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Religion and the Cold War Politics: The Election of Athenagoras as Patriarch¹

Din ve Soğuk Savaş Politikaları: Athenagoras'ın Patrik Seçilmesi

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ÖZ

2. Dünya Savaşı yıllarına ilişkin kritik bir gelişme, SSCB'nin Kilise'ye yönelik politikasını değiştirerek, Moskova Patrikhanesi'nin Ortodokslar üzerindeki nüfuzundan yararlanma çabası içerisine girmesi olmuştur. SSCB'nin bu hamlesi, İstanbul Patrikhanesi'nin kuvvetlendirilmesi yoluyla Balkan ülkelerindeki ve Ortadoğu'daki Sovyet etkisinin önünün alınacağını düşünen ABD'yi harekete geçirmiştir. ABD, Fener'in liderliğine, Moskova ile mücadelede etkili olabilecek bir isim olarak Kuzey ve Güney Amerika Başpiskoposu Athenagoras'ı önermiş, bu öneri Türkiye ve Yunanistan tarafından da kabul görmüştür. Bununla birlikte, Athenagoras'ın patrik seçilmesi hem Türk vatandaşı olmaması, hem de Türkiye'nin seçim süreci boyunca göstermiş olduğu ihtiyatlı tavır nedeniyle kolaylıkla gerçekleşmemiştir. Yunanistan'ın aceleci tavrına karşılık Türkiye ile birlikte ABD'nin de tedbirli bir tutum sergilediği sancılı bir sürecin neticesinde ise Athenagoras Patrik seçilmiş; yeni Patrik, ABD yanlısı söylemleri ve Türk resmi çevreleri ile kurduğu yakın ilişkilerle, göreve başlar başlamaz kendisinden beklenenleri karşılayabilecek bir din adamı olduğunu göstermiştir. Bizzat kendisinin de ifade ettiği üzere Truman doktrinin dini ayağını teşkil eden Athenagoras'ın çabaları, ABD'li ve Türk yetkililer tarafından da memnuniyetle karşılanmıştır. Athenagoras'ın Türk ve ABD yanlısı duruşu, zaman içerisinde Rum cemaati içerisinde ise rahatsızlık yaratmış, kendisine yönelik olarak bazı tepkilere yol açmıştır.

ABSTRACT

A critical development during the years of World War II was the change of the USSR's policy towards the Church and its attempt to make use of the influence of the Moscow Patriarchate on the Orthodox world. This move of the USSR mobilized the United States, which assumed that the Soviet influence in the Balkan countries and the Middle East would be prevented by strengthening the Patriarchate of İstanbul. The US proposed Athenagoras, the Archbishop of North and South America, for the leadership of Phanar; a figure who was expected to be effective in the struggle with Moscow. This proposal was accepted by Turkey and Greece. However, Athenagoras' election as patriarch was not easily achieved both because he did not have Turkish citizenship and because of the cautious attitude demonstrated by Turkey during the selection process. At the end of the election process during which the United States has taken a cautious stance with Turkey, Athenagoras was elected as the Patriarch. As soon as he started the job, with his pro-US rhetoric and close relations with the Turkish official circles, the new Patriarch showed that he was a cleric who could meet the expectations. Being the religious pillar of the Truman doctrine, as he himself stated, Athenagoras' efforts were also welcomed by the US and Turkish authorities. At the same time, Athenagoras's pro-Turkish and pro-American stance has caused discomfort within the Greek community over time, leading to some reactions against him.

¹ Çalışma, 2007 yılına ait "Türkiye'de çok partili hayata geçiş döneminde azınlık politikaları" başlıklı yüksek lisans tez çalışmama dayanmaktadır.

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Introduction

At the beginning of the Cold War, both the United States (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) placed a high value on religion and religious institutions as part of their strategic plans. Especially for the USA, religion came to the fore as a critical tactical element in foreign policy during the Cold War. In the case of the USA, this was closely related to the domestic policy orientation of the time. In those years, religious emphasis occupied an important place in the speeches of US political leaders. In parallel, it was observed that the visibility of religious symbols and practices in public life gradually increased.² The foundation for developments in this regard was laid just after World War II. President Truman, who took office in 1945, saw religion from the beginning as a very functional tool that could be used to curb the spread of communism in the world. Religion had a value that could not be easily substituted in the processes of propaganda and psychological warfare. In this sense, religion and religious institutions could have occupied a central place in Cold War activities aimed at achieving the overall goal of weakening the Soviets. It was within the framework of this approach that Truman was in a position to launch an anti-Communist plan soon after taking office, in which he also invited religious leaders to offer their support (Kirby, 2003, pp. 77-78).

