



# PRUDENTIAL LINES, INC.

May 28, 1969

SPYROS P. SKOURAS  
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Dear Mr. Vice President:

I would like to express my wholehearted appreciation to you for your kindness in seeing me last Wednesday, despite your heavy schedule, because it gave me an opportunity to inform you concerning the matter of His Holiness, Patriarch Athenagoras I.

As I told you, the late General George Marshall, when he was Secretary of State, called me and asked me to give him my opinion of the then Archbishop Athenagoras of North and South America, now Patriarch of Constantinople. General Marshall wanted to recommend that the Archbishop be considered by the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church in Istanbul for the office of Patriarch of Constantinople.

At that time, both General Marshall and the then President, Harry S. Truman, were apprehensive that there might be elected to this important office of Patriarch of Constantinople of the Greek Orthodox Church a man who would not be aware of the importance of American policies abroad, particularly in Communist Russia and its satellite states which are all at least 90% Greek Orthodox.

There were, and are, over 300,000,000 Greek Orthodox adherents in the world and this was therefore an important consideration. Both President Truman and General Marshall felt that the man who was chosen for the office of Patriarch had to be not only a great spiritual leader, who enjoyed the esteem and affection of all his spiritual subjects, but one who was also American-oriented in his thinking.

Aside from this, he had also to be approved by the Turkish Government and be a Turkish citizen before he was elected by the Holy Synod. This was in keeping with the terms of the Lausanne Treaty, executed between Turkey and Greece in 1922.

Naturally, I recommended His Holiness, then Archbishop, very highly. I had been working closely with him for many years, both as a member of the Church and also as President of the Greek War Relief Association, of which he was Chairman.

I therefore knew His Holiness well and had the highest respect for his abilities, his great humanity, and all the wonderful qualities that he possessed so abundantly and which made him the revered spiritual leader that he was. In addition, he was an American citizen and loved this country very much and all it stood for. I told General Marshall that I felt of all the people in the world, no one was better qualified to fill the office of Patriarch of Constantinople than Archbishop Athenagoras, as he was eminently suited to this post from all aspects.

(continued)

-2-

Vice President  
Spiro T. Agnew

5/28/69

Therefore, General Marshall, in his capacity as Secretary of State, had no hesitation in sponsoring His Holiness and thanks mainly to his efforts and influence, the Holy Synod decided to elect Archbishop Athenagoras as Patriarch and the Turkish Government agreed to his election.

In 1949, President Truman sent his private plane -- the Sacred Cow -- to take His Holiness to Istanbul for his enthronement and a small group of Greeks and Americans of Greek descent, of whom I was privileged to be a member, accompanied His Holiness.

Needless to say, it was an unforgettable experience and I was elated that this great personage had been elected to this high office because I felt he would not only serve the spiritual needs of the millions of Greek Orthodox throughout the world, but he would understand and appreciate the policies of the United States.

In addition, His Holiness had the respect and affection of the people whose spiritual leader he would be in all the Orthodox countries. This was especially important in such countries as Russia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, part of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Syria, Georgia, Armenia, as well as Ethiopia and Coptic Egypt.

Since his enthronement as Patriarch, I am proud to say his prestige has grown tremendously and His Holiness has become known to millions of people aside from those of the Greek Orthodox Faith, as a spiritual leader of great humanity and compassion.

He has rendered innumerable services to mankind and one of the most important and world-encompassing is the fact that he was responsible for the Ecumenical movement which will lead to eventual unification of all the Christian faiths.

Patriarch Athenagoras first began the Ecumenical movement with Pope John, who is certainly among the great Popes of the Roman Catholic Church. After his passing, when Pope Paul announced that he was going to visit Israel, Patriarch Athenagoras sent him his historic telegram saying "I will meet you in Jerusalem" and they opened dialogues for the reconciliation of the two great basic Christian religions, -- the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic, which had been separated for 900 years. This courageous step established Patriarch Athenagoras as one of the great religious leaders of our time, and the meeting between him and Pope Paul electrified the world with its promise of eventual peace and true world brotherhood for mankind.

One year ago, Patriarch Athenagoras undertook a journey which took him to Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia, Geneva -- where he attended a meeting of the World Council of Churches -- Rome, -- where he met again with Pope Paul -- and London. This journey, too, had a tremendous impact on the people of those nations who look to the perpetuation of their faith as their one hope of salvation and freedom.

That is why I feel so strongly that the message the Patriarch sent me is a very serious one, worthy of the deepest consideration of the President of the United States. I have an appointment on June 17th in Ankara to see the Turkish Foreign Minister, Sabri Caglayangil, and I hope also to meet with the Prime Minister and the President of Turkey.

-3-

Vice President  
Spiro T. Agnew

5/28/69

I hope at that meeting to accomplish my purpose, which is to secure Turkish permission to rebuild the Patriarchate in Istanbul, which is in shameful condition, having deteriorated very badly over the years and no repairs have ever been made.

