

House Resolution 415

By: Representatives Cheokas of the 134th, Wilkinson of the 52nd, Walker of the 107th, Keown of the 173rd, Davis of the 122nd, and others

A RESOLUTION

1 Urging the Government of Turkey to grant the Ecumenical Patriarch appropriate
2 international recognition, ecclesiastical succession, and the right to train clergy of all
3 nationalities and to respect the property rights and human rights of the Ecumenical
4 Patriarchate; and for other purposes.

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

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

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

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

17 WHEREAS, following the terrorist attacks on our nation on September 11, 2001, Ecumenical
18 Patriarch Bartholomew gathered a group of international religious leaders to produce the first
19 joint statement with Muslim leaders that condemned the 9/11 attacks as "antireligious"; and

20 WHEREAS, in October 2005, the Ecumenical Patriarch, along with Christian, Jewish, and
21 Muslim leaders, cosponsored the Conference on Peace and Tolerance II to further promote
22 peace and stability in southeastern Europe, the Caucasus region, and Central Asia via
23 religious leaders' interfaith dialogue, understanding, and action; and

1 WHEREAS, the Orthodox Christian Church, in existence for nearly 2,000 years, numbers
2 approximately 300 million members world-wide with more than 2 million members in the
3 United States; and

4 WHEREAS, since 1453, the continuing presence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey
5 has been a living testament to the religious coexistence of Christians and Muslims; and

6 WHEREAS, this religious coexistence is in jeopardy because the Ecumenical Patriarchate
7 is considered a minority religion by the Turkish government; and

8 WHEREAS, the Government of Turkey has limited the candidates available to hold the
9 office of Ecumenical Patriarch to only Turkish nationals, and from the millions of Orthodox
10 Christians living in Turkey at the turn of the 20th century and due to the continued policies
11 during this period by the Turkish government, there remain less than 3,000 of the Ecumenical
12 Patriarch's flock left in Turkey today; and

13 WHEREAS, the Government of Turkey closed the Theological School on the island of Halki
14 in 1971 and has refused to allow it to reopen, thus impeding training for Orthodox Christian
15 clergy; and

16 WHEREAS, the Turkish government has confiscated nearly 94 percent of the Ecumenical
17 Patriarchate's properties and has placed a 42 percent tax, retroactive to 1999, on the Baloukli
18 Hospital and Home for the Aged, a charity hospital run by the Ecumenical Patriarchate; and

19 WHEREAS, the European Union, a group of nations with a common goal of promoting
20 peace and the well-being of its peoples, began accession negotiations with Turkey on
21 October 3, 2005; and

22 WHEREAS, the European Union defined membership criteria for accession at the
23 Copenhagen European Council in 1993, obligating candidate countries to achieve certain
24 levels of reform, including stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, adherence to the
25 rule of law, and respect for and protection of minorities and human rights; and

26 WHEREAS, the Turkish government's current treatment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is
27 inconsistent with the membership conditions and goals of the European Union; and

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

3 WHEREAS, the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Order of St. Andrew the
4 Apostle, a group of laymen who each have been honored with a patriarchal title, or
5 "offikion," by the Ecumenical Patriarch for their outstanding service to the Orthodox Church,
6 will send an American delegation to Turkey to meet with Turkish government officials, as
7 well as the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, regarding the Turkish
8 government's treatment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

9 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES that
10 the members of this body urge the Government of Turkey to:

- 11 (1) Uphold and safeguard religious and human rights without compromise;
- 12 (2) Cease its discrimination of the Ecumenical Patriarchate;
- 13 (3) Grant the Ecumenical Patriarch appropriate international recognition, ecclesiastic
14 succession, and the right to train clergy of all nationalities; and
- 15 (4) Respect the property rights and human rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

16 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representative is authorized
17 and directed to transmit appropriate copies of this resolution to the President of the United
18 States, the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, the Ambassador of the
19 Republic of Turkey to the United States, and to the members of the Georgia Congressional
20 Delegation.