In the USSR of these years, as a consequence of the ideological character of the regime, religion did not have a political position as in the USA. At the same time, there was also an end to the anti-religious policies of the 1920s and 1930s. The Moscow Church, which was in a weakened state as of 1939, had the opportunity to recover with the start of the Second World War. The reason for this change was Joseph Stalin's desire to benefit from the international influence of the Moscow Church. By 1943, the rapprochement between Church and State accelerated and many churches that had been closed in the 1930s were reopened. In addition, religious schools and church publications were once again permitted (Walters, 1986, pp. 138-139).

The moderate policy towards the Church in the USSR was largely maintained after the end of the Second World War. During these years, the Moscow Patriarchate pursued a policy aimed at eliminating the influence of the Istanbul Patriarchate, especially in countries under the influence of the USSR and in the Middle East. A central goal of the Moscow Church in this process was to seize the leadership of the Eastern Orthodox by placing Phanar in an isolated position. The rise of Soviet influence in the Balkans and the Middle East through the Moscow Church mobilized the USA, which had already made religion an important part of its new domestic and foreign policy. At that point, it became imperative that a strong and effective leader acting on behalf of US interests head the Patriarchate of Istanbul. This requirement was compounded by the health problems of Maximos V³, who had become head of the Patriarchate after Veniamin's death in 1946. With the introduction of the Truman Doctrine, the Patriarchate became one of the main items on the agenda of both US officials and diplomatic circles in Turkey and Greece. This political support was also important for the Istanbul Patriarchate, whose sphere of influence was shrinking in the face of the growing power of the Moscow Church (Şeker, 2013, p. 268). At the same period, Turkey, which saw the USSR and its allies in the Balkans as a threat to itself, started to follow a more moderate policy against the Istanbul Patriarchate and aimed to benefit from the power of the Patriarchate (Alexandris, 1992, pp. 238-239). Turkey acted together

² One of the notable symbols of this process was the insertion of the words "one nation under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954. That same year, it was decided in Congress that all US coins and banknotes should bear the motto "In God We Trust", which then became the national motto in 1956 (Kirby, 2003: p. 96).

³ Hereafter Maximos.

with the USA and Greece, and the purpose of these three states was to turn the Istanbul Patriarchate into an effective and powerful religious center against the Moscow Church.

Considering that studies on state relations with religious institutions during the Cold War years have the potential to contribute to the assessment of the period, this study aims to provide descriptive information on how Athenagoras was appointed as the head of the Patriarchate of Istanbul. For this purpose, the article mainly uses historical documents from the US National Archives (NARA) and news articles from *Cumhuriyet* (The Republic). In the first part of the study, the changing power balances with the Cold War and the position of Turkey and Greece in the emerging new order are mentioned. In the second part, Turkey's new attitude towards the Istanbul Patriarchate at the very beginning of the Cold War and its relations with Patriarch Maximos are depicted. The third part focuses on the developments after Maximos' decision to resign and the work carried out for the election of Athenagoras as patriarch. In the fourth part of the study, the relations that Athenagoras established with official circles after his election as patriarch take place. The policies followed by the USA, Turkey, and Greece on the way to the election of Athenagoras, which is the main subject of the text, are mainly discussed in the second and third parts of the study.

Transition to the Cold War Order

World War II resulted in great military and material losses for many European countries, which led to the change in the global balance of power after the war. The USA and the USSR, which were decisive on the course and outcome of the war, came to the fore as "superpowers" in the new process. It was the conflicts between these two states that marked the post-war period. Shortly afterward, this process was called the Cold War, and during the period both states followed a policy of continuously developing their spheres of influence.

Looking at the situation immediately after the war, one can detect a trend towards continued cooperation between the USA and the USSR. However, this trend is known to be very short-lived. The reason for this is that not long after the war, the two states clearly stated their aims to expand their sphere of influence. While the USA tried to spread free trade, and the USSR was attempting to spread socialism, the cooperation inevitably left its place to a deep conflict (Del Pero, 2014, p. 5). Furthermore, the tense relationship between the capitalist world and the USSR that started after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 was a factor that facilitated the start of the Cold War not long after the end of the Second World War. The economic problems that continued throughout the 1930s and worsened during the war years brought the planning thought to gain strength in Europe. The considerations that the problems could not be solved within the free market began to come to the fore in this process. After the war, when Eastern Europe came under the control of the USSR, the suspicions against Soviet Russia in the West were strengthened, and it became an urgent matter for the USA to prevent the spread of the idea of socialism in Europe (Cox, 1990, pp. 26-29). Again in this period, the introduction of an aid plan for Turkey and Greece came to the fore in the USA. The reasons for the issue to come out were developments such as Stalin's announcement that he postponed the decision to withdraw the USSR troops from Iran, and additionally his pressure on Turkey for the control of the Straits. For the USA, the possibility of an increasing influence of the USSR in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East was worrying. At this point, the critical date was March 12, 1947. In his speech at the Congress, President Truman identified the US with majority rule and freedoms while associating the USSR with the dominance of the minority over the majority. The importance of aid to Greece and Turkey was also emphasized in the speech, which later came to be known as the Truman Doctrine (Del Pero, 2014, pp. 7-9) The Doctrine, which entered into force on May 22, 1947 with the approval of US President Truman, put into action a plan of economic aid of 300 million dollars to Greece and 100 million dollars to Turkey. Under the law, it was decided to send American

soldiers and civilian personnel to both countries to assist in the use of aid (Erhan, 2009: pp. 531-532).

