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The Halki Theological School Issue: The Closure of the School Amidst the Cyprus Crisis and Its Repercussions in Greece, 1955-1971*

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Abstract

The closure of The School in 1971 was a pivotal moment shaped by the broader context of Turkish-Greek relations and the Cyprus Issue. While the existing literature largely focuses on the school's functioning, Türkiye's stance during the closure process, and the subsequent international discussions, few

* This study is based on the paper titled "Heybeliada Ruhban Okulu Krizi: Okulun Statüsünün Değiştirilmesi ve Yunanistan'ın Tepkisi, Ocak-Aralık 1971", which was presented at the II. Istanbul Islands Symposium held on September 25-27, 2023. While addressing the same topic, the text has been restructured, its scope expanded, and enriched with archival sources. Additionally, the historical process has been examined in greater detail.

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studies adopt a comparative perspective that explores Türkiye's motivations for altering the school's status alongside Greece's responses within the internal and external dynamics of the period. This study aims to contribute to filling this gap in the literature and to provide a historical background to the contemporary debates on the reopening of the school. Founded in 1844, The School was established with the primary mission of training clergy within the framework of Patriarchate ideology to reinforce its authority, prestige, and unity amidst rising nationalist movements establishing independent churches. Despite enduring conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and Greece, the school grew to become a cornerstone of Orthodox Christian education. After the Treaty of Lausanne, its status was closely tied to Turkish-Greek relations. During periods of tension, the school and its curriculum were monitored for fears of fostering anti-Turkish sentiment. During periods of good relations between the two countries, the Patriarchate and the school were granted significant freedom.

The unresolved crisis in Turkish-Greek relations caused by the Cyprus Issue was one of the most significant dynamics behind the closure of the school. In 1963, the Cyprus crisis emerged following Cypriot President Makarios's attempt to revoke the political rights granted to Turkish Cypriots under the 1959 London and Zurich Agreements. This crisis led to political tensions between Türkiye and Greece, two key NATO members. While Greek Cypriots and Greece pursued Enosis (union with Greece), Türkiye's policy of Taksim (partition) brought the two sides to the brink of war. Although the crisis was temporarily defused by U.S. intervention in 1964, the tension between the two countries could not be entirely resolved. During this period, when the Cyprus Issue became a central topic in the foreign policy agendas of both nations, discussions surrounding the Patriarchate and The School also intensified. Proposals to revoke the privileges of these two institutions were brought to the forefront. However, Turkish governments at the time refrained from taking steps to close The School. At the beginning of 1971, as the Cyprus Issue evolved into a new phase and developments in Türkiye's domestic politics gained momentum, a policy change was implemented. The Nihat Erim Government enacted a law requiring private schools to be placed under state supervision. However, the Patriarchate, unwilling to accept this regulation, decided to cease the school's operations. Meanwhile, the junta in Greece, which was planning to overthrow Makarios, adopted a policy of downplaying this significant development to avoid creating a bargaining point for Türkiye on the Cyprus Issue. The ongoing debates actually demonstrate the extent to which the issue holds significance for Greece.

Keywords: The School, Patriarchate, Türkiye, Greece, Cyprus, Athenagoras

Heybeliada Ruhban Okulu Meselesi: Kıbrıs Krizi Sürecinde Okulun Kapatılması ve Yunanistan'daki Yankıları, 1955-1971

Öz

Heybeliada Ruhban Okulu'nun 1971 yılında kapatılması, Türk-Yunan ilişkilerinin ve Kıbrıs Meselesi'nin gölgesinde gerçekleşen önemli bir gelişmeydi. Mevcut literatür genellikle okulun işleyişine, Türkiye'nin kapatma sürecindeki tutumuna ve kapatma sonrası uluslararası tartışmalara odaklanmaktadır. Ancak, Türkiye'nin okulun statüsünü değiştirme motivasyonu ve Yunanistan'ın buna verdiği tepkiyi dönemin iç ve dış dinamikleri çerçevesinde karşılaştırmalı bir perspektiften ele alan bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır. Bu çalışma literatürdeki bu boşluğun doldurulmasına katkı sunmayı, günümüzde okulun yeniden açılması tartışmalarına tarihsel bir arka plan sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

1844 yılında kurulan Heybeliada Ruhban Okulu, kilise ideolojisi doğrultusunda din adamı yetiştirerek Patrikhane'nin otoritesini, prestijini ve birliğini güçlendirmek amacıyla kurulmuştu. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ile Yunanistan arasındaki gerginliklere rağmen büyüyen okul, Hristiyan-Ortodoks eğitiminde önemli bir merkez haline gelmişti. Lozan Antlaşması sonrası okulun statüsü, diğer pek çok önemli meselede olduğu gibi, iki ülke arasındaki dengeye bağlı hale gelmişti. Türkiye-Yunanistan ilişkilerinin kötüleştiği dönemlerde, okul ve müfredatı, Türk karşıtı duyguları teşvik etme korkusuyla yakından takip edilmişti. İki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerin iyi olduğu dönemlerde ise Patrikhane ve okula ciddi bir övgürlük alanı açılmıştı.

