

6 Σεπτεμβρίου 2013

**By His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch  
Bartholomew At His Meeting with the President  
of the Estonian Parliament, Her Excellency Ene  
Ergma (September 5, 2013)**

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English / Ξένες γλώσσες](#)



Your Excellency,

We are filled with great joy and warm sentiments at the fervent reception of the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church by the blessed State of Estonia, its spiritual and political authorities, and especially Your dearly beloved Excellency, during our encounter in this historical place of responsibility and high decision-making.

Your Excellency, you are head of the democratic household of this glorious and noble land, as is customary in political terminology to describe parliaments of free nations. We assure you and your colleagues that, while political practice is foreign to the Orthodox Church, and particularly to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, we clearly and fully comprehend the burden of your manifold responsibilities. Your nation has assigned to the sensitive heart and experience of Your Excellency the obligation and responsibility of defending democracy in an Estonia, which was deeply plagued by the totalitarian regime, in order to coordinate the political voices and diverse opinions so as to unite them and sustain the beneficial interests of the dignified, martyric and glorious Estonian people.

We very much appreciate, from our own personal experience, the burden of this responsibility inasmuch as the holy and sacred canons as well as the tradition of the Orthodox Church have reserved for our Ecumenical Patriarchate – as the First Throne within the system of the One, Holy Orthodoxy – the responsibility of presiding and coordinating the witness of all the Orthodox Churches, while at the same time expressing through our Modesty the one and unified Orthodox voice.

For centuries, the Mother Church of Constantinople bears and exercises this responsibility of service, to which it responds thoroughly, despite the difficulties provoked and caused by the times, by temporary or even newly-formed opinions, as well as by human weaknesses. It is a service always successfully exercised by the Ecumenical Throne for one reason alone: Because the Church is a divine-human institution, whose head is our Lord Jesus Christ, who came into the world and preached the truth. Consequently, the vessel of His Church may sometimes be tossed about by storms, but it is never engulfed by the waves.

Therefore, Church and Parliament have a parallel service. They serve God's "gift," namely humanity within the instability of this fleeting life. This is why they should "prepare" and cooperate on a daily basis in order to manage physical and spiritual illness, machinations by individuals, rebellion by enemies, and the "extreme evil" of "wicked people," as St. John Chrysostom, the great Archbishop of

Constantinople, preaches.

On this point of the common service provided by the leadership of the Church and the leadership of the State, we wish to emphasize - what is surely known to Your Excellency, namely - the difficulties faced by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the exercise of its responsibility as the First Throne. Beyond all other challenges, such as the property rights of our Communities in Istanbul, which had been removed in the past, fortunately in recent years the honorable Turkish Government, embracing the "European stance," has - through legislative initiatives and administrative decisions, permitted and endeavors to practice the return of confiscated property belonging to our Community in Constantinople. Toward this positive and favorable development, in addition to the good disposition of the current Government, there was also the contribution and decision of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasburg, which returned to the Mother Church and recorded the sole property title in its name, namely the historical building of the former Orthodox Orphanage on the Princes' Island. Nevertheless, despite all this, there is still no legal entity ascribed to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the country that it inhabits, which essentially means that its very legal existence is questioned. Moreover, one of our personal great concerns is the inability of the Patriarchate to educate its own candidates for the priesthood, since, as is well known to everyone, we are still unable to reopen the Theological School of Halki, which closed over forty years ago without the slightest notion of justice and which famously and favorably contributed to our ecclesiastical education and to the Church. This holds true despite our many efforts and the exhortations of the global community for a resolution to our request, but also despite calls from the governments of nations comprising the European Union and the United States of America, as well as the positive to date verbal assurances of the honorable Turkish Government toward us. We pray and hope that our Lord and Savior, who manages all things for our benefit and salvation, holds a kinder and better future for His Church of Constantinople and throughout the world.

It is precisely in this context and despite the innate difficulties associated with the exercise of its mission, that the Ecumenical Patriarchate also appraises, ascertains and assesses the needs and requirements of the local Churches, guiding them and bestowing the status or honor of autonomy, self-administration or even autocephaly, so that the divine evangelical word may be proclaimed and witnessed, while the people of God in all places may be edified and better served in accordance with the local traditions and without at all touching the blameless common Orthodox faith even to a dot.

Moreover, that is how the Ecumenical Patriarchate acted canonically exactly ninety years ago for the Orthodox Apostolic Church of Estonia, this beloved and more recent Daughter Church, whose autonomy – granted in 1923 but abolished in 1940 by the atheist regime of the time – was reconstituted in 1996, in response to a joint request expressed and submitted by the State through the late President Lennart Meri as well as the Orthodox clergy and laity of Estonia. Indeed, today the Mother Church of Constantinople rejoices and celebrates with the entire Estonian nation as it commemorates this joyous and historical anniversary in the Parliament of this country and with all Estonians, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox.

Your Excellency,

In perusing the most important of your scholarly studies, we discover that you attribute particular attention to the critical harmony of the universal macrocosm and the microcosm of molecules and atoms, which is realized through the positive interaction of heavenly bodies and material particles. It is the same worldview expressed by the Nobel laureate and Greek literary romantic Odysseas Elytis when he describes this harmony as “this world, which is both small and great.”

The same harmony, Your Excellency, is also obligatory in the life of a nation with regard to its connection with all other nations of the world, as well as the connection among the Churches. After all, the purpose and goal of both the State and the Church is to serve the human person as a psychosomatic unity, to satisfy its needs, and to dispel its concerns.

The wise Parliament of the glorious State that you lead has historically assumed the responsibility of distinguishing and continuing your wonderful homeland, of devoting and adapting its legislation to the contemporary reality, of harmonizing it with the European legislation, thereby ultimately elevating Estonia to one of the most notable country-members of the European Union. In this task and service of your Parliament – of “the public church,” as the most historical and classical parliament in the world, namely that in ancient Athens, was known – you may be assured of the ongoing support of our beloved daughter Orthodox Autonomous Church of Estonia under the prudent leadership of His Eminence Metropolitan Stephanos of Tallinn and All Estonia.

Therefore, we ask that you accept the sincere congratulations and grateful thanks of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and ourselves for the multifaceted, multifarious and responsible work that you carry out, as well as for the protection that you extend to

our Orthodox Church here.

May our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ grant you personally and the beloved members of the Estonian Parliament health, every benefit and good gift, crowning the land of Estonia, which is our host during these days and which we also regard as our own, peace and prosperity through your manifold initiatives.

We thank you and we bless you.

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