Despite the fact that a critical step was taken against the spread of communism with the Truman Doctrine, the USA took action in a short time for a program that included European countries, based on the argument that American national security depends on an economically strong Europe. In June 1947, Foreign Minister George Marshall brought forward an economic aid proposal to Europe, and this proposal, which had a rather vague content at the beginning, was elaborated over time and put into practice in 1948. The aid program, known as the Marshall Plan, served critically for the anti-communist alliance in the West in the years following its entry into force, and it was seen that Western European countries quickly healed the wounds of the war thanks to the economic support from the USA (Kunz, 1997, pp. 162-163). On the other hand, the plan did not only cover Western European countries, but also Turkey and Greece were included in the scope of support. In the case of Turkey, this was largely the result of efforts by the Turkish authorities to get involved in the plan. The US experts included Turkey, which they initially did not want to include in the Marshall Plan, in exchange for contributing to the reconstruction of Europe by providing food and raw materials (Erhan, 2009: pp. 531-532). The inclusion of Greece in the plan, unlike Turkey, was related to the chaotic conditions of the country. In Greece, which was still in the Civil War when the Truman Doctrine was put into practice, aid could not be put into effect as intended due to the confusion and administrative weaknesses in the country. In the country where the communists were highly active, the area where the war took place also expanded (Botsiou, 2009, p. 212). Under these conditions, the Marshall Plan was put into effect in Greece together with other European countries in order to prevent the growing influence of communism. In this process, both the military and economic influence of the USA on Greece increased significantly.

Therefore, as of the second half of the 1940s, the USA had drawn Turkey and Greece to its axis through military and financial aid. Although there are various opinions about why Turkey took a position close to the Western Bloc in the period following World War II, the obvious thing was that Ankara had moved away from the USSR quite a bit. In the same period, under the conditions of the ongoing Civil War, Greece was also very close to the USA. Under these conditions, the atmosphere of the Cold War would be decisive on the policies of both Turkey and Greece regarding the Patriarchate.

Maximos Becoming the Head of the Patriarchate

Turkey, which followed a strict policy regarding the Istanbul Patriarchate until 1945, changed its approach towards the Patriarchate in the new conditions that emerged after the Second World War, and started to follow a rather flexible policy regarding the Patriarchate, especially with the effect of its differing relations with the USA. It is known that immediately after the war, as a response to the close interest of the USSR in religious institutions, the USA began to closely follow the developments in the Patriarchate. The interest of US diplomats towards the Istanbul Patriarchate increased even more when Maximos, who was alleged to be left-leaning, became the head of the Patriarchate. In the process leading up to the election of Athenagoras as Patriarch, it was seen that the developments in the Patriarchate were systematically reported to the US State Department. The first indication of Turkey's new attitude towards Fener was the attitude of state officials after the death of Patriarch Veniamin on February 17, 1946. Close attention was paid to Veniamin's funeral by the official authorities. The prime minister of the time, Şükrü Saracoğlu, sent a telegram expressing his condolences to Veniamin's funeral held in Fener on February 19, while Governor Lütfi Kırdar attended the ceremony together with some governorship officials. The governorship also approved the closure of Greek schools in Istanbul for the day of the funeral. This moderate attitude of the official circles continued during the election of the new Patriarch.

In the previous elections, while the Government eliminated some of the candidates presented to it, this time Governor Lütfi Kırdar informed the Synod that the Government would not affect the election in any way.⁴ Under these circumstances, the Synod, convened on February 20, 1946, unanimously elected Maximos, who has been the Metropolitan of Kadıköy since 1932, and who has been in charge of all administrative affairs of the Patriarchate since 1936 due to the serious health problems of Patriarch Veniamin (NARA, 867.404/2-2646). The Turkish Government had prevented Maximos from being elected in the elections held in 1936, despite the support of the Greek community (Macar, 2004, p. 155). Maximos was detained in Bursa for three months in the same year for his pro-Hellenist activities (NARA, 867.404/2-2646). This time, the Turkish authorities did not prevent Maximos and did not interfere in the election in any way.

