

By Senator Fasano

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Senate Memorial

A memorial to the Congress of the United States, urging Congress to encourage the Government of Turkey to grant the Ecumenical Patriarch appropriate international recognition, ecclesiastical succession, and the right to train clergy of all nationalities and to respect the property rights and human rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

WHEREAS, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, located in Istanbul, Turkey, is the Sacred See that presides in a spirit of brotherhood over a communion of self-governing churches of the Orthodox Christian world, and

WHEREAS, the See is led by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who is the 269th in direct succession to the Apostle Andrew and holds titular primacy as primus inter pares, meaning "first among equals," in the community of Orthodox churches worldwide, and

WHEREAS, in 1994, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, along with leaders of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, cosponsored the Conference on Peace and Tolerance, which brought together Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religious leaders for an interfaith dialogue to help end the Balkan conflict and the ethnic conflict in the Caucasus region, and

WHEREAS, in 1997, the Congress of the United States awarded Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew the Congressional Gold Medal, and

WHEREAS, following the terrorist attacks on our nation on September 11, 2001, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew gathered a

11-00399-10

2010314

30 group of international religious leaders to produce the first
31 joint statement with Muslim leaders that condemned those attacks
32 as "antireligious," and

33 WHEREAS, in October 2005, the Ecumenical Patriarch, along
34 with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders, cosponsored the
35 Conference on Peace and Tolerance II to further promote peace
36 and stability in southeastern Europe, the Caucasus region, and
37 Central Asia via religious leaders' interfaith dialogue,
38 understanding, and action, and

39 WHEREAS, the Orthodox Christian Church, in existence for
40 nearly 2,000 years, numbers approximately 300 million members
41 worldwide, with more than 2 million members in the United
42 States, and

43 WHEREAS, since 1453, the continuing presence of the
44 Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey has been a living testament to
45 the religious coexistence of Christians and Muslims, and

46 WHEREAS, this religious coexistence is in jeopardy because
47 the Ecumenical Patriarchate is considered a minority religion by
48 the Turkish government, and

49 WHEREAS, the Government of Turkey has limited the
50 candidates available to hold the office of Ecumenical Patriarch
51 to only Turkish nationals; and, out of the millions of Orthodox
52 Christians who were living in Turkey at the turn of the 20th
53 century, there remain as a result of the policies of the Turkish
54 government during this period fewer than 3,000 of the Ecumenical
55 Patriarch's flock left in that country today, and

56 WHEREAS, the Government of Turkey closed the Theological
57 School on the island of Halki in 1971 and has refused to allow
58 it to reopen, thus impeding training for Orthodox Christian

11-00399-10

2010314

59 clergy, and

60 WHEREAS, the Turkish government has confiscated nearly 94
61 percent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's properties and has
62 placed a 42 percent tax, retroactive to 1999, on the Baloukli
63 Hospital and Home for the Aged, a charity hospital run by the
64 Ecumenical Patriarchate, and

65 WHEREAS, the European Union, a group of nations with a
66 common goal of promoting peace and the well-being of its
67 peoples, began accession negotiations with Turkey on October 3,
68 2005, and

69 WHEREAS, the European Union defined membership criteria for
70 accession at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, obligating
71 candidate countries to achieve certain levels of reform,
72 including stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy,
73 adherence to the rule of law, and respect for and protection of
74 minorities and human rights, and

75 WHEREAS, the Turkish government's current treatment of the
76 Ecumenical Patriarchate is inconsistent with the membership
77 conditions and goals of the European Union, and

78 WHEREAS, Orthodox Christians in this state and throughout
79 the United States stand to lose their spiritual leader because
80 of the continued actions of the Turkish government, and

81 WHEREAS, the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the
82 Order of St. Andrew the Apostle, a group of laymen who each have
83 been honored with a patriarchal title, or "offikion," by the
84 Ecumenical Patriarch for their outstanding service to the
85 Orthodox Church, will send an American delegation to Turkey to
86 meet with Turkish government officials, as well as the United
87 States Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, regarding the

11-00399-10

2010314

88 Turkish government's treatment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,
89 NOW, THEREFORE,

91 Be It Resolved by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

93 That the Congress of the United States is urged to
94 encourage the Government of Turkey to:

95 (1) Uphold and safeguard religious and human rights without
96 compromise.

97 (2) Cease its discrimination of the Ecumenical
98 Patriarchate.

99 (3) Grant the Ecumenical Patriarch appropriate
100 international recognition, ecclesiastic succession, and the
101 right to train clergy of all nationalities.

102 (4) Respect the property rights and human rights of the
103 Ecumenical Patriarchate.

104 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
105 dispatched to the President of the United States, to the
106 President of the United States Senate, to the Speaker of the
107 United States House of Representatives, and to each member of
108 the Florida delegation to the United States Congress.