Kıbrıs Meselesi nedeniyle Türk-Yunan ilişkilerinde bir türlü aşılamayan kriz, okulun kapanmasındaki en önemli dinamiklerden biri olmuştu. 1963 yılında Kıbrıs Cumhurbaşkanı Makarios'un, Kıbrıslı Türklere 1959 yılında imzalanan Londra ve Zürih Antlaşmaları ile tanınan siyasi hakları geri alma girişimi neticesinde ortaya çıkan Kıbrıs buhranı, NATO'nun iki önemli üyesi olan Türkiye ve Yunanistan arasında siyasi gerilime yol açmıştı. Kıbrıslı Rumların ve Yunanistan'ın Enosis (birleşme) girişimlerine karşılık Türkiye'nin Taksim siyaseti nedeniyle taraflar savaşın eşiğine gelmişti. 1964 yılında Amerika'nın müdahalesiyle kriz geçici olarak savuşturulmuşsa da, iki ülke arasındaki gerginlik tam anlamıyla sona erdirilememişti. Kıbrıs Meselesi'nin, iki ülkenin temel dış politika gündem maddesine dönüştüğü bu süreçte, Patrikhane ve Ruhban Okulu'na ilişkin tartışmalarda bu iki kuruma tanınan ayrıcalıkların kaldırılması gündeme gelmişti. Ancak, Türk Hükümetleri o dönemde Ruhban Okulu'nun kapatılması yönünde bir adım atmaya yanaşmamıştı. 1971 yılı başında, Kıbrıs sorununun yeni bir boyuta evrilmesi ve Türkiye'nin iç siyasette yaşadığı gelişmelerin etkisiyle bu politikada bir değişiklik yaşandı. Nihat Erim Hükümeti, özel okulların devlet denetimine alınmasını öngören bir kanunu yürürlüğe

koydu. Ancak bu düzenlemeyi kabul etmek istemeyen Patrikhane, okulun faaliyetlerine son verdi. Yunanistan'da Makarios'u devirme planları yapan Cunta yönetimi ise Türkiye ile Kıbrıs konusunda bir pazarlık unsuru yaratmama kaygısıyla, bu önemli gelişmeyi "büyütmeme" yönünde bir siyaset izlemeyi tercih etti. Günümüzdeki tartışmalar aslında meselenin Yunanistan açısından ne ölçüde önem arz ettiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Heybeliada Ruhban Okulu, Patrikhane, Türkiye, Yunanistan, Kıbrıs, Athenagoras

Introduction

Halki Theological School¹, located on Hope Hill in Heybeliada, one of the Princes' Islands south of Istanbul, was founded in 1844 by Patriarch Germanos IV (1842–1845). This was achieved by converting the Holy Trinity Monastery, originally built by Patriarch Photios in the 9th century, into a seminary. Interestingly, shortly before the establishment of this school, a seminary had been founded in Fener in 1839 for a similar purpose (separate from the Fener Greek School, which did not have the status of a seminary). However, that school operated for only one year before closing². The circumstances surrounding the establishment of Theological School were shaped by the aftermath of the Greek War of Independence in 1821, the establishment of the Greek Kingdom in 1830, and the rights granted to minorities, particularly in terms of religious freedoms. These developments were likely influenced by a desire to prevent similar uprisings and to encourage Greeks to remain in or return to Istanbul. For instance, in 1830 alone, 25 churches were opened in Istanbul, and commercial high schools offering education in various languages were established. Halki, became home not only to a religious seminary but also to a commercial school. In 1831, with the permission of Sultan Mahmud II, known for his direct Westernization reforms, a

¹ In international literature, the term "Theological School" is widely used to refer to the The Halki Theological School (Heybeliada Ruhban Okulu). The Greek press of the period also includes the statement, Η Θεολογική Σχολή της Χάλκης (Halki Teoloji Okulu)

² Vasilidis Stavridis, *I Iera Theologiki Sholi tis Halkis*, Tomos A, Athina, 1970, p.13; Aris Abacis, *Lavirintos tis Halkis, I Peripatia tis Theologikis Sholis*, Athina, 2011, p.17.

Greek commercial school offering instruction in English, French, German, and Turkish was established³.

The primary purpose of establishing Theological school, which was directly under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Fener, was to train clergy at an academic level with strong intellectual qualifications within the framework of the Patriarchate's ideology. This was intended to meet the spiritual needs of the entire Orthodox Christian world, particularly the Greek churches in Istanbul⁴. The general aim was to establish a unified theological language through the education provided at the school, to contribute to maintaining religious unity among all Orthodox communities as they underwent different ethnic state formations, and to preserve the spiritual authority and reputation of the Patriarchate. In this way, the school sought to strengthen the will, prestige, and unity of the Patriarchate, which had begun to be challenged by the tendency of ethnic-based states to establish their own churches-an inclination that gained momentum following the French Revolution. Additionally, the school aimed to become the largest educational center of the Orthodox world⁵. Its opening was also a response to the Patriarchate's aspiration to remain an international center amidst the rising tide of nationalism in the Balkans and the increasing trend of forming national churches as a result of this nationalism⁶. The school was not the only one established for this purpose. A theological school was founded at the University of Athens in Greece in 1837, and another was established in Jerusalem in 1855. However, among these three institutions and others providing theological education, Heybeliada stood out as the most prestigious

³ Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of World's Desire, 1453-1924*, John Murroy, 1991, p.252.