The main factor that pushed Turkey to take such a stance on the Patriarchate was that the USSR, which changed its attitude towards the Moscow Church, became closely interested in the Istanbul Patriarchate. The Soviet Consul was the only one who attended both the funeral of Veniamin and the coronation of the new Patriarch Maximos (NARA, 867.404/2-2646). The Greek Ambassador Pericles Skepheris and various representatives from the Embassy, as well as the Soviet Consul General, the Soviet Attaché, the Romanian and Bulgarian Consuls General attended the Easter Festival held in Phanar on April 22, 1946. It might also be noted that, during this period, Easter was celebrated for the first time in Russia since the Soviet Revolution (*Cumhuriyet*, 22 April 1946).

In response to the convenience provided by the Turkish authorities, the new Patriarch Maximos established a moderate relationship with official circles from the moment he took office. After his coronation on February 21, 1946, 'At this moment' said Maximos in his meeting with the journalists,

I would like to commemorate the name of Eternal Chief Atatürk, who has a great place in my heart and the hearts of all our people, and express my gratitude and admiration to the National Chief İsmet İnönü. I ask God to give strength and health to our National Chief, his valuable colleagues, and to give his blessings to our beautiful homeland (*Cumhuriyet*, 22 February 1946).

Maximos also rejected the allegations that he was "left-leaning" and used the phrase 'my creed is completely different' (*Cumhuriyet*, 22 February 1946). In May, the Patriarch sent a delegation on behalf of the Patriarchate to President İsmet İnönü, Prime Minister Şükrü Saracoğlu and the dignitaries of the government to thank them for the close attention shown to him. The delegation visited the Çankaya Mansion and signed the Presidential Special Book, and also visited

⁴ The Governor's Office has important powers regarding the election of the patriarch. These powers are mainly based on the governor's decree dated 6 December 1923. Elçin Macar gives the following information on the subject: "Between 1860 and 1923, the Patriarch was elected by the St. Sinod from among three candidates determined by a mixed assembly consisting of metropolitans, officials of the community and secular (meaning non-clerical) based on the 1862 Greek Patriarchate Order, which was prepared in accordance with the regulations made after the 1856 Reform Edict. Today, he is elected by the Synod in a legal process based on the governor's decree of 6 December 1923, which is originated from the 1862 Greek Patriarchate Order. The governor's decree includes the obligation that the candidates and members of the Holy Synod must be Turkish citizens and metropolitans working within the borders of Turkey during the election. According to the Ottoman regulation, the Synod submits the list of patriarch candidates to the Governorship of Istanbul. These candidates are Turkish citizens and metropolitans whose offices are located within the borders of the Turkish Republic. According to the Nizamname, due to the authority of the Sublime Porte during the Ottoman period, the Governor's Office could exclude candidates from the list without giving any reason. Candidates on the list coming from the governorship are voted on in the Holy Synod. The number of candidates is reduced to three and one of them is elected patriarch." (Macar, 2004, p. 29).

the Prime Minister and Ankara Governor Nevzat Tandoğan (*Cumhuriyet*, 15 May 1946).

An issue that came to the fore at this time, and Turkey's sensitivity to the issue is also noteworthy in terms of revealing how critical the Patriarchate occupied in the new post-war order. As stated before, after the Second World War, the Moscow Patriarchate endeavored to expand its sphere of influence. These initiatives of the Moscow Patriarchate were strongly supported by the USSR. In these circumstances, a message sent to Maximos by Moscow Patriarch Alexy on September 6, 1946, a few months after the Patriarchal election in Istanbul, caused alarm both in the Istanbul Patriarchate and in government circles. In his message, Patriarch Alexy informed Maximos that he would send a delegation consisting of an archbishop, a bishop and 3 priests to Phanar. The delegation would congratulate Maximos on his election as Patriarch. The Patriarchate was surprised by this message. Maximos immediately sent a representative to the Turkish Government and stated that they had nothing to do with this visit, but that it was not possible for them to refuse this visit out of courtesy (NARA, 867.404/9-1346). The Turkish Government, on the other hand, took a stance to prevent the visit and activated the Turkish Embassy in Moscow in this regard. The Embassy followed a very distracting tactic regarding visa issues to prevent the Moscow Patriarchate delegation, forcing the delegation to move directly to Jerusalem for another visit without stopping by Turkey (NARA, 867.404/11-2946).

