-440. Cf. Ioan Ică, *Rolul femeii în Biserica Ortodoxă. Concluziile Consultației interortodoxe Rhodos, 30 oct. -7 nov. 1988*, in "Revista Teologică" 2, 1989, pp. 121-127.

¹⁴ He says: "The unlocking the preparation of the Holy and Great Council decisions were made by the Heads of the Orthodox Churches of Synaxis at the Phanar, Istanbul, from 6 to 9 March 2014". V. Ioniță, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod...*, p. 13.

¹⁵ V. Ioniță, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod...*, pp. 30-38.

¹⁶ V. Ioniță, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod...*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁷ He wrote some books such as: Nifon Mihăiță, *Misiologie creștină*, Bucharest, Assa Press, 2002; N. Mihăiță, *Ortodoxie și Ecumenism*, Bucharest, Agora Press, 2000; N. Mihăiță, *Politica Religioasă a lui Mihai Viteazul*, Târgoviște, Press of the Orthodox Archdiocese of Târgoviște, 2001; N. Mihăiță, *Misiune și viață*, Bucharest, Assa Press, 2001.

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an important theologian, writer¹⁸ and employee of the Ecumenical Council from Geneva during several decades. Thus, both of them are important and well-known theologians, with competences in the fields debated in the assemblies.

Starting from the 5th preliminary assembly, that also took place in Chambesy between the 10th and the 17th of October 2015 and was called by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the 5th of August of the same year¹⁹, the Romanian delegation became richer with one member. It would also receive the Bishop Visarion Bălțat from Tulcea²⁰, a good theologian who studied at the University of Athens and published over 200 articles and studies in different theological reviews and newspapers from Romania and from abroad²¹.

Then, at the Holy Pan-Orthodox Synod of Crete, the Romanian Orthodox Church was represented by a delegation of 25 Bishops, Archbishops and Metropolitans, coordinated by His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel²².

¹⁸ His most important publications are: Viorel Ioniță, Hans Langendörfer SJ, Roger Williamson, *Versöhnung. Gabe Gottes und Quelle neuen Lebens. Eine Arbeitshilfe für die Vorbereitung der Zweiten Europäischen Ökumenischen Versammlung*, St. Gallen, Genf, 1995; Johann Marte, Viorel Ioniță, Iacob Mârza, Laura Stanciu, Ernst Christoph Suttner (eds.), *Unirea Românilor transilvăneni cu Biserica Romei*, 1st volume - "De la începuturi până în anul 1761", Bucharest, Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 2010; Michael Beintker, Viorel Ioniță, Jochen Kramm, *Taufe im Leben der Kirchen. Dokumentation eines orthodox-evangelischen Dialogs in Europa*, Leuenberger: LIT Verlag, 2011; Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009 – Spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe*; Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009 – spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe*.

¹⁹ V. Ioniță, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod...*, p. 51.

²⁰ V. Ioniță, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod...*, p. 51.

²¹ For more information about his life and activity, see: <http://www.episcopiatulcii.ro/arhiereu-biografia.html>, accessed 12. 01. 2017.

²² The delegates were: His Beatitude Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church; His Holiness Teofan, Archbishop of Iași and Metropolitan of Moldova and Bucovina, His Holiness Laurențiu, Archbishop of Sibiu and Metropolitan of Ardeal, His Holiness Andrei, Archbishop of Vad, Feleac and Cluj and Metropolitan of Cluj, Maramureș and Sălaj, His Holiness Irineu, Archbishop of Craiova and Metropolitan of Oltenia, His Holiness Ioan, Archbishop of Timișoara and Metropolitan of Banat, His Holiness Iosif, Romanian Orthodox Archbishop of Western Europe and Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan of Western and Southern Europe, His Holiness Serafim, Romanian Orthodox Archbishop of Germany, Austria and Luxembourg and Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan of Germany, Central and Northern Europe, His Holiness

Moreover, there were priests and lay theologians, who accompanied the hierarchs and advised them during the debates. If someone takes a look at their biographies²³, he / she will see that all of them had a rich ecumenical experience, serious theological studies and they all had pastoral interactions with different denominations and religions during their activity.