⁴ Vasil T. Stavridis, "A Concise History of the Ecumenical Patriarchate", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, (trans. and ed. by George Dragas), Vol. 45, No. 1-4, 2000, p. 57-153, p.98.

⁵ Emre Özyılmaz, *Heybeliada Ruhban Okulu*, Tamga Yay, Ankara, 2000, p.33.

⁶ Elçin Macar and Mehmet Ali Gökçaçı, "Discussions and Recommendations on the Future of the Theological School", Istanbul, TESEV, 2009, p. 9; Ayşe Aslı Bilge, *The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate ff Istanbul: Its Current Status and International Claim with Reference to Türkiye's EU Membership Process*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Marmara University, 2012, p.55.

school for religious education, thanks to its systematic approach and educational principles, earning the admiration of Orthodox Christians.

The School, which operated from 1844 to 1971, graduated approximately 1,000 students, many of whom rose to significant positions, including the Greek Patriarch of Fener. The current Patriarch, Bartholomew (I. Bartholomeos/ Βαρθολομαίος Α), is among the notable graduates of this institution. Vasileios Stavridis, a teacher and writer who attended the school (1947–1949), categorizes its historical function into four distinct periods. From its establishment until 1919, the school offered a curriculum comprising four years of secondary education and three years of theological studies. Between 1919 and 1923, it focused exclusively on a five-year theology program, discontinuing secondary education. From 1923 to 1951, it returned to the structure of the first period, and from 1951 to 1971, the curriculum included four years of high school followed by three years of theological education. The school ceased operations in 1971. The school educated 930 students, 12 of whom rose to the position of Patriarch⁷.

During the Ottoman period, the school operated directly under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate, benefiting from the state's general approach of allowing non-Muslims to establish and manage educational institutions. As a result, the school was able to maintain its autonomy. However, developments in bilateral relations eventually brought the status of the school, along with the Patriarchate, into debate. Throughout the Balkan Wars and World War I, the school remained off the agenda due to the multitude of pressing issues faced by both countries. However, the Turkish-Greek War (*Turkish War of Independence*), which began with Greece's occupation of Smyrna, and the Patriarchate's role in this conflict, brought the matter to prominence. The Ankara Government complained that the Patriarchate and churches across the country of becoming centers for Hellenistic propaganda, inciting unrest among Anatolian Greeks and undermining the Turkish National Struggle (*İstiklal Harbi*). In this period, Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos' rhetoric and his vision of "a greater Greece dominating two continents and five seas" intensified discussions and ambitions regarding the capture of Istanbul. As a result, the Greek

⁷ Stavridis, *op. cit.*, p.13.

Patriarchate of Fener became increasingly politicized and assertive, to the extent of positioning itself as the flagbearer of the Megali Idea⁸.

Especially during the occupation of Istanbul and Izmir, the Patriarchate's attitude had accumulated a serious anger against this institution. In this context, the general perception and acceptance on the Turkish side was that the school had forgotten its mission of providing only religious education and had turned into a political center operating in line with the directives of the Patriarchate. Amid the occupations of Istanbul and Izmir, the Patriarchate's actions provoked significant anger toward the institution. The prevailing perception on the Turkish side was that the school had strayed from its mission of providing solely religious education and had transformed into a political center operating under the directives of the Patriarchate. At the Lausanne negotiations, the removal of the Patriarchate from Istanbul became a topic of debate. However, in the final agreement, the Patriarchate retained its position. Its administrative, political, and judicial powers were abolished, leaving it as a purely religious institution serving only the Greek population in Istanbul, Gökçeada, and Bozcaada. Following these discussions, it was agreed to respect the historical significance of the institution, provided that it refrained from engaging in political activities or claiming an ecumenical, i.e., global, role. Under these conditions, it was allowed to remain in Istanbul⁹. After the Lausanne Peace Treaty was signed on July 24, 1923, Türkiye closely monitored the Patriarchate's activities, including the operations of the school within this framework. Although the school was not the central focus of discussions regarding the Patriarchate, it was nevertheless

⁸ Mansel *op. cit.*, p.384-385.

⁹ Alexandris Alexandris *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations 1918-1974*, Centre for Asia Minor Studies, Athens, 1992, s.92; For a study evaluating Patriarch Meletios Metaxakis's approach and initiatives during the Lausanne Conference in response to the Turkish delegation's arguments, based on Greek sources, see Nilüfer Erdem's article titled "Lozan Görüşmeleri Sırasında Patrikhane Meselesi Karşısında Patrik Meletios'un Yunan Kaynaklarına Yansıyan Yaklaşımı", *Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 16/33, 2016, pp. 105-134.

influenced by the measures taken against the Patriarchate due to its direct affiliation with the institution¹⁰.