The new Patriarch Maximos gained the appreciation of both the government circles and the Greek community in the first period he took office, and the Patriarch's dynamism and ability in administration created satisfaction in a wide circle. However, the fact that Maximos had a nervous disease shortly after his election as Patriarch led to the disappearance of this support (Alexandris, 1992, pp. 243-244). After his diagnosis, the Patriarch first rested for a while in Heybeliada. Following his examination on 29 December 1946, the doctors declared that Maximos was healthy (*Cumhuriyet*, 30 December 1946). However, despite this statement, discussions on the election of a new Patriarch could not be prevented. An independent member of parliament, Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, who met with Greek Ambassador Skepheris regarding the issue, expressed his opinion that it would be beneficial to elect an influential patriarch, and then the issue was transferred to Prime Minister Recep Peker. Peker's approach was that the Istanbul Patriarchate should be strengthened in order to fight the Moscow Church. As a result, the question of who would be the new patriarch of the Istanbul Patriarchate began to be asked, and after a while, the name of the Archbishop of North and South America Athenagoras came to the fore. Prime Minister Peker informed the Turkish Ambassador in Washington that the election of Athenagoras as the new Patriarch would be appropriate for the Turkish Government and stated that there would be no difficulty in the Turkish citizenship required for the election of the Patriarch (NARA, 867.404/1-2047). Athenagoras' candidacy was not initially welcomed by Greece. When the new election came to the fore in the Patriarchate, Greece demanded that Hrisanthos, the former Archbishop of Athens and known for his anti-communist personality, be elected as Patriarch. However, the anti-Turkish activities that Hrisanthos was involved in while he was serving in Trabzon between 1918-1922 made the Greeks soon adopt the idea that the solution to the Phanar problem would only be possible with the election of Athenagoras (Alexandris, 1992, pp. 245-246). In the following months, Greece became the state that made the most effort for the election of Athenagoras.

Thus, it became clear at the beginning of 1947 that Maximos, who has always been treated with suspicion since his election as Patriarch, would not be able to continue his duty for a long time due to health problems. During this period, while the new Patriarch candidates were being discussed in official circles, Maximos went to Athens for treatment on 19 May 1947 (*Cumhuriyet*, 20 May 1947). When he returned to Istanbul on August 3, 1947, he expressed his gratitude to the Turkish Government, which provided all kinds of convenience to him, and stated that he was in

good health and would start his duty immediately (*Cumhuriyet*, 4 August 1947). In the statements made by the Istanbul Patriarchate at this time, it was constantly reported that Maximos was in good health. However, by November, it was seen that Maximos was ready to leave his job due to health problems. The desire of the American, Greek and Turkish governments to see an active patriarch at the head of Fener in the face of the Soviet threat was effective in the emergence of this situation (Psomiades, 1957, p. 378). Although Maximos came to the point of accepting the resignation, he also put forward some conditions for this decision. Concerned that he would be sent to a distant monastery by the new Patriarch if he did not hold an effective position in the Patriarchate, Maximos requested the position of Metropolitan of Kadıköy and the position of vice-president of the Holy Synod in return for leaving his post (NARA, 867.404/11-147).

The Problems Before the Election

By the end of 1947, the joint efforts of the USA, Greece and Turkey brought Maximos to the point of resignation, thus overcoming an important problem regarding the Patriarchate. In this way, the conditions became more favorable to take action on the issue of citizenship, which was critical for the election of the new Patriarch candidate. As a matter of fact, after Maximos decided to resign under certain conditions, the Turkish Government started to work on the solution of Athenagoras' citizenship problem (NARA, 867.404/11-147). However, another problem arose during this time, so it was decided to postpone the election of the Patriarch for a while. The problem was the large number of Athenagoras opponents in the Patriarchate. In order to overcome this problem, the Greek Embassy developed the formula for the participation of some metropolitans from Greece in order to form the majority that would ensure the election of Athenagoras (NARA, 867.404/1-1948). This proposal was presented to the Turkish authorities in the following weeks.

The strong possibility that the new election to be held in the Patriarchate may not result in Athenagoras' favor was also revealed during the meetings held in the Istanbul Patriarchate by a US foreign official in April 1948. Although the activities for the election of Athenagoras as the new patriarch were continuing, in the meetings held by the US official, it was revealed that six or seven of the members of the Synod were willing to elect Athenagoras, and four of them were openly against Athenagoras. The fact that some of the remaining members had not made their decision yet, and that some of them did not want to express their opinions, increased the anxiety of the authorities.⁵ In the interim, another important development was that the opposition to Athenagoras started among some Turkish officials due to the concern that the election of Athenagoras would increase the tension with the USSR. Hence, an official from the US Embassy in Greece asked the US State Department to discuss this issue with the Turks (NARA, 867.404/4-1548). However, it should be noted that although there were some differences of opinion within the Turkish Government, the tendency of the government leaders in this period was towards the election of Athenagoras. In this respect, at that time, Greece had no serious concerns that Athenagoras would be challenged with citizenship. The main issue was whether there would be enough favorable votes for Athenagoras from the Synod. The solution developed by Greece to overcome this problem was to bring four metropolitans from Greece to Turkey and grant them Turkish citizenship. According to this plan, Athenagoras could easily be elected as Patriarch with the votes of the metropolitans. As of mid-April, Greece had conveyed this proposal to the Turkish Government and was waiting for a response (NARA, 867.404/4-2048).

As of May 1948, it was seen that Turkey continued to take the citizenship issue of

⁵ At that time, there were 17 members in the Holy Synod.