III. Conclusions

In the previous pages we have summarised the commissions that attended the preliminary assemblies and the 2016 Synod of Crete. Now at the end of the research, we consider it appropriate to resume some important information that has been already presented and to draw conclusions. As we can see, ever since the first Pan-Orthodox meetings, the Romanian Orthodox Church has shown a special interest in these manifestations. Therefore, it has delegated to each meeting leading personalities from the field of theology and church life and has made interesting proposals for discussion, accepting or sanctioning certain decisions.

Nifon, Archbishop of Târgoviște, His Holiness Irineu, Archbishop of Alba-Iulia, His Holiness Ioachim, Archbishop of Roman and Bacău, his Holiness Casian, Archbishop of Lower Danube, His Holiness Timotei, Archbishop of Arad, His Holiness Nicolae, the Romanian Orthodox Archbishop of the Americas, His Holiness Sofronie, Bishop of Oradea, His Holiness Nicodim, Bishop of Severin and Strehaiia, His Holiness Visarion, Bishop of Tulcea, His Holiness Petroniu, Bishop of Sălaj, His Holiness Siluan, Romanian Orthodox Bishop of Hungary, His Holiness Siluan, Romanian Orthodox Bishop of Italy, His Holiness Timotei, Romanian Orthodox Bishop of Spain and Portugal, His Holiness Macarie, Romanian Orthodox Bishop of Northern Europe, His Holiness Varlaam Ploieșteanul, Assistant Bishop to the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchy and secretary of the Holy Synod, His Holiness Emilian Lovișteanul, Assistant Bishop to the Archdiocese of Râmnic, His Holiness Ioan Casian of Vicina, Assistant Bishop to the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of the Americaa. <http://basilica.ro/membrii-delegatiei-patriarhiei-romane-care-vor-participa-la-sfantul-si-marele-sinod/>, accessed 12. 01. 2017. As we can see, the two bishops that were part of the preliminary debates, His Most Holiness Nifon of Târgoviște and His Holiness Visarion of Tulcea, were also part of this delegation.

²³ For presentations of their lives and activities, see, for example: Rev. Mircea Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 2nd edition, Bucharest: Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 2002; Rev. Mircea Păcurariu, *Enciclopedia Ortodoxiei Românești*, Bucharest: Press of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2010; Rev. Alexandru Moraru, *Ierarhii Bisericii Ortodoxe Române-2005: Bio-bibliografie selectivă*, Alba-Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2005.

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If we take a look at the biographies of the delegates, we notice that the Church has always sent well-trained people with serious concerns in Pan-Orthodox theology and with a rich experience both in terms of religious life and dialogue. That happened to all the meetings, since the Pan-Orthodox meeting held in Constantinople in 1923 until the 2016 meeting. This proves that the Romanian Orthodox Church has taken these debates seriously and endeavoured to provide input and expertise, contributing to the Church and making sure, during the discussions, that its doctrinaire identity and faith remained untouched.

While today, some priests and monks rush to accuse participants to the Synod of Crete of betraying the Church and of resorting to inappropriate attitudes, the Romanian Orthodox bishops had strived to send well-prepared people to the debates and to treat things with the utmost seriousness and responsibility. Therefore, we believe that many of those who for a while now see in any synodic action a betrayal of the Church and a demonic work should be aware of all the intellectual skills of our representatives to the Synod and leave aside pride and the arrogance of assuming qualities and skills they do not have.

If the bishops of the Romanian Orthodox Church have entrusted the task of discussing issues that are fundamental for universal Orthodoxy to well-trained people, skilled in analysis, we consider that it would be appropriate for those who contest the decisions of the council of Crete to do the same and choose wisely their representatives in the dialogue with the participants to the council.