The school, closely tied to the Patriarchate, faced significant challenges during the early years of the Turkish Republic. The Patriarchate's transition into a purely religious institution and the focus on establishing a secular-democratic regime led to difficulties in maintaining the school's standards, student quality, and operational rhythm. However, improved Turkish-Greek relations later brought a period of recovery. Key milestones included Venizelos's return to power in Greece in 1928, his visit to Ankara in 1930, and the signing of a friendship treaty between the two countries. These events reduced mutual hostility, eased tensions over the Patriarchate's political status, and fostered goodwill on both sides¹¹. Despite this, skepticism remained. Greece criticized Türkiye for allegedly using the Patriarchate as "a threat,"¹² while Türkiye remained wary of the Patriarchate's "ecumenical claims". Following the Second World War, two major developments positively influenced the status, jurisdiction, and influence of the Patriarchate and Theological School. The first was the election of Athenagoras as Patriarch in 1948¹³, succeeding Maximos, who had been dealing with long-term health issues. The second was the rise of the Democratic Party to power in Türkiye in 1950, ending 27 years of one-party rule.

Two key factors influenced the appointment of Athenagoras as Patriarch. First, the continuation of friendly relations between Türkiye and Greece played a significant role. In the pre-war period, both nations were united by a shared concern over Italian and Bulgarian revisionist policies, fostering closer ties. Post-war, this dynamic shifted to a mutual interest in countering Soviet expansionism and communism, making it

¹⁰ Aristidi Pasadaïou, *Iera Theologiki Sholi Halkis, Istorïa, Arhitektoniki*, Ekdosi Ieras Mitropoleos Elbetias, Athina, p.119.

¹¹ *Εκκλησιαστικά Χρονικά* 1992:3-4.

¹² Thanos Veremis and Giannis Koliopoulos, *Ellas I Sinxroni Sinexia, apo to 1821 simera*, Ekdoseis Kastaniotiü, Athina, 2018, p.367-368

¹³ For detailed information on Stavridis's connection of Meletios-Athenagoras in the context of America, see, Vasil T. Stavridis, "Two Ecumenical Patriarchs From America: Meletios IV Metaxakis (1921-1923) and Athenagoras I Spyrou (1948-1972), *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 44/1-4, 1999, pp.55-84.

beneficial for both countries to maintain positive relations. The second, and more importantly, was related to the United States. Following World War II, the U.S. adopted a global strategy to combat communism, which significantly impacted Türkiye and Greece. Both nations received economic support under the Truman Doctrine and were later integrated into the Western security framework through NATO membership. Athenagoras's appointment as Patriarch in 1948 was facilitated by American initiatives, leveraging its influence over both countries.

Athenagoras, who served as the Ecumenical Patriarch from 1948 to 1972, was a graduate of The Halki Theological School. He was not only a religious leader but also a prominent political figure on the international stage. When he was elected Archbishop of America in 1930, he established personal friendships during his tenure with many U.S. presidents, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Dwight D. Eisenhower. In 1948, he was sent to Ankara directly on President Truman's plane and subsequently proclaimed Patriarch. One of the main reasons for this was the increasing influence of the Russian Church over the Orthodox community, which had alarmed the United States. According to Truman, something needed to be done to revitalize the Orthodox Church. Under the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne, the individual elected to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople was required to be a Turkish citizen. However, Athenagoras was rapidly granted Turkish citizenship. He was essentially tasked with three primary missions: To free the Ecumenical Patriarchate from the influence and pressure of the Russian Church, to reestablish the Patriarchate as an international spiritual power and increase its influence among the Orthodox, to combat communism. Athenagoras fulfilled these missions with great success.

In this context, Athenagoras I, assumed the role of Patriarch after Maximos V resigned (or was pressured to resign) in 1948. This marked the first time a non-Turkish citizen, Athenagoras, a Greek national, was appointed to the Greek Patriarchate of Fener. Despite concerns that this move might embolden the Patriarchate's ecumenical aspirations or lead to a Vatican-like institution, Türkiye refrained from voicing objections due to its priorities at the time. Türkiye's tacit acceptance of Athenagoras's appointment and its broader implications-such as the

Patriarchate's ecumenical rhetoric and the potential risks of Theological School becoming a source of political or ideological tension-was closely tied to its desire to solidify its position within the Western bloc. These concerns were either sidelined or strategically ignored under the circumstances of the era.