Athenagoras slow and the Greek authorities' discomfort about this situation increased. Moreover, although it was discussed that elections could be held at any time during these dates, the Turkish Government had not yet come to a decision on the entry of four pro-Athenagoras metropolitans into Turkey. For this reason, the issue of when the elections will be held continued to be uncertain for a while. Since the Greek Embassy did not want the elections to be held without a majority for Athenagoras, no steps could be taken to set a date for the election (NARA, 867.404/5-1448). Another important reason for not being able to determine when the patriarch election would be held was the increasing opposition to Athenagoras in the Holy Synod. The concern that the election of Athenagoras would cause such discomfort in the Moscow Church that it would reject the spiritual leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, led to increased opposition to Athenagoras within the Patriarchate (NARA, 867.404/5-2048). It is known that the candidacy of Athenagoras was also started to be discussed among Turkish officials during this period. A remarkable example in this regard was the objection of the Secretary General of Foreign Affairs, Mehmet Fuat Carım. Carım expressed his concerns on the idea that granting citizenship to Athenagoras would set a precedent that could pave the way for the election of a Slav as Patriarch in the future, and opposed the granting of Turkish citizenship to Athenagoras. After meeting with the representative of the Patriarchate on June 2, 1948, Carım ended his objections on this issue, thus, the support of a wing within the Turkish Government that had reservations about the issue was obtained (NARA, 867.404/6-848).

As of June 1948, although the problem created by the objections to granting Turkish citizenship to Athenagoras had been removed, it was still unclear whether enough votes would be given to Athenagoras by the Holy Synod. As stated before, there was a strong opposition to Athenagoras within the Patriarchate. In addition, the gradual deterioration of Maximos' health created the concern that another vote to be given to Athenagoras would be lost. Besides, the fact that three of the nine members who were expected to vote for Athenagoras had various health problems caused a concern, especially in Greek official circles, that an election to be held under these conditions could be lost. Actually, at the beginning of June, the Greek authorities had received positive signals from the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior regarding a long-time working plan to bring the four Greek metropolitans to Turkey to vote in the election. However, at this point, Mehmet Fuat Carım came to the fore once again. Carım, who was hardly persuaded to grant citizenship to Athenagoras, stood against the bringing of metropolitans from Greece on this occasion (NARA, 867.404/6-848). The reason for Carım's objection was that if the plan was carried out in this way, both the opposition within the Patriarchate and the Soviets and their satellites would be given a trump card. According to Mehmet Fuat Carım, in such a case, these circles would claim that the Patriarchate had lost its independence and came under Turkish control. In this regard, Carım was also critical of the Greek Government's expectation of such an intervention, which has always demanded the recognition of the Patriarchate's independence from Turkey, and argued that such an initiative would only worsen the current situation (NARA, 867.404/6-1448).

In the following days, when Prime Minister Hasan Saka came in line with the Foreign Affairs regarding the four metropolitan plans, the Greeks gave up on this plan, but Greece continued its active stance on the election of Athenagoras. In June, a letter, encouraging the election of Athenagoras, was written by the Greek High Clergy to the Holy Synod. This article was effective and Athenagoras supporters soon took over the majority in the Synod. Although the status of three or four members among Athenagoras supporters still remained uncertain due to their advanced age and health problems, this development caused Greece to take action to hold the elections as soon as possible.

When the doubts stemming from the Synod regarding the election of Athenagoras were

cleared in June 1948, there was only the issue of citizenship left to be settled. The Turkish Government, which had priorly been taking this issue slow, also intended to clarify the issue before the elections were held. The problem was that, under US law, Athenagoras had to renounce his US citizenship prior to his transition to Turkish citizenship. It was unclear how this situation would be received by the US authorities. Feridun Cemal Erkin, the new Ambassador to Washington, was to meet with US officials on the subject. The fact that Erkin was supposed to start his duty in August created discomfort in Greece, which wanted the elections to be held as soon as possible. Skepheris, the Greek Ambassador in Ankara, suggested that the Greek authorities investigate what the US stance would be rather than waiting for the Turks. It was planned that the Greek Government would contact Athenagoras and learn the approach of the USA through him. In this way, Greece would inform the Turkish Government of the outcome as soon as the response from the USA was received, thus speeding up the process (NARA, 867.404/6-2848). However, while Greece was following a hectic policy in the election and complaining about Turkey to the USA for its passive attitude, it was seen that the USA was also in a cautious stance on this issue. The USA, which was very cautious during the patriarch election process and tried not to create the impression that it interfered in religious affairs, continued this stance on the citizenship of Athenagoras as well. The United States did not want Athenagoras to contact them directly regarding citizenship. Instead of this method proposed by Greece, the US officials decided to inform the US Ambassador to Ankara, Wilson, about the conditions for going abroad, and to convey this information to the Turkish Government. Thus, fewer people would have participated in these discussions, and the allegations that the US government was involved in religious affairs could be prevented (NARA, 867.404/7-348).