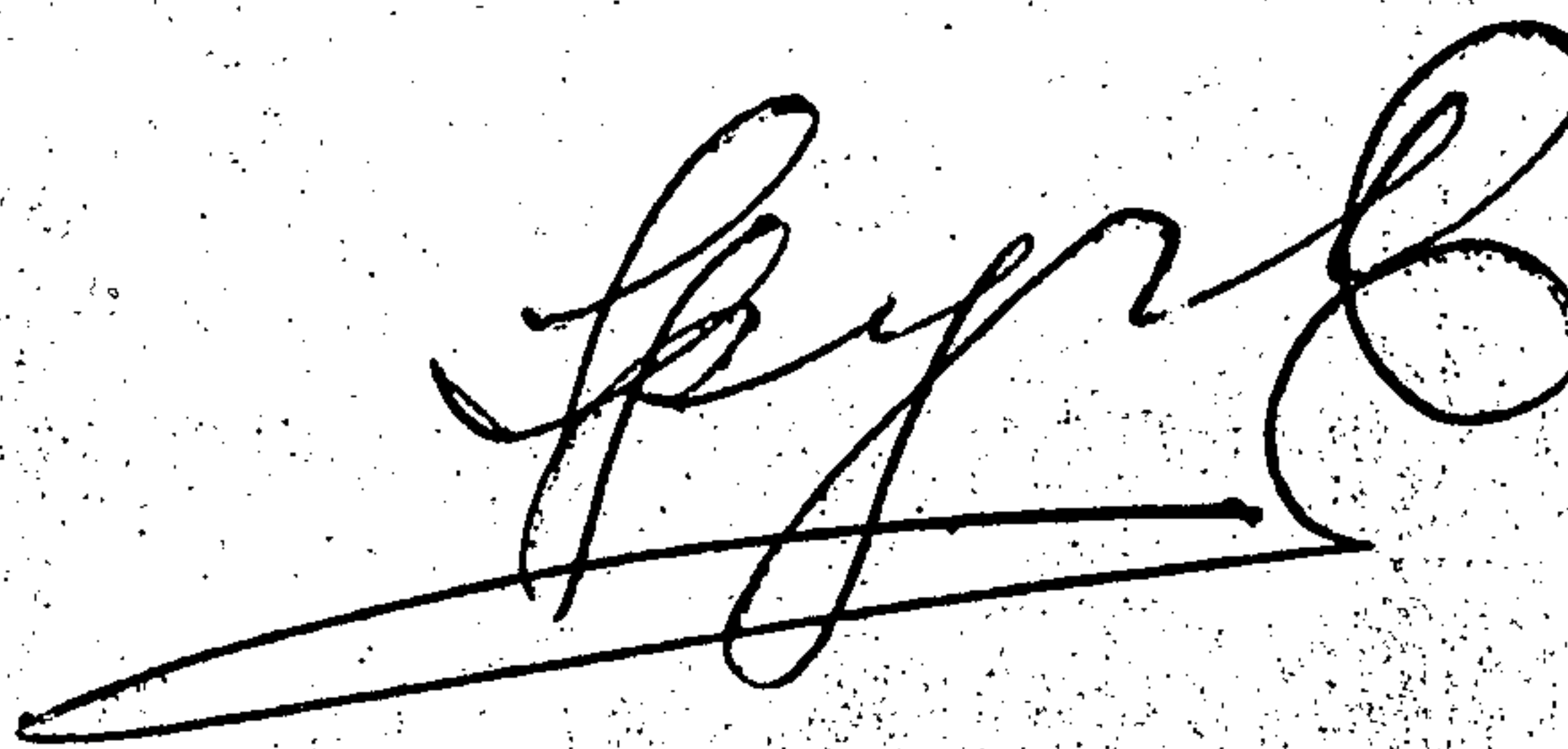
In the meantime, before my departure, I would like very much to see the President for a few minutes in order to comply with the urgent request of His Holiness to me to convey his message directly to the President.

His Holiness is greatly concerned about his health and the matter of his successor, and I feel very strongly that at this time the matter is also of grave concern to the United States, just as it was when Mr. Truman was president and George Marshall, as Secretary of State, realized the importance of the person who is selected to fill the office of Patriarch of Constantinople.

I feel confident I can rely on your understanding and your good will to appreciate the importance of this matter and to facilitate an appointment for me with the President so that I may convey the message His Holiness entrusted to me.

With my warmest good wishes and kindest regards,

Sincerely,



The Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, D.C.

Prudential Lines, Inc. chairman Sypros Skouras thanks Vice President Spiro Agnew for meeting with him in order to present Agnew with a message of peace from Turkish Patriarch Athenagoras I. White House, 28 May 1969. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349525819/USDD?u=birm97026&sid=USDD&xid=d0b90bae>. Accessed 20 July 2020.