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Hierarchs Under the Patriarchate Can Become Turkish Citizens - **The National Herald**

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Special to The National Herald

BOSTON –The government of Turkey seems to be willing to grant Turkish citizenship to all those hierarchs of the Ecumenical Patriarchate who serve outside of Turkey. Turkish citizenship will allow them to freely participate in all the administrative activities of the Patriarchate including the right to be candidates for the Ecumenical Throne when a vacancy arises. It was made clear by the Ecumenical Patriarch himself that “they will have the right to elect and to be elected.” Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew broke the news to Archbishop Demetrios of America and to the hierarchs of the Archdiocese during his recent visit to the U.S. at the luncheon that has held at the Carlyle Hotel after the Patriarchal Liturgy at the Archdiocesan Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in New York on Sunday, November 1.

The issue is vital because of the dearth of successors to the current hierarchs due to the virtual disappearance of the Greek community of Turkey from decades-long ethnic cleansing. Ankara had an easy veto over patriarchal candidates by refusing citizenship to those who do not possess it; the new policy may make that more difficult. *The National Herald* is in a position to know that the issue in its current phase goes back some years, when Patriarch Bartholomew raised it verbally and in writing to the current political leadership of Turkey and more specifically, to Prime Minister Tagip Erdogan. The issue was officially clarified August 15 on the feast day of the Assumption of the Mother of God when the Patriarch and the Turkish Prime Minister met on the island of Prigkipos and they jointly visited the Greek Orthodox orphanage and other religious and community institutions of the island. It was the first time in decades that a Turkish prime minister and an Ecumenical Patriarch were seen together in public. Prime Minister Erdogan told Patriarch Bartholomew that his request will be satisfied and asked him to send the appropriate information with names of the hierarchs and other details to the government of Turkey.

The issue was brought up at the meeting of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate and official letters were sent recently to hierarchs serving outside of Turkey urging them to file – if they so wish - their applications to become Turkish citizens. Patriarch Bartholomew brought the letters with him when he came to the U.S. on October 21 and gave them to Archbishop Demetrios to send to the hierarchs of the Archdiocese. This development applies to the Archbishop and the hierarchs of America, the hierarchs of the Metropolises in Europe, the Archbishop and hierarchs of the Archdiocese of Australia, the Archbishop and hierarchs of Thyateira and Great Britain (England), the hierarchs of Canada, Asia, South and Central America, the Archbishop and the hierarchs of the island of Crete and also the hierarchs of the Metropolises of Dodecanese. It does not apply, however, to the hierarchs of the so- called Metropolises of the New Lands of the Church of Greece who spiritually and canonically belong to the Ecumenical patriarchate but administratively to the Church of Greece, thus being members of the Holy Synod of Greece. It is noted here that a hierarch cannot participate in two Synods. Until a few years ago only Turkish citizens were allowed to participate in the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but Patriarch Bartholomew changed the rules so that at any given time six hierarchs from Turkey serve six month terms and six others from abroad serve one year terms.

This development has been met with mixed reactions from hierarchs of all categories. Sources from the island of Crete told *The National Herald* that the hierarchs there have expressed some uneasiness because of fears that the local population will wonder about the loyalty of hierarchs who would be potentially under the influence of the Turkish government. None of the hierarchs of America have yet to express an opinion. Concern has also arisen among high-ranking officials of the Phanar since such a substantial increase in the number of eligible hierarchs will dramatically affect the dynamics of future patriarchal elections. Until now, only Turkish citizens had the right to be candidates for the Patriarchy and only the Turkish members of the Holy Synod were allowed to vote. The hierarchs outside Turkey used the so-called “symsifon” meaning that they simply expressed their consensus on the decision of the Synod in Constantinople. Furthermore, the Synod at the Phanar was obligated to submit the official list of candidates for Patriarch to the Turkish government for its official approval. The Turks had the right to delete the names of those hierarchs they did not want to be elected to the Ecumenical Throne. At the last Patriarchal election no names were deleted. The then-Metropolitan of Chalcedon Bartholomew was the leading candidate, and he was ultimately elected.

The following example from the pages of the history of the ecumenical patriarchate will illustrate the conditions under which the Holy Synod has been operating under Turkish rule. The late Metropolitan of Chalcedon Meliton (Hatzis) was

the spiritual father and mentor of both the then Metropolitan of Philadelphia Bartholomew and Metropolitan of Melitine Ioakim. Meliton had a long-standing strategy for the succession of the Ecumenical Throne, grooming both Bartholomew and Ioakim to be the dominant candidates. He struck an agreement with them that if one of their names was deleted by the Turkish authorities, the other was to be elected. This explains the fact that Patriarch Bartholomew's first administrative decision was to elect Ioakim Metropolitan of the First-ranking Metropolis of Chalcedon. Ioakim suffered a powerful stroke eight years ago and remains at the American Hospital of Constantinople in a comatose state; doctors have declared his condition irreversible.

All the Ecumenical Patriarchs of the recent centuries were Turkish citizens upon their election except for Patriarch Athenagoras (Spirou) who was elected Patriarch while serving as Archbishop of America. Athenagoras traveled to Constantinople aboard an aircraft provided by U.S. President Harry Truman. The Turks handed him Turkish citizenship papers aboard the airplane at Constantinople's airport.