

110TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 615

Urging the Government of Turkey to respect the rights and religious freedoms of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Christian Church.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 17, 2008

Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself, Ms. SNOWE, Mr. BIDEN, and Mr. CARDIN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

RESOLUTION

Urging the Government of Turkey to respect the rights and religious freedoms of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Christian Church.

Whereas the Government of Turkey has sought membership in the European Union and maintains strong bilateral relations with the United States Government;

Whereas the accession of Turkey to the European Union will depend on its adherence to the Copenhagen criteria that require candidate countries to have achieved stability of governmental institutions that guarantee human rights and that respect and protect minorities, including religious minorities such as Orthodox Christians;

Whereas, on August 2, 2007, European Union Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn indicated that Turkey must

achieve “concrete results in areas of fundamental freedoms such as . . . religious freedom”;

Whereas the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its Sacred See is the spiritual head for tens of millions, a valuable place of great historic significance to hundreds of millions where much of the New Testament and sacred creeds, including the Nicene Creed, were codified, and as the head of the largest Christian Church headquartered in a majority Muslim country, a critical link between Christians and Muslims;

Whereas the United States was founded on the concept of religious freedom and has maintained its support for such freedom throughout its history;

Whereas the practice of religious freedom of millions of Orthodox Christians in the United States is dependent on the religious freedom of the spiritual head of their faith;

Whereas the United States Government has expressed its emphatic support for full religious freedom for the Ecumenical Patriarchate through numerous statements by both Democratic and Republican Presidents, in letters signed by the extraordinary number of 73 of 100 United States Senators and 42 of 50 members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, and in reports of the Department of State, the Helsinki Commission, and other government agencies;

Whereas Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew gathered international religious leaders soon after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, and produced the first condemnation of the attacks as “anti-religious”;

Whereas the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian award bestowed by Congress;

Whereas the international community places particular importance on safeguarding and promoting religious freedom as is expressed in the creation of a Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations, in the “Declaration of Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States” principle VII, paragraph I of the Helsinki Commission, and in most highly regarded international organizations;

Whereas the Government of Turkey does not recognize the Ecumenical Patriarch as ecumenical, interferes with the process of selecting the Ecumenical Patriarch by requiring that the Patriarch be a citizen of Turkey, thereby restricting candidates due to the gradual disappearance of eligible Orthodox Christians who are citizens of Turkey; and

Whereas the Government of Turkey has confiscated without compensation significant quantities of property belonging to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and closed its seminary at Halki: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) expresses its view that the Government of
3 Turkey should move expeditiously to meet the cri-
4 teria set forth by the European Council in Copen-
5 hagen;

6 (2) calls on the European Union to focus on the
7 elimination of all forms of discrimination in Turkey,

1 particularly with regard to the Ecumenical Patri-
 2 archate, while continuing accession negotiations;

3 (3) calls on the Government of Turkey to re-
 4 move an obstacle in its relations with the United
 5 States Government by taking positive steps to pro-
 6 vide full religious freedom for the Ecumenical Patri-
 7 archate; and

8 (4) calls on the Government of Turkey to imme-
 9 diately—

10 (A) recognize the right to the title of “Ec-
 11 umenical Patriarch”;

12 (B) grant the Ecumenical Patriarch appro-
 13 priate international recognition and ecclesiastic
 14 succession;

15 (C) grant the Ecumenical Patriarch the
 16 right to train clergy of all nationalities, not just
 17 Turkish nationals; and

18 (D) respect property rights and human
 19 rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

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