Turkish Historian Adnan Sofuoğlu evaluates this process in detail through the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper. According to Sofuoğlu, Maximos, despite his illness, deliberately delayed his resignation to ensure that Athenagoras could succeed him. Under normal circumstances, Athenagoras could not have been elected Patriarch, as he was not a Turkish citizen¹⁴. Türkiye, aiming to maintain the Patriarchate as a Turkish institution to counter its ecumenical aspirations and Greece's influence, had historically required Turkish citizenship for the position. However, with the improvement in bilateral relations, Athenagoras was granted Turkish citizenship, thereby adhering to this principle while accommodating the situation¹⁵. In doing so, Türkiye, intentionally or not, reduced its influence and control over both the Patriarchate and Theological School. Although concerns existed that these developments might encourage the Patriarchate's ecumenical ambitions or lead to the creation of a Vatican-like entity, Türkiye refrained from expressing such fears at the time. This approach was primarily driven by Türkiye's desire to strengthen its position within the Western bloc. Concerns over the Patriarchate's ecumenical rhetoric, the election of a non-Turkish citizen as Patriarch, and the potential risks posed by Theological School-seen as a possible "hotbed of danger" where recruits from Greece could be politically mobilized-were ultimately sidelined or overlooked under the circumstances of the era.

Upon becoming Patriarch, Athenagoras took significant steps to improve the situation of the Patriarchate and the Greek community in Istanbul, particularly focusing on Theological School. His genuine relationship with political figures, including İsmet İnönü, played a crucial role in his success. Following his appointment he developed strong

¹⁴ Adnan Sofuoğlu *Fener Patrikhanesinin Siyasi Faaliyetleri*, İstanbul, 1996, pp.163-166.

¹⁵ Nesim Şeker, "The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople in the Midst of Politics: The Cold War, the Cyprus Question, and the Patriarchate, 1949-1959", *Journal of Church and State*, Spring 2013, 55/2, 2013, pp.264-285.

relationships with Turkish government officials. Athenagoras's efforts led to the resumption of admitting foreign students, especially from Greece, to the school. While such admissions had been allowed after Lausanne, Türkiye had later imposed restrictions. During this period, foreign teachers were also brought in to enhance the quality of education¹⁶. Most of the seminary's students came from regions under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate, but the admission of Greek students was particularly valuable from a Hellenist perspective. This not only elevated the school's reputation but also reinforced its ideological significance.

The pinnacle of these relations was marked by Prime Minister Menderes' visit to the Patriarchate in 1952, which was the first and only visit at such a high level. Even more notable was the fact that during this period, the Patriarch was referred to in the press as "Ecumenical," and this did not provoke significant discomfort¹⁷. Encouraged by these developments, Athenagoras, in his meetings with Turkish officials, expressed the need for a new Patriarchate building and suggested that a large area outside Istanbul be allocated for this purpose. He also requested special rights for the Patriarchate outside the framework of Turkish law and proposed the transformation of The School into an Orthodox University¹⁸. These demands were frequently presented to the Republican People's Party (CHP) but were rejected during the tenure of Nihat Erim as Deputy Prime Minister¹⁹. Although Turkish authorities perceived these requests as an attempt to create a "Vatican-like church," no overt reaction to these demands was given under the circumstances of that period.

1- Cyprus Crises and its Impact on The School

The Patriarchate and the Heybeliada Seminary experienced its "golden age", so to speak, in terms of autonomy and, in contrast, its

¹⁶ Alexandris, *op. cit.*, pp.247-248.

¹⁷ Elçin Macar, *Cumhuriyet Döneminde İstanbul Rum Patrikhanesi*, İletişim, İstanbul, 2003, p.191-193.

¹⁸ Yazının devamı için bkz. <https://millidusunce.com/misak/devletlerustu-bir-guc-patrikhane/>

¹⁹ Abaci, *op. cit.*, p.41.

“dark age” during the Democratic Party period. The Democratic Party was in favor of further improving relations with the Patriarchate and Patriarch Athenogoras, both in terms of winning the votes²⁰ of the Greeks living in Istanbul and in the context of relations with Greece and America. In fact, although the rapprochement between the two countries, the foundations of which were laid during the Atatürk-Venizelos period, and even the development of both institutions within the framework of friendly relations had begun during the Republican People's Party period, many radical changes to the benefit of these two institutions had begun in the early years of the Democratic Party. Between 1923 and 1950, the Greek Patriarchate of Fener's efforts to bring foreign teachers and students to the Seminary were unsuccessful. However, after the Democrat Party came to power in 1950, foreign students began to be admitted under Menderes's directive. By 1953, the rapid increase in foreign students reduced Turkish citizen students to just 10% of the total enrollment, and the number of Turkish language classes was also decreased. In the previously mentioned 1953 speech, he spoke of this with great satisfaction. In 1951, shortly after the Democrat Party's election victory, the Seminary was granted college status, falling short of the previously requested university status. Nonetheless, Athenagoras interpreted this as effectively granting the school university recognition²¹. Athenogoras also managed to develop a cordial dialogue with both Menderes and Bayar²². Prime Minister

²⁰ According to Özyılmaz account, the primary reason the Democratic Party responded positively to the Patriarchate's demands for privileges before the elections was to secure the votes of 100,000 Greeks living in Istanbul. Both Patriarch Athenagoras and the Democratic Party cooperated on this matter. For more information, see Özyılmaz, *op. cit.*, p.86.

