

FOREIGN SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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APR 9
1951

TO : Department of State

882.413/4-1051

FROM : ISTANBUL 524 APRIL 4, 1951.

1 ENCLOSURE

REF : ISTANBUL'S DESPATCH NO. 276, NOVEMBER 7, 1950. 11 41

SUBJECT : CURRENT ACTIVITIES OF ATHENAGORAS, OECUMENICAL PATRIARCH.

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There is attached a Memorandum of Conversation between His Holiness the Oecumenical Patriarch, Athenagoras, and Consul Merrill.

As reported in the despatch under reference, His Holiness is endeavoring to increase his influence among the Orthodox Churches of the Near East with a view to counter-acting the recent activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in the area. The Oecumenical delegation, which is being sent to Damascus, Jerusalem and Alexandria for this purpose, will depart this month. The members of the delegation will be elected by the Saint Synod within a few days.

Athenagoras plans later to send Oecumenical delegations to Greece, Mount Athos and the Greek Islands, as well as to the United States in 1952. He has also issued a call for a Oecumenical Conference of all Orthodox Churches on Mount Athos.

Among other things, Athenagoras commented on the proposed visit of the Patriarch of Antioch to Istanbul this summer, the unfortunate political activity of the Archbishop of Cyprus, and a proposal to have the Monastery at Mount Athos placed under the "cultural benediction" of the Byzantine Institute in Washington.

Athenagoras wondered if it was desirable for the members of the Near East delegation to "contact" the American Chiefs of Mission in Damascus, Jerusalem and Alexandria. This might have the effect of giving U.S. coloration to the mission. The Department may wish to instruct me in the premises prior to the departure of the delegation.

Charles W. Lewis, Jr.
American Consul General.

Enclosure: 
Memorandum of Conversation.

Copies to:
Ankara, Athens, Belgrade, Bucharest, Damascus, Moscow.
Alexandria, Jerusalem, Nicosia.

FTMerrill.amc

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ACTION COPY — DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The action office must return this permanent record copy to DC/R files with an endorsement of action taken.

882.413/4-1051

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April 4, 1951

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Consul General

FROM: F. T. Merrill

SUBJECT: Conversation with His Holiness the Oecumenical Patriarch, Athenagoras.

His Holiness stated yesterday that he had now completed his plan to bring the Patriarchate of Antioch firmly in line, and that the projected delegation from the Phanar would leave sometime this month, in any case before the Orthodox Easter, April 29. The instructions to the delegation had already been approved, and it would proceed first to Damascus, then to Jerusalem and subsequently to Alexandria. He wondered if members of the delegation should "contact" the American Chiefs of Mission in these places. The composition of the delegation was still dependent upon decision by the Saint Synod, which was to meet April 5. Athenagoras said he felt sure his nominees would be elected, but he was reluctant to tell me the names in advance, which perhaps is a confirmation of reports in Istanbul that Athenagoras does not feel sure that he has a plurality in the Saint Synod.

Athenagoras went on to explain that one of the reasons for the delay in despatching the delegation, which originally was to have left three or four months ago, was his desire to establish firmly the correct psychological atmosphere for the mission. He said the other Patriarchs were extremely sensitive and jealous of their prerogatives and that it was his policy to move slowly in his campaign to draw them closer to the Phanar. Moreover, he had been hard put to find qualified members for his delegation and for proper intermediaries. He had recently established satisfactory liaison with the Patriarch at Damascus through a priest (unnamed) in Beirut. Moreover, he had exchanged cordial correspondence with him and now had good news to tell me, i.e., that Alexander had accepted his invitation to visit him in Istanbul early this summer, following the visit of the delegation to Damascus.

Athenagoras said that he also plans to send Oecumenical delegations to Mount Athos, to Greece, and to the Greek Islands (with the exception of Cyprus), and also to the United States in 1952. At his mention of Cyprus, I remarked that the Archbishop of Cyprus had been in Athens recently and was reported to have had interviews with the Prime Minister and the British Ambassador regarding the political status of the Island. Athenagoras commented that it had always been his practice

never to interfere in political matters and decried the action of the Archbishop. I hinted that perhaps he could use his influence, but he was non-committal. I gather that he does not feel he can exert any influence in this direction, obviously because of his delicate position between the Turks, who take a dim view of the agitation in Cyprus for union with Greece, and the resident Greek minority here.

Athenagoras also mentioned that he had circulated a call for a Oecumenical Conference of Orthodox Churches on Mount Athos. This invitation had gone to all Patriarchates, including Moscow, Belgrade and Bucharest. He said he had purposely not mentioned any agenda or date, and had not contemplated that the meeting would be held, in any case, until 1952. I asked him whether he thought the Communist-dominated Patriarchs would accept, and he merely shrugged his shoulders. He had, however, already received one acceptance -- that of the Patriarch of Alexandria.

Athenagoras appeared to be much more optimistic about his various plans to draw the Orthodox Churches in the Near Eastern area closer to the Phanar in Istanbul, and "America", as he added. As usual, he talked at some length of his belief that the United States must remain in the Near East for several centuries to fulfill the mission which had been given it by God to give freedom, prosperity and happiness to all people, etc. He again expressed his disappointment that all Christian churches could not get together. (An expression of his desire to have some connection with Rome, which he at last realizes is impossible.)

Another plan, which he said he had been turning over in his mind, was to have Mount Athos placed under the "cultural benediction" of the Byzantine Institute in Washington. He did not seem to know how he would go about this. It is evidently his desire to attract financial support to the Monastery and to throw open its archives, library, etc. to the Byzantine Institute and other American scholars.