

**AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

**Remarks to “The 23<sup>RD</sup> Annual Cyprus, Hellenic, and Orthodox Issues Conference in Washington, D.C.”**

**Congressman Tom Lantos**

**Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs**

**U.S. House of Representatives**

**May 17, 2007**

Among the most gratifying developments of the post-Cold War world has been the rapprochement between Greece and Turkey. It was initiated in the late 1990s by the former Greek foreign minister George Papandreou and has evolved since then. Both sides have benefited enormously. The mutual rewards have extended to politics and to economics – on both sides of the Aegean. Greece’s far-reaching vision in this matter earned the praise and admiration of the world.

Now it is time for *Turkey* to take the next major step forward in relations between Greeks and Turks. Ankara needs to show a new resolve and a renewed energy in addressing some of the longstanding, difficult problems between the two sides. What is needed now is willpower and goodwill.

As many of you already know, I have just written a letter to Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan urging that he take a number of steps to liberalize Turkey’s policies toward the Ecumenical Patriarchate once and for all.

First, and most important, Turkey must recognize that the Patriarchate is indeed ecumenical. Its ecumenical nature exists in the hearts of Orthodox believers everywhere, and it is absurd for Turkey to try to deny it.

Second, Turkey must cease all interference in the process of selecting the Ecumenical Patriarch, particularly its maddening insistence that the Patriarch be a Turkish citizen. It is simply beyond the bounds of religious freedom for a state to impose such requirements. If Turkey persists in these policies, the Ecumenical Patriarchate will cease to exist: sadly, there are now less than 2,500 Orthodox citizens left in Turkey. The demise

of this solemn spiritual institution – with a tradition spanning two millennia – is intolerable to Orthodox worshippers, to the world at large, and to me personally. All Orthodox, regardless of citizenship, should be eligible to become the Ecumenical Patriarch. It is the Church, not the Turkish state, that should determine who becomes Ecumenical Patriarch.

Third, Turkey must cease expropriating land that belongs to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This unethical and illegal policy deprives the Ecumenical Patriarchate of both badly needed funds and cultural patrimony. This land was handed down through generations and generations.

I am far from alone in these views in the U.S. Congress. A remarkable 84% of the members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, which I chair, agreed to sign my letter urging the Turkish government to stop bullying the Ecumenical Patriarchate nearly into extinction. That's a bipartisan coalition of 42 out of the Committee's 50 members. I'm very proud of that, particularly in this era when it is difficult to get a bipartisan consensus on much of anything in the United States Congress.

Turkey's policies regarding the Ecumenical Patriarchate are anachronistic and inappropriate, and I will underscore that point in all my future meetings with Turkish leaders – until Turkey changes those policies. Turkey should recognize the Ecumenical Patriarchate for what it is -- a spiritual beacon to 250 million Orthodox believers around the globe, millions of whom live right here in the United States.

Turkey wants to be a fully modern European state, and I believe it will be. It has already made some strides in that direction. But Turkey can only mature fully if it implements modern values. And that starts with real religious freedom. There is no better way for Turkey to begin this process than by taking the long overdue and morally imperative step of recognizing the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is one of the world's oldest and greatest treasures. I look forward to working with you to save it and to ensure that it thrives, throughout this century and well beyond, in a manner commensurate with its spiritual stature.