

By His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew At the Dinner of His Excellency Christos Kontovounissios, Ambassador of Greece in Finland (September 11, 2013)

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Your Excellency,

Distinguished friends,

First, we would like to express our joy at this new occasion to meet at the hospitable home of the Greek Embassy in Finland and our warm gratitude for the honor and gracious hosting of this reception, as well as your kind words and sentiments of love and respect.

Having visited Estonia and its most holy Church over the last seven days for the 90th anniversary since its elevation to the status of an Autonomous Church under the protection of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, today we commence our visit to its

neighboring country of Finland and its most holy Church, which also celebrates the 90th anniversary since its bestowal of the status of autonomy by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Such a historical development in no way separated the Church of Finland from the Mother Church of Constantinople, which vigilantly prays and affectionately cares for the progress and spiritual growth of its dearly beloved daughter Church of Finland and its spiritual children, rejoicing whenever it witnesses their maturity “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4.13)

For, the mission of the Ecumenical Patriarchate has from the outset been the transmission of the Gospel of Christ to the nations sitting in the darkness and shadow of death, as well as the coordination and concern as the first among the Orthodox Churches for their unity of faith and its expression on an ecumenical level. It has never been the pursuit of their domination, as occurred in the past by various other Churches and confessions. The missionary expeditions originating from Constantinople have always sowed the seed of the evangelical truth and faith in Jesus Christ, laboring to nurture and care for this seed, in order that it might not be stifled by thorns. They never sought to gather its fruits, fully recognizing that the fruits belong to the Lord of the Vineyard. This is also why the Ecumenical Patriarchate has yielded and continues to yield the administration and management of the local Churches to their own resources, only preserving their selfless and loving coordination, while in the case of the autonomous Churches, canonically protecting and spiritually guiding them. Thus, it is convinced that it contributes not only by means of its preaching, but also by its actions to the promotion of peaceful coexistence and cooperation among all people and nations, which is the constant aim for progress and prosperity among human beings and the whole world, especially at a time when we all witness societies troubled by the diverse crises that plague our world.

Aware of the fact that you also, dear Ambassador, from your noble and responsible position, contribute to the expansion of such cooperation among people and nations, embracing the Orthodox Church of Finland with your interest and love, we thank you wholeheartedly and toast to the health and many years of you and all your dear guests, invoking upon all of you the grace of God.

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