



November 23, 2025

Archon Sunday 2025

The Sunday before the Feast Day of St. Andrew

**Presentation on the Legal Identity and Property Rights of the
Ecumenical Patriarchate**

Who and What are the Archons? What do they do?

Our Purpose:

- We are the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate - we have a singular and laser focus...
- To protect and defend religious freedom for all - and most especially for the Ecumenical Patriarchate - The historical spiritual center of the world's 300+ million Orthodox Christians.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate:

- Under attack by the Turkish government in five key ways.

Five Key Issues:

- 1) The Ecumenical Patriarchate has no legal identity or rights in Turkey. In the eyes of the Turkish government, the Ecumenical Patriarchate does not exist!
- 2) The Turkish government interferes with the election of the Patriarch by requiring that he must be a Turkish citizen and maintains the right to approve who is selected. This is clearly interference with the Apostolic succession of the Church's leadership.
- 3) We can no longer train our clergy in Turkey because they closed our beloved Halki Seminary in 1971 where we had trained more than 1000 clergymen (including over 300 bishops and even a few Patriarchs) for 127 years. Today, Halki remains closed. As a result, those who want to become clergymen must be sent elsewhere out of the country. The result is that we are experiencing a gradual asphyxiation of the Holy Mother Church in Turkey. The Greek Orthodox population of Constantinople is now only 2,000 to 2,500 people, down from 300,000 at the beginning of the twentieth century. With all of this said, there

have been recent positive discussions that could possibly lead to the opening of the seminary. We will remain cautiously optimistic.

- 4) The Ecumenical Patriarchate cannot own, inherit or pass along property. Not even our churches can be owned by the Patriarchate. In 1936, the church owned 8000 properties including monasteries, churches, schools, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged, homes, and apartment buildings. Today most have been confiscated and we have less than 500 properties remaining.
- 5) The Turkish Government does not recognize the “Ecumenical” status of the Patriarch and Patriarchate. Turkish authorities do not allow the use of the term or title “ecumenical” for any religious activity – even though this title has been used since the 6th century and recognized throughout the world. As a matter of fact, the Turkish government only refers to the Patriarch as a local bishop of the Romii (the descendants of Roman Empire).

These are all serious issues, but the main thing I want to talk to you about today is how the lack of legal status leads to the loss of Church properties, and how this threatens the very existence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

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Occasionally, the Turkish government allows the Ecumenical Patriarchate to regain control of one of these confiscated properties, but only under the most difficult of circumstances. The Girls and Boys Orphanage Foundation on the island of Prinkipos (which the Turks refer to as Buyukada), for which the Ecumenical Patriarchate has held a deed since 1902, is, like other properties, not legally recognized by the Turkish government as belonging to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In this case, however, the European Court of Human Rights compelled the Turks to hand it over to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but only in dilapidated condition.

And the confiscation of church properties is just one part of this problem. Another is that the Ecumenical Patriarchate doesn't actually own some of our Church's most cherished items.

The relics

Some of you may remember back in 2004, when one of the most momentous events in modern history of relations between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church took place.

- On November 27, 2004, Pope John Paul II handed over the sacred relics of two of our most important saints, Saints John Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzen, to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.
- This was an important gesture toward unifying Roman Catholicism with Orthodox Christianity, the two largest Christian groups and the only two that were founded by the apostles.
- Yet because of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's lack of legal identity and property rights in Turkey, Pope John Paul II was actually handing over these relics not to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but to the government of Turkey.

- The holy relics of Saints John Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzen are now housed at the Patriarchal Church of St. George in the Phanar “Lantern,” the historic Greek district of Constantinople in the Ottoman period. Yet because the Turkish government denies the Ecumenical Patriarchate any actual legal status, these sacred relics and numerous other properties that have belonged to the Ecumenical Patriarchate from time immemorial technically belong to the government itself.
- This creates a situation in which, if the Turkish government decided to do so, it could demand the Ecumenical Patriarchate turn over these relics to it at any time, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate would have no legal recourse, because according to Turkish law, no such entity as “the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople” even exists.
- This is true despite the fact that the Ecumenical Patriarchate traces its presence in Constantinople back to the times of the Holy Apostle Saint Andrew the First-Called, while the Turkish presence in the city dates only from 1453, and the modern Turkish state was founded in 1923.

This lack of a legal identity:

- Obviously a major source of problems for the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
- Is not even limited solely to the Turkish government’s non-recognition of its ownership rights, although that creates enough problems in itself. The Ecumenical Patriarchate’s lack of a legal identity also means that “foreign,” that is, non-Turkish priests often encounter difficulty in obtaining the necessary residence and work permits that would allow them to work in the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
- As essential as these priests are for the continuity and functioning of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Turkish government is often reluctant to issue such permits or extremely slow in issuing them, as it recognizes no such entity as the Ecumenical Patriarchate and so sees no need to ensure its continued functioning.
- The inability of “foreigners” who work at the Ecumenical Patriarchate to secure work permits often results in these individuals having to leave the country every three months to renew their tourist visas. This disrupts the operation and productivity of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and discourages staffing from abroad.

What can be done:

- Because of the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s lack of legal identity, its vulnerability to the decisions of the Turkish state is all-pervasive.
- If the international human rights organizations such as the European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations, among others, do not manage to compel the Turkish government to grant property rights to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the spiritual center of the world’s 300 million Orthodox Christians remains essentially defenseless, and perilously close to extinction in its historical homeland.
- The Ecumenical Patriarchate needs financial support, so that it is less subject to the will of the Turkish government: the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew Foundation, founded by the Archons, is dedicated to providing financial stability for the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
- Please pray regularly for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Christians of Constantinople and consider a donation to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew Foundation.