The Election and the Activities of Athenagoras as Patriarch

After removing the obstacles to the election of Athenagoras, Maximos resigned on October 18, 1948 (*Cumhuriyet*, 19 October 1948). The day after the resignation, the Synod convened and accepted the resignation read by the Kadıköy Metropolitan (*Cumhuriyet*, 20 October 1948). In the election held on November 1, 1948, in which Athenagoras was not present, while the Metropolitan of Mytilene and the Metropolitan of Kos stood as candidates, Athenagoras was elected as the new patriarch by getting 11 of 17 votes (*Cumhuriyet*, 2 November 1948). At this point, it should be emphasized that two conditions were determined for the patriarch candidates in the governor's decree dated 6 December 1923, which regulated the patriarch election. According to this, it is stipulated that the candidates can only be determined from among the "metropolitans working within the borders of Turkey at the time of the election" as well as being "Turkish citizens" (Macar, 2004, p. 29). Athenagoras, on the other hand, was appointed as the head of the Patriarchate before the procedures related to his transition to Turkish citizenship were completed. Additionally, the fact that Athenagoras was not a metropolitan in Turkey at the time of the election constituted another contradiction to the governor's decree regarding the election of the patriarch.

After the election, it was discussed that Athenagoras would come to Turkey with an American warship, and this claim created discomfort in Turkish official circles. The Turkish Foreign Ministry warned the US Ambassador Wadsworth about the drawbacks of such a plan, and after this warning, the Embassy denied the news with the approval of the US Department of State (NARA, 867.404/12-1348). Meanwhile, the citizenship issue, which was essential for Athenagoras to take office, was still waiting to be resolved. Under Turkish law, Athenagoras's acquisition of Turkish citizenship was primarily dependent on his renunciation of his US citizenship. On the other hand, under US law, the new Patriarch could not renounce citizenship within the borders of the US. In order to overcome the problem, it was decided that Athenagoras would give up his US citizenship at a foreign point during his journey to Turkey and get a Turkish

passport. This was the reason for the susceptibility of the Turkish Government to keep the journey out of sight. It was thought that if Athenagoras came to Turkey on an American warship or an official US plane, the USSR would not hesitate to use this as leverage (NARA, 867.404/12-1348)

While Turkey's post-election attitude was in this direction, by the end of December there was a sudden change in the Turkish Government's attitude towards Athenagoras' journey. The Turkish Government informed the Greek Ambassador that the arrival of Athenagoras on Truman's private plane "Sacred Cow" would never bother them, on the contrary, such a show of interest by the United States would please them. This sudden change in Turkey's attitude was met with surprise by both the US and Greek officials (NARA, 867.404/12-2348). Following Turkey's approval for the journey, Athenagoras departed from New York on January 24, 1949 with Truman's private plane (*Cumhuriyet*, 25 January 1949). The Patriarch stopped by Paris during his journey and received the laissez-passer document from Oğuz Gökmen, first secretary of the Paris Embassy (Macar, 2004, p. 190). When Athenagoras landed in Turkey on January 26, a large crowd greeted him with applause and the shouts of "Axios" and "Zito Athenagoras."⁶ (*Cumhuriyet*, 27 January 1949).

As soon as the new Patriarch arrived in Turkey, he clearly showed that he would be on good terms with official circles. The answer of Athenagoras to the Metropolitan of Bursa, who read a speech in Greek during the welcoming ceremony, was in Turkish. Although the Phanar had to be visited first as per the schedule, the Patriarch went to the Atatürk Monument in Taksim and left a wreath of flowers plucked from the garden of the White House. After this visit, Athenagoras went to Phanar and met with journalists. In the meeting, the Patriarch stated that the news that he brought a message of friendship from Truman to İnönü was true and used the following expressions:

I spoke to my personal friend, President Truman, a short time ago. He has deep love for the great Turkish nation and admiration for its high qualifications, talent and heroism. He asked me to convey these feelings to our President İnönü. My intention is to go to Ankara at the first opportunity and meet with the elders of our country (*Cumhuriyet*, 27 January 1949).

Athenagoras was crowned Patriarch with a great ceremony on January 27. In his first speech as the Patriarch, he thanked the Government, the metropolitans and Maximos. In his speech, Athenagoras mentioned the crisis the world was in and stated that the only way to eliminate it was to ensure religious feelings dominate the world. The Patriarch, mentioning the need for cooperation between Orthodox churches, sent his greetings to the chiefs of these churches. The Patriarch also invited the Roman, Anglican, Protestant and Armenian churches and the Muslim world to cooperate. Atatürk's reforms were also included in Athenagoras' speech, and the reforms were enthusiastically praised by the Patriarch (*Cumhuriyet*, 28 January 1949). Athenagoras also sent telegrams to the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior on the occasion of the ceremony and expressed his loyalty by declaring that he had begun to fulfill his duties within the framework of the laws of the Republic (*Cumhuriyet*, 29 January 1949).

