



**Press Release**  
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## **Churches urge European Union to help with protection of the cultural heritage in the Republic of Cyprus**

Protection of the cultural heritage in the Northern part of Cyprus was called for at the seminar hosted today by MEP Dr. Eleni Theoharous, under the high patronage of His Excellency Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, the Representation of the Church of Cyprus to the EU and in co-operation with the Church and Society Commission of CEC. The destruction of Holy sites in the occupied areas of Cyprus still remains.

The seminar was opened by His Beatitude the Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos II. In his opening speech he said: “We ask the European Union to support our demand strongly and powerfully and to work systematically and effectively in order to restore and ensure respect for religious freedoms in the occupied part of our island; to put an end to the looting and plundering of our sacred sites and monuments and to protect our religious sites.”

Two programmes concerning the restoration of cultural and religious monuments have already been completed within the occupied part of Cyprus, the Agios Nikolaos Church (Bedestan) and Emerke Hamam. There is also another programme currently running which consists of a fund of €800 000 for the architectural documentation of religious monuments. In this respect, speakers and participants of the seminar requested from the EU Institutions, and especially those with the proper competencies such as the Commissioner for Enlargement and the Commissioner for Culture and Education as well as the Committee for Culture and Education in the European Parliament, to enhance and increase their engagements in view of saving the religious and other cultural heritage that runs the risk of absolute destruction. We also call for the respect of religious freedom and human rights in the occupied part of Cyprus for all religious denominations. We consider it our duty, within a civilized society, to respect, protect and save the religious and cultural heritage of the occupied part of Cyprus which constitutes, in fact, a civilization belonging to the EU and the international community.