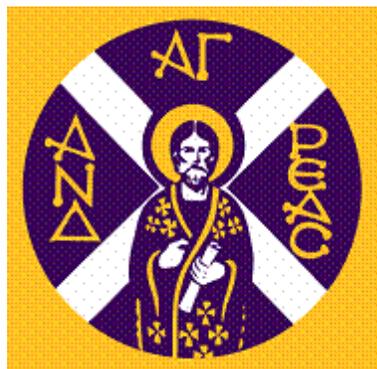


Order of St. Andrew the Apostle
ARCHONS OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE



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On Reopening Hagia Sophia / The EU Perspective

A Misguided Campaign that Demeans the Real Survival Struggle of the Ecumenical Patriarchate which is at the Precipice of Extinction due to the Systematic Policies of Religious Persecution by the Government of Turkey

Despite claims to the contrary, the European Union has not "pressured the Turkish government to restore St. Sophia Cathedral from a Museum into a Greek Orthodox Church," nor is there a "requirement of 1,000,000 signatures on a petition before it makes this conversion a prerequisite for Turkey's accession into the European Union." At this time we are compelled to release an official letter from the European Union that clarifies their position regarding the re-opening of Hagia Sophia (see below) and to re-lease the position of the Order of St. Andrew / Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in America that follows.

Many readers may have received an email requesting them to sign a petition supporting the "restoration and reopening" of Hagia Sophia. The email states that this petition would oppose Turkey's entry into the European Union unless or until the Turkish government "restored" Hagia Sophia (currently a museum) to a church. To my mind, Hagia Sophia is the most magnificent edifice in the world. I believe that its mosaics, particularly the 14th century Deisis with its depiction of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and St. John the Forerunner, are among the greatest works of art ever conceived! However, this campaign is misguided and lamentable. It demeans the current survival struggle that is unfolding before us regarding the life of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to which the world community and the Orthodox faithful have barely awakened. The call to action to which all women and men of conscience should respond is the call to protect the *living institution* of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

For the greater part of eighteen centuries, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has preserved and passed on the Christian message. Through countless and unimaginable hardships it has remained as a testament to faith and the enlightenment for all mankind. Over the course of the last several decades, elements in the Turkish government have systematically moved to extinguish the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Not only has an environment of religious intolerance been fomented, certain members of the Turkish state have persecuted the Orthodox clergy and laity, closed down its only theological school and confiscated its properties. The litany of aggressive persecutions is vast and ghastly.

Instead of being beguiled in the comfortable click of an email signature endorsing a petition to "restore and reopen" Hagia Sophia, let us all commit to taking profound action to ensure the perpetual health of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Here are some of the many things you can do:

1. Make a donation to the [Order of Saint Andrew](#) for its Patriarchal Defense Initiatives. These initiatives will support legal actions and seeking governmental intervention against the repression of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the courts and governments of the United States, Europe and the Middle East;

2. Write President George W. Bush, copying Secretary of State Rice and House Speaker Dennis Hastert, and your Senators and Congressmen, your state, city and local representatives stating something like the following: *America was established, in part, because of the desire for religious freedom. The First Amendment makes it very clear that freedom of worship is a fundamental human right recognized by the Founding Fathers and the framers of the United States Constitution. Turkey, as an ally of the United States, ought to recognize legally the Ecumenical Patriarchate; return its confiscated properties back to the Mother Church; not interfere in Patriarchal elections or in the Ecumenical Patriarchate's canonical governance; and immediately reopen Halki Theological School which was forcibly closed in 1971. For Turkey to join the European Union it must act like Europeans and Americans; i.e. recognize fundamental religious freedom and inalienable human rights.*
3. Contact our brothers and sisters of all faith and creeds, whether they be Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant – Muslim or Jewish and ask them to join in a united stance for religious tolerance and freedom of faith.

These are the true calls to action to which we must respond. Let us resolve to ourselves and the world that a true tragedy of *our generation* – the extinguishment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate – must be averted.



The Deisis



Anthony J. Limberakis, MD
National Commander
Order of St. Andrew the Apostle
Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in America



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Washington, April 13, 2007
D/539

Father Alexandros Karloutsos
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
8 East 79th Street

New York, NY 10021

Dear Father Karloutsos,

Following up to recent correspondence and our last phone call, I can confirm to you that it is not accurate that "the European Parliament has pressured the Turkish government to restore Saint Sophia Cathedral from a Museum into a Greek Orthodox Church." It is also not accurate that "the European Parliament has set a requirement of 1,000,000 signatures on a petition before it makes this conversion a prerequisite for Turkey's accession into the European Union."

The position of the European Parliament with regard to Turkey's accession negotiations to the European Union has been generally supportive, provided that the country fully embraces EU principles, including the ones on the protection of religious freedom. The most recent report on Turkey was adopted by the Parliament in September 2006 and the part on religious freedoms says the following:

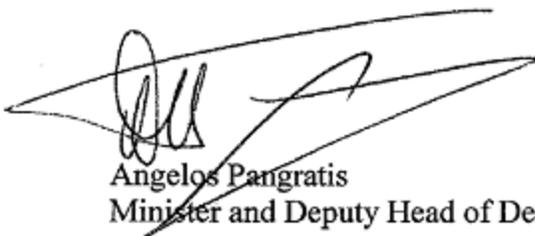
« 33. Reiterates its call on the Turkish authorities, expressed in its previous resolutions, to fulfil their commitments regarding freedom of religion and to take concrete steps to eradicate obstacles facing religious minorities as regards, in particular, their legal status, the training of clergy and their property rights (the Ecumenical Patriarchate, for example, has suffered the expropriation of 30 properties in recent times); calls for an immediate stop to all seizure and selling off by the Turkish authorities of properties belonging to religious communities; calls for the immediate re-opening of the Greek Orthodox Halki seminary and the public use of the ecclesiastical title of the Ecumenical Patriarch; calls for the protection and recognition of the Alevi, including the recognition of Cem houses as religious centres; calls for the protection and recognition of the Yezidis and the establishment of Yezidi places of prayer, and for all religious education to be

voluntary and to cover not only the Sunni religion, and for the establishment of an alternative subject, for those who do not wish to take part in religious instruction, in which values, standards and ethical issues are discussed; calls for the protection of the fundamental rights of all Christian minorities and communities in Turkey (e.g. the Greeks of Istanbul, Imvros and Tenedos); »

For more details on the European Parliament's position on Turkey's accession in the European Union, please visit the following website: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu> (There is a search machine under *Activities – Parliamentary Business – Texts Adopted*, to search for other EP positions on enlargement and Turkey.)

Should you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Angelos Pangratis
Minister and Deputy Head of Delegation

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