

6 Σεπτεμβρίου 2013

By His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew At the Meal Organized in His Honor By the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs The Hon. Urmas Paet (September 5, 2013)

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Your Excellency Minister Paet,

“Consider how many are my foes, and with what unjust hatred they hate me.” (Ps. 24.19)

“The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Ps. 16.1)

We address a wholehearted greeting from the Mother Church of Constantinople to Your beloved Excellency, who bears the burden of managing the external policy of Estonia. And we extend our blessing and prayer for strength, to fulfill your difficult responsibility, which, among other things, requires delicate and sensitive conduct, flexibility and dynamic, in order that the “unjust hatred” ascribed by the Prophet David, as the “politician” of his time, to the numerous “enemies” of the chosen people of God, even at that time – speaking of course in a messianic way about our Lord Jesus Christ – may be transformed into “support” of justice by God so that people, and especially the faithful, may not “cower” before the adverse “threats” of all kind.

Naturally, in our age, these “threats” are for the most part, not military but “humanitarian” and “social.” Consequently, they demand special attention in order to preserve and protect the rights of peoples, religion, democracy, peace and freedom.

Indeed, Estonia – which has known glory as well as martyrdom in its adventures throughout history – traditionally serves and preserves these values of freedom, justice, unity, and religion, as witnessed by older and contemporary historical records.

In addressing these words to you during our third visit here as Ecumenical Patriarch, we are expressing our pride and pleasure in the Lord for the progress and development of the Autonomous Orthodox Church here, due among other reasons to the political freedom for religious conviction and belief, but also to the support and defense of justice in this country. This is because the Church of Estonia, which during its years of “trouble and circumstance” was deprived of institutions, through the course of its history stood beside the Estonian people, sharing in their trials as well as their joys in times of peace and prosperity.

Our sentiments and words should be perceived as deriving from an institution of martyrdom and witness for over seventeen centuries. It is an institution, which exercises the privilege and obligation of presiding and coordinating the local Orthodox Churches and which, always with an understanding of the local people’s needs, converses in love and truth with all Christian Churches and Confessions, with impressive results. For concern and anguish among those in conversation, as you politicians know better than ecclesiastical and spiritual leaders, looks to the discovery of points that unite rather than divide, so that common initiatives may emerge on a mutual basis for the healing of situations and the resolution of problems, both on a spiritual and ecclesiastical level, but also on a broader

humanitarian and social level.

In particular, we note that the Theological Dialogue of the Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church has achieved significant progress. From a period of absolute silence and anathema between the two worlds, we have reached a point of love and trust, cooperation and deeper exploration in matters of faith, in a mutual search of ways of greater communication, in order that through our fragile hands the Lord's will may be fulfilled, and all those who believe in Him may be one.

The ministry of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, therefore, corresponds to yours in the following domain: namely the solution of challenges and differences, without sacrificing the truth in love and dialogue, albeit under different dimensions and perspectives. Indeed, we both face difficulties in this struggle, although of course your responsibilities differ from ours.

As the Church of Constantinople, with its See in a land with a different faith than ours, we struggle with issues related to land and property rights for our Communities and Foundations, with the education of clergy and formation of new dynamic resources, as a result of the unjust closure of our historical Theological School on the island of Halki over forty years ago, with the failure to recognize the Ecumenical Patriarchate as a legal entity, and with other issues related to our daily life and service.

Nevertheless, the problems existed in the past, continue to exist and will always exist. We bear responsibility and are called to face them on the basis of justice and truth, as well as the common interest and benefit of all people and society.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate comprehends and always assesses every kind of challenge as a stage of perfection. This is why it empties itself in humility before the daily difficulties and conflicts, proclaiming resurrection, while offering hope, assurance and encouragement to the various local Churches, in order for them to grow and advance in Christ, so that they may serve the spiritual and wider needs and aspirations of their people and nations. It has, in fact, done this with all of the newer local Orthodox Churches since the sixteenth century, but also ninety years ago with your Estonian Orthodox Church – following, evaluating and recognizing its progress, both in the past, during peaceful times and later during times of trial, as well as from 1996 to this day especially, under the leadership of its Most Reverend and in every way worthy First-Hierarchy, Metropolitan Stephanos. To this purpose, we express our gratitude, joy and congratulations to you personally and to the honorable Estonian State for its assistance and support of the Church here.

With these sentiments of joy and delight for the present, but also of expectation and favorable hopes for the future and witness of Estonia as a nation and state of justice, as well as of the Orthodox Autonomous local Church in this land, we thank Your Excellency for this gracious meal in our honor and in recognition of the contribution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for its nine decades of Orthodox ecclesiastical journey with the Estonian people. And we raise this toast for the health and prosperity of Your Excellency and for the blessing from above of your noble service for the peace and prosperity of your people, the advocacy of its rights and this land, all of which demand “experience in the affairs of the world” on the part of leaders, “who are wise and knowledgeable in the diverse advantageous arts” (Basil the Great, On Proverbs PG 31.392), such as Your esteemed Excellency and your distinguished colleagues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

May the Lord keep and save Estonia from all harm. Amen.

Text No. 3