



AMERICAN HELLENIC INSTITUTE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACTIVITIES IN 2020

- **January 7** — The American Hellenic Institute (AHI) President Nick Larigakis provided written testimony to the U.S. Department of State urging the Department to reject Turkey's request for a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which imposes import restrictions on cultural goods originating prior to 1924 or the formulation of the Turkish Republic.
- **January 21** — The AHI Legislative Director Elias Gerasoulis testified to the State Department's Cultural Property Advisory Committee (CPAC) arguing against Turkey's proposed MoU. Gerasoulis also answered questions from Committee members.
- **End of 2019 - Beginning of 2020** — AHI had meetings with the staff of the following members of congress, in which the plight of the Ecumenical Patriarch was raised among other issues: Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX), Sen. John Enzi (R-WY), Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY), Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), Rep. Brad Sherman (D-CA), member, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Rep. Ron Wright (R-TX), Rep. Mike Conaway (R-TX), Rep. John Rutherford (R-FL), Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R-TX), Rep. John Ratcliffe (R-TX), Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA), Rep. Steve King (R-IA), & Rep. Jeff Van Drew (R-NJ).
- **February 11** — AHI released the press statement "AHI Condemns Turkish Administrative Court's Ruling that Denigrates Christian History," criticizing the Turkish government for moving forward with the conversion.
- **March 2** — AHI Legislative Director Elias Gerasoulis presented on the topic of AHI's policy work at a forum held by Armenian and Cypriot groups, February 21, 2020, at the invitation of Consul General of Cyprus In New York, Aleix Phedonos-Vadet. During this time, Gerasoulis discussed the Turkish government's persecution of religious minorities, including the plight of the Ecumenical Patriarch, among other topics.
- **February 24** — The AHI President Larigakis submitted written testimony to the House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs on the Trump Administration's foreign aid proposal for FY2021. In the testimony, AHI stated that Turkey should not receive aid or benefit from any assistance program unless "the Turkish government's safeguarding the Ecumenical Patriarchate, its status, personnel and property, reopening the Halki Patriarchal School of Theology, and returning church properties illegally seized."
- **May 5** — The AHI issued a statement welcoming the USCIRF 2020 Annual Report on Turkey.

- **June 5** — The AHI President Larigakis submitted written testimony to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs on the Trump Administration’s foreign aid proposal for FY2021. In the testimony, AHI stated that Turkey should not receive aid or benefit from any assistance program unless “the Turkish government’s safeguarding the Ecumenical Patriarchate, its status, personnel and property, reopening the Halki Patriarchal School of Theology, and returning church properties illegally seized.”
- **June 10** — AHI held a virtual forum “An Analysis of the 2020 U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Report.” The speakers were Judge Theodore Bozonelis, National Secretary of the Order of St. Andrew, Piero Tozzi, Senior Adviser & Counsel to Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), Professor Elizabeth Prodromou, Visiting Professor at Tufts University. John Metaxas, journalist, was the moderator.
- **June 30-July 2** — AHI held a virtual forum for AHI Foundation Foreign Policy Trip Alumni, in which Archbishop Elpidorophoros participated.
- **June 15** — AHI issued a statement regarding the U.S. Department of State 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom in Turkey.
- **July 15** — AHI wrote a letter to President Trump demanding that he act in light of President Erdogan’s conversion of the Hagia Sophia.
- **July 23** — During the eve of a Day of Mourning proclaimed by the Holy Eparchial Synod of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, the AHI reiterated its statement condemning the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque.
- **July 28** — AHI issued a statement supporting the successful passage of Rep. Dina Titus’ Hagia Sophia amendment. AHI had actively supported the amendment throughout July.
- **August 5** — AHI President Larigakis and Legislative Director Gerasoulis held a conference call with Deputy Assistant Secretary of European & Eurasian Affairs, Matthew Palmer, in which Turkey’s conversion of the Hagia Sophia was discussed.
- **August 14** — The AHI supported and participated in a protest held at the Turkish Embassy in Washington, D.C. The protest focused on condemning Turkey’s formal decision to change the status of Hagia Sophia from a museum to a mosque.
- **August 25** — The AHI joined with nine organizations to send a coalition letter to the U.S. Department of State’s Cultural Property Advisory Committee (CPAC) opposing proposed MoU with Turkey. Legislative Director Gerasoulis circulated this letter throughout the State Department’s Bureau of European & Eurasian affairs, and educated officials in the Bureau about the aforementioned MoU and its many problems.
- **September 24** — AHI Legislative Director Elias Gerasoulis spoke to the American Bar Association’s Art and Cultural Heritage Law section about AHI’s work opposing Turkey’s proposed Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Property (MoU).

- **October 5** — AHI announced it has submitted a 2020 Policy Platform on issues of importance to the Greek American community to each of the presidential campaigns of President Donald J. Trump and former Vice President Joseph Biden, Jr. Included were suggested policy directives regarding the Ecumenical Patriarch.
- **October 15** — Biden-Harris Campaign Responds to AHI's Proposed Policy Platform with a policy platform for the Greek-American community, which included statements that a President Biden would fight for the "rights of the Greek Orthodox Church."
- **November 1** — U.S. Rep. Brad Sherman (D-CA), a senior member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, submitted his foreign policy platform on issues of importance to the Greek American community to the AHI, which included policy positions on religious freedom and the Greek-Orthodox Church.
- **November 2** — "Greek Voices For Trump," an arm of the Trump-Pence campaign, responded to AHI's policy platform and issued a policy statement for the Greek-American community, which included policy positions on religious freedom and the Greek-Orthodox Church.
- **November 11** — AHI wrote a letter to Secretary of State Pompeo on his upcoming visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
- **November 24** — AHI President Nick Larigakis and Delaware members organized a virtual meeting with Sen. Chris Coons (D-DE), a senior member of the Foreign Relations Committee. Larigakis discussed the plight of the Ecumenical Patriarch during the meeting, among other issues.
- **October & November 2020** — AHI meetings were held with the following staff from congressional offices, in which the plight of the Ecumenical Patriarch was raised among other issues: Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ), ranking member, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), Rep. Brad Sherman (D-CA), Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-NJ).
- **December** — The American Bar Association (ABA) publication published an article authored by AHI Legislative Director Elias Gerasoulis on AHI's firm stance for religious freedom in opposition to Turkey's proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United States on cultural property.
- **December 9** — AHI sends a congratulatory letter to President-Elect Biden, stating that the AHI looks forward to working with him in "strengthening US-Greece, US-Cyprus relations, and safeguarding the rights of the Ecumenical Patriarch."
- **December 31** — Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) submitted a Congressional letter to Secretary of State Pompeo as well as several high-ranking state department officials, opposing the proposed MoU with Turkey. AHI successfully convinced the Congressman and his staff on the need for such a letter, and worked with them for several months to bring it to fruition.