²¹ The basis for these statistics is Athenagoras's speech delivered during the school's graduation ceremony in July 1953. National Archives (United States) (NA), Democracy in Türkiye, 1950-1959: Records of the U.S. State Department Classified Files, Central File: Decimal File 983.61, Other Internal Affairs. Communications, Transportation, Science., Türkiye, Newspapers. Clippings. Items., October 22, 1952- September 14, 1954, Frederick T. Merrill to the Department of State, İstanbul, 24 July 1953.

²² “Rum Patriği Athenagoras'ın bayram tebriği”, BOA, Başkanlık Özel Kalem Müdürlüğü (BÖKM), 5-24-10, 23.05.1950; Abacıs, *op. cit.*, p.29.

Menderes' visit to the Patriarchate in 1952 was the peak of these relations, as it was the first and only visit at the highest level²³.

Indeed, the Seminary found an extraordinary "freedom" space during the early years of the Democrat Party, particularly when compared to the preceding administration. Athenagoras, while striving to elevate the profile of both the Patriarchate and the Seminary, simultaneously sought to foster good relations with the Democrat Party. In doing so, he occasionally set aside his religious persona, acting and speaking as if he were a politician. Surprisingly, from the perspective of both Greece and the Greek community in Istanbul, his participation in the 500th anniversary celebrations of the conquest of Istanbul and his open praise of the Democrat Party should be viewed within this context. According to a report by Frederick T. Merrill, the U.S. Consul in Istanbul, sent to the U.S. Department of State in Washington on July 24, 1953, Athenagoras, in a speech delivered during the graduation ceremony at Theological School, described America as a powerful nation playing a decisive role in the fate of the world. He praised NATO (which Türkiye and Greece had joined together in 1952), criticized the CHP (Republican People's Party)²⁴, and expressed gratitude to the Democrat Party for restoring university status to the Seminary. Furthermore, he openly expressed his satisfaction with the reduction in the number of Turkish language courses²⁵. This stance drew harsh criticism from both the Greek and Turkish press, with Athenagoras being accused of exploiting his position for political purposes. However, the Democrat Party largely ignored these criticisms. In fact, certain actions, which would seem unlikely in today's context, were met with silence. According to Elçin Macar, the use of the term "Ecumenical" to refer to the Patriarch in the press did not provoke significant discomfort. Such "tolerances" or

²³ Macar, *op. cit.*, pp.191-193.

²⁴ Whether Nihat Erim, who would sign the decision to close the school in 1971, was influenced by Athenagoras's stance remains a subject requiring further investigation. This is because, during his tenure as Minister and Deputy Prime Minister (1945-1950), the CHP had opposed efforts to change the status of the school.

²⁵ National Archives (United States) (NA), Democracy in Türkiye, 1950-1959: Records of the U.S. State Department Classified Files, Central File: Decimal File 983.61, Other Internal Affairs. Communications, Transportation, Science., Türkiye, Newspapers. Clippings. Items., October 22, 1952- September 14, 1954, Frederick T. Merrill to the Department of State, İstanbul, 24 July 1953.

concessions, which were markedly at odds with the sensitivities of the Republic, were likely intended to preserve the positive atmosphere of the period and were, in a sense, conditional.

In this favorable climate, a crisis emerged in a distant region that would profoundly impact the fate of the Patriarchate and Theological School: the Cyprus issue. In the early 1950s, relations between Türkiye and Greece began to deteriorate when Greek Cypriots, led by the church, demanded the annexation of Cyprus to Greece. This demand was actively supported by Greece, encouraging Greek Cypriots in their cause. Tensions escalated further when Greece brought the matter to the UN in 1954, prompting Türkiye to abandon its previous stance of "Türkiye does not have a Cyprus issue" and take a more assertive position. The process that escalated into a severe crisis, bringing the two countries to the brink of war, arose from the acceleration of the Greek Cypriots' demands for Enosis. Cyprus, a strategically significant island in the Eastern Mediterranean, was under Ottoman rule from 1571 to 1878 before being "temporarily" ceded to British colonial administration. Following the Ottoman Empire's entry into World War I on the side of the Central Powers, Britain declared its annexation of the island. This de facto situation, which persisted until 1923, was formalized with the Treaty of Lausanne, through which the Turkish Grand National Assembly acknowledged British sovereignty over the island. For the Greek Cypriots, this development sparked renewed hope for the island's unification with Greece.

Britain's opposition to these demands and its declaration of Cyprus as a Crown Colony in 1925 drew strong reactions from the church and nationalist Greek Cypriots. This tension culminated in a major uprising in 1931, demanding Enosis²⁶. In response, Britain ruled the island under martial law until the end of World War II. After the war, Greek Cypriot efforts to unite with Greece intensified, gaining a new dimension. By 1955, terrorist acts against British administration began, further escalating the situation. Britain's decision to transform Cyprus into a military base, following its withdrawal from Egypt, and its refusal to relinquish control over the island exacerbated the crisis. When

²⁶ Gürhan Yellice, "1878'den 1931'e Kıbrıs'ta Enosis Talepleri ve İngiltere'nin Yaklaşımı", *Çağdaş Türkiye Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 12/24, pp.13-26.

negotiations between Türkiye, Greece, and Britain failed to produce a resolution, the issue evolved into an international crisis. It had also escalated into a major crisis between the two communities in Cyprus.

