
State Government & Tribal Affairs
Committee

HJM 4003

Brief Description: Petitioning the government of Turkey to respect the property rights and human rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. .

Sponsors: Representatives Wallace and Hinkle.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Prays to the President of the United States, the U.S. Secretary of State and the Washington Congressional Delegation that the Government of Turkey grant the Ecumenical Patriarchate (Patriarchate) the appropriate international recognition, uphold and safeguard religious and human rights and respect the property rights of the Patriarchate.

Hearing Date: 2/13/09

Staff: Tracey O'Brien (786-7196)

Background:

The Turkish Constitution provides for freedom of religion and, according to the U.S. Department of State 2008 International Religious Freedom Report, the Government of Turkey (Turkey) generally respects this right in practice. Turkey does place some restrictions on Muslims and other groups and on Muslim religious express in government offices, state-run institutions, and universities, usually with the state purpose of preserving the secular state. With a population of 72.6 million, Turkey estimates that 99 percent of the population is Muslim, the majority of which is Sunni. Turkey officially recognizes three minority religious communities: Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenian Orthodox Christians, and Jews.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate (Patriarchate) is the highest-ranking Orthodox Church. It is the spiritual center for over 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide. In 1923 the primacy of the

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Ecumenical Patriarch was recognized in the Laussane Treaty as the spiritual leader of Orthodox Christians around the world. Turkey does not recognize the ecumenical nature of the Patriarchate. It regards the Patriarchate as an institution whose leader is only the spiritual leader of Orthodox believers in Turkey. In addition, the Turkish authorities do not allow the use of the term "Ecumenical" for any religious activity. Turkey also does not recognize that the Patriarchate has a legal personality, resulting in the failure to recognize its ownership rights.

Legislation urging Turkey to grant the Patriarchate the appropriate international recognition has been introduced in seven states and the U.S. Congress. In 2006 New Jersey was the first state to pass such a resolution.

Summary of Bill:

The Legislature prays to President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and to the Washington Congressional Delegation that the Government of Turkey:

- Upholds and safeguards religious and human rights without compromise;
- Ceases its discrimination of the Patriarchate;
- Grants the Patriarchate the appropriate international recognition, ecclesiastic succession, and the right to train clergy of all nationalities; and
- Respects the property rights and human rights of the Patriarchate.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.