Patriarch Athenagoras continued his contacts with official circles in the following days and went to Ankara on February 5, 1949. During his visit, which started by laying a wreath and praying at Atatürk's temporary tomb, the Patriarch met with the President, Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Head of Religious Affairs. The Patriarch also visited the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, and in the speech he made during his reception by President İnönü, he

⁶ "Worthy," "long live Athenagoras" in Greek.

expressed his contentment with the interest and favor towards him and his community.

On the second day of his visit to Ankara, Patriarch Athenagoras delivered a speech on Ankara Radio addressing the USA. In his speech, the Patriarch praised the American nation and government. The Patriarch also expressed his gratitude to President Truman, to Turkish diplomats and students in the United States, and to his community there. In the evening of the same day, a dinner was given in honor of Athenagoras by the Minister of Interior Emin Erişirgil at Ankara Palas. While the Patriarch was leaving Ankara by train, he was sent off by the representatives of the Presidency, Prime Ministry and Ministry of Interior, as well as Istanbul deputy Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver and Greek Attachés (*Cumhuriyet*, 7 February 1949).⁷ After returning to Istanbul, the Patriarch paid a visit to Istanbul Governor and Mayor Lütfi Kırdar on February 14, and continued to be in close relations with official circles in the following days.

As it has been pointed out, the activities and statements made by Athenagoras immediately after his election as Patriarch were of the kind that would meet the expectations of him. After taking office, Athenagoras significantly met the expectations of both the Turkish Government and the USA with his activeness as well as the good relations he established with the official authorities. This attitude of the Patriarch and his closeness with the Turkish Government officials would create discontent in the Greek community with the influence of the Holy Synod over time. The Patriarch's extreme pro-US attitude, which was another feature that disturbed the congregation, caused him to be referred to as "nylon" in Church circles after a while (NARA, 867.404/3-2849). On the other hand, Athenagoras maintained good relations with Turkish official circles in the first half of the 1950s. However, this situation did not last long. With the Cyprus problem in 1954, the Patriarchate-Government relations began to weaken. In 1964, with the revival of the problem and new developments, relations deteriorated significantly (Şeker, 2013, pp. 277-282).

Conclusions

Since the first years of the Second World War, the USSR changed its policy on religion and the Church and sought to benefit from the power of the Orthodox Church, and this situation prompted the USA, which was worried about the increasing influence of the Soviets on Orthodox communities. By taking the Istanbul Patriarchate under its control, the USA aimed to prevent the Moscow Patriarchate from expanding its dominance. In line with this goal, the USA, Greece, and Turkey commenced activities for Athenagoras to get elected as the Patriarch of Istanbul. At the end of a strained process, these three states succeeded in making Athenagoras head of the Istanbul Patriarchate. In this process, it was seen that the USA and Turkey were in a very cautious attitude, while Greece acted very hastily. However, although Turkey displayed a generally prudent stance throughout the election process, at the end of the process, it almost ignored the governor's decree of 1923, which regulated the patriarch election. As a consequence, even though he did not hold Turkish citizenship and did not hold the office of metropolitan within the borders of the country, Turkey did not object to the election of Athenagoras. Although Turkey took into account the requirement of being a "citizen of Turkey" in the governor's decree, it approved the election of Athenagoras without waiting for him to become a citizen of the Republic of Turkey. Actually, by doing this, Turkey aspired to prevent further delays in the election, which had constantly been postponed for various reasons detailed in the study. Turkey also did not see any harm in making

⁷ At this time, the close attention that Athenagoras received in Ankara was also welcomed among the leading figures of the Greek community, and Athenagoras' popularity in Turkish circles was seen as an important opportunity to gain some rights (NARA, 867.404/4-2249).

it clear that the Patriarch election was a "US operation", by approving Athenagoras' arrival in Istanbul on Truman's private plane.⁸

The USA, which was the determinant state for Athenagoras to head the Istanbul Patriarchate, succeeded in gaining a significant advantage in its struggle for influence with the USSR with this development. The fact that the US diplomats followed the activities in Phanar very carefully revealed how critical the Istanbul Patriarchate was for the US. It has also been observed that although the USA followed a generally cautious policy throughout the election process, it did not refrain from turning Athenagoras' election into a show of strength after reaching its goal. It is possible to attribute the impatient attitude of Greece, which appears to be the most hectic country in the election process, to the ongoing Civil War in the country throughout the period under consideration. While the Greek Government was trying to prevent a communist revolution that would bring the country under the influence of the USSR, it wanted the control of the Church to be in "safe hands" as soon as possible. For this reason, during the election process, the hastiest attempts to eliminate the problems that caused the delay of the election came from Greece.

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⁸ Athenagoras himself clearly expressed this by saying that "I was the religious part of the Truman doctrine" (Macar, 2004, p. 190).

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