It was evident that Türkiye, during the Treaty of Lausanne negotiations, either accepted or tolerated the continued presence of the Patriarchate (and consequently Theological School) in Istanbul as a gesture of mutual goodwill. In the early years of the Democrat Party's rule, this tolerance evolved into concessions and privileges. However, as Greece's attempts to annex Cyprus began to disrupt the Turkish-Greek balance established by Lausanne, the status of the Patriarchate and Theological School, along with pressures on the Greek minority in Istanbul, became one of the first issues to be debated in Türkiye. The Greek minority was among the first to feel the impact of this crisis. As the rebellion initiated by Greek Cypriots against British rule gained traction and the situation of Turkish Cypriots grew increasingly uncertain, Türkiye began to advocate for the partition of Cyprus under the slogan "Partition or Death" in response to Enosis. During this process, the Greek minority in Istanbul was seen as a potential bargaining tool to bolster Türkiye's position. This approach further fueled the rise of anti-Greek sentiments in Istanbul.

A few months after the terrorist acts (referred to as a war of independence by Greece and Greek Cypriots) began against British rule in Cyprus, the *Istanbul Express*, a newspaper close to the Democrat Party, published a report on September 6, 1955, claiming that "a bomb had exploded at Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's house in Thessaloniki." Following this report, crowds allegedly organized by the Cyprus Is Turkish Association carried out attacks on Greek-owned properties, Orthodox churches, businesses, and schools in Istanbul. The government, aiming to intimidate Greece over the Cyprus issue, failed to take sufficient measures to prevent these nationalist demonstrations. The Cyprus issue emerged during a period when the Democrat Party was facing challenges in its efforts to achieve economic development and improve public welfare. Struggling to manage growing economic difficulties, the Democrat Party sought to use the Cyprus issue for populist purposes. This approach also contributed to delays in taking effective measures to address the situation.

With this critical development, the amicable relations between the Patriarchate and the Democrat Party came to an abrupt end. In a telegram sent to Prime Minister Menderes, Athenagoras used accusatory and judgmental language, claiming that the incidents were carried out in a systematic and organized manner²⁷. His implication was clearly directed at the government. Although the Democrat Party declared martial law and shut down the Cyprus is Turkish Association (*Kıbrıs Türktür Cemiyeti*) following the events, the repercussions of the incidents persisted for a long time²⁸. The events played a crucial role in highlighting how and to what extent the Cyprus Issue, which quickly transformed into a “National Cause” (*Milli Mesele*) would affect relations between the two countries. As President Makarios in Cyprus and the Greek government refused to back down, and Britain adopted decisions under its “divide-and-rule” policy that exacerbated tensions between Greek and Turkish communities on the island, the crisis deepened further. The possibility of war between Türkiye and Greece emerged as a significant concern²⁹.

In such a tense political climate, the Democrat Party government decided to closely examine the operations and activities of the Patriarchate and Theological School. The government did not resort to harsh measures or attempt to revoke the privileges that had been granted recently. However, it was evident that the previous tolerance toward these two institutions had come to an end. Likely as a warning or a form of intimidation, some restrictive measures were introduced. One such measure was the banning of certain books sent to the library of Theological School³⁰. This prohibition was later expanded to include some newspapers. For instance, in a decision dated November 16, 1956, the Directorate of Decisions ordered the banning of the August 11, 1956, issue of the newspaper *Yeni İzmir* and the September 5, 1956 issue

²⁷ BOA/BÖKM, 133- 869-5, 11.09.1955.

²⁸ “Örfi İdare ilan Edildi”, *Milliyet*, 7 Eylül 1955; “İstanbul ve İzmir’de Sükûnet Avdet etti”, *Milliyet*, 8 Eylül 1955; “Kıbrıs Türktür Cemiyeti Kapatıldı”, *Milliyet*, 9 Eylül 1955.

²⁹ For detailed information on the British policy during this process, see Gürhan Yellice. Gürhan Yellice, *İngiltere’nin Kıbrıs Politikası, 1950-1960*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü, 2010.

³⁰ BOA, KARARLAR DAİRE BAŞKANLIĞI, 145 - 107 – 2, 17.01.1957.

and subsequent editions of the newspaper *Akropolis* from entering and being distributed in the country³¹.

The press, encouraged by the developments in Cyprus and the government's stance, adopted a highly critical attitude toward the Patriarchate. Arguments that had been set aside during the "cooperation" years resurfaced, and the Patriarchate's role in the Cyprus issue came under scrutiny. It was alleged that the Patriarchate aspired to become an independent entity similar to the Vatican, that Athenagoras was engaging with foreign diplomats to exert political pressure on the government, and, most significantly, that he was supporting the Greek position on Cyprus. The fact that the effort to unite Cyprus with Greece was led by an Archbishop became a recurring theme in the press. The Patriarchate faced criticism for its silence on the Cyprus issue, while Athenagoras was accused of collaborating with Makarios. For instance, the newspaper *Milliyet*, in its July 1, 1957 article titled "Athenagoras Claims He has no involvement in the Cyprus Issue," reported that "priest-like" EOKA members had begun issuing threats³².

