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Welcoming address to the Summer School for Ukrainian Theologians
Volos Academy, June 30, 2019

Your Eminence, Your Grace, Dear Rector of the Volin Theological Academy,
Dear Professors, Dear Participants,

On behalf of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, it is my great joy to greet this honorable audience, and to warmly welcome you to the city of Volos, the Diocese of Demetrias and the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, wishing you an enjoyable stay, and fruitful work, exchanges and discussions during the Summer School, with all God's blessings.

The Volos Academy for Theological Studies — a Church related institution which in 2014 was recognized as Research Center by the Greek Ministry of Education and Research — functions as an open forum for thought and dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the broader scholarly community of intellectuals worldwide. In its effort to foster interdisciplinary and inter-religious understanding, the Volos Academy has been organizing a series of studies, international seminars, conferences, round tables and publications. In order to meet this objective, the Academy has collaborated with numerous academic and ecumenical institutions, as well as with a number of journals, academic periodicals and publication houses, jointly addressing problems and challenges of our time, in a spirit of respect for each other's differences. As a result of this scholarly activity, the Diocese of Demetrias and the city of Volos have become an international meeting place for encounter and dialogue.

Today we are pleased and honored to welcome in Volos Professors and students from the Kiev and Volyn theological academies, as well as from the Chernivtsi National University. The recent establishment of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Ukraine is a great moment in the history of contemporary Orthodoxy. By a bold decision, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew the Ist and the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople attempted to address a schism that oscillated a whole country and which deprived millions of faithful, clergy and theologians of the canonical ties and ecclesial communion with ecumenical

Orthodoxy. The stigma of schism itself hindered osmosis with other traditions, not allowing spiritual exchange and pastoral care, while at the same time it encouraged introverted behaviors. The Ecumenical Patriarchate has healed this difficult situation, using all means of ecclesiastical economy, precisely in order not to perpetuate extreme problematic attitudes on a canonical, ecclesiological and pastoral level.

This urgent situation makes the clergy and theologians training of the new Church an imperative, especially for an institution with the openness and capacities of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, which has a long experience in organizing demanding conferences and all sorts of training activities. It has developed a culture of meaningful dialogue and cordial reception of each other, while it seeks the honest exchange of views and has the staff, knowledge and infrastructure to provide effective communication. If this is taking place for about twenty years now in the city of Volos, a medium-sized city, and beyond the Orthodox or generally Christian framework, seeking dialogue with every man of good will, it is ready to do so for the brothers of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

The Volos Academy is broadly known for the quality of its theological work, its connection to the most important theological centers of global Orthodoxy, as well as collaborating with world-wide reference points of Christian and secular education. It has created a wide network of contacts, while at the same time it receives a plenty of stimuli for its own work. By undertaking the training of the Ukrainian clergy and theologians, the Volos Academy will contribute to the deepening of the relations between Greek-speaking Orthodoxy, as represented in this case by our diocese and more widely the Church of Greece, and the new Church.

Therefore, I welcome you all, theologians, clergy, professors and trainers, with great joy in our local Church and in the beautiful city of Volos, always a center of dialogue and meeting point of different traditions, religions and cultures, wholeheartedly wishing the successful completion of this summer school's work.

Before closing this welcoming address, let me thank the people thanks to whom this Summer School was made possible: Our bishop Metropolitan Ignatius of Demetrias for the enthusiastic reception and the continual support of the idea of the theological training; our sponsors, the General Secretariat for the Religious Affairs of the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, and its General Secretary Dr. George Kalantzis, as well as the Huffington Ecumenical Institute in California, and its Director Fr. Cyril Hovorun, for their generous financial

contribution; the professors of the Summer School for their commitment and confidence in this project; the staff of the “Thessalia Conference Center,” and of the Holy Metropolis of Demetrias who will assist us during all the days of the Summer School; last but not least, I would like to thank my colleagues from the Secretariat of the Volos Academy, Mrs Claire Nicolaou and Valila Giannoutaki, and Mr. Filoktimon Stamopoulos Samaras, for their valuable logistic and technical support. Finally we would like to thank all of you present here, for travelling so long distance, for your confidence in Volos Academy, and for your faithful commitment in this enlightening spiritual, intellectual and academic journey.