One of the most significant elements proving that the developments between the government and the Greek community in Istanbul (such as the Patriarchate, Theological School, and minority issues) were largely shaped around the Cyprus Issue was the media's stance during the process leading to the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus. The harsh rhetoric in the Turkish press softened rapidly following the initiation of negotiations in late 1958 between Türkiye, Greece, and the United Kingdom, encouraged by the United States, to find a definitive solution to the matter. In 1959, the Cyprus Issue was "resolved" through the Zurich and London Agreements, under the guarantorship of the United Kingdom, Türkiye, and Greece. This led to a restoration of relations between the two countries and a significant reduction in the pressure on the Patriarchate and Theological School. In parliamentary debates and media reports, renewed emphasis was placed on Turkish-

³¹ BOA, KARARLAR DAİRE BAŞKANLIĞI, 144- 90 – 19, 16.11.1956.

³² *Milliyet*, 1 Temmuz 1957.

Greek friendship, with expressions highlighting the need to “revive it with all strength”³³.

However, the Republic of Cyprus was not long-lived. Established with high hopes following the Zurich and London Agreements, the republic survived only a few years. President Makarios’s attempts to amend the constitution, claiming that too many rights were granted to the Turks, deepened the crisis between the two communities, eventually rendering it insurmountable. The Greek majority intensified its pressure on the Turkish minority, which escalated into violent incidents. Makarios’s short-term goal was to revoke the rights granted to Turkish Cypriots, centralize the state, and establish a unitary structure. His long-term objective was to abolish the guarantor rights that allowed external intervention in Cyprus’s internal affairs-essentially nullifying the Zurich and London Agreements-and transform the island into a unitary and “fully independent” state³⁴.

The resignation of the Karamanlis government, which sought to avoid new tensions with Türkiye, and the rise to power of the far-right and pro-Enosis Center Union Party led by Papandreou on November 3, 1963, were among the most significant factors that emboldened him³⁵. Papandreou supported Makarios, despite the risk of deteriorating relations with Türkiye. His aim, in contrast to Makarios, was to unite the island with Greece as quickly as possible. While Greece supported the constitutional amendment efforts with the hope of achieving *Enosis*, Türkiye firmly opposed these efforts, leading to renewed tensions between the two sides. Thus, the conditions reverted to the pre-Zurich and London Agreements era. In the island, Makarios made "provocative" statements, declaring that the alliance agreement was no longer valid, the constitution was dead³⁶ that Türkiye should withdraw

³³ “Kıbrıs’ın İstikbaliyle ilgili konferansın neticesi: Tam Anlaşma”, *Milliyet*, 12 Şubat 1959; “Kıbrıs Cumhuriyeti’ni Doğuran Antlaşma İmzalandı”, *Milliyet*, 20 Şubat 1959.

³⁴ Gürhan Yellice, *Enosis mi Tam Bağımsızlık mı? Kıbrıs Cumhuriyeti’nin Kurulmasından İlk Bölünmeye* Atina-Lefkosa ilişkileri (1960-1964). *Tarihin Pesinde*, 2018 (19), p.316.

³⁵ Glafkos Klerides, *My Deposition*, Vol. I, Alithia, Nicosia, 1989, pp.165-167.

³⁶ Parker T. Hart, *Two NATO Allies at the Threshold of War: Cyprus, A Firsthand Account of Crises Management, 1965-1968*, Duke University Press, London, 1990, p.10.

its troops from the island, and that their presence posed a threat to Cyprus's integrity.

The Enosis-Taksim conflict seemed to begin to flare up again.

During this period, when the republic effectively collapsed, Turkish-Greek relations began to deteriorate once again. In response to Greece's open support for Makarios's *Enosis* initiatives, Türkiye prepared to intervene in Cyprus in 1964 to lift the blockade on Turkish Cypriots and curb Makarios's actions. However, this intervention was thwarted by the direct involvement of U.S. President Johnson. During this period, the possibility of war between the two sides emerged as a serious concern for the first time³⁷. Statements such as İsmet İnönü's remark that "Turkish-Greek relations are heading in a dark direction"³⁸ and Cemal Gürsel's harsh declaration that "Turkish-Greek friendship is dead"³⁹ highlighted the gravity of the crisis.

The danger was real one.

In the tense atmosphere where fears of losing Cyprus resurfaced, Theological School once again became the center of heated debates. Viewing Greece's support for Greek Cypriots as aggressive and provocative, Türkiye adopted a strategy to reduce the privileges granted to the Patriarchate and Theological School. During this period, discussions about relocating the Patriarchate outside Istanbul gained serious traction, and radical measures were implemented. In his study titled *Theological School*, Özyılmaz notes that, particularly after 1964, official state institutions closely monitored certain Pan-Orthodox and Pan-Christian meetings held at the seminary. According to Özyılmaz, these meetings were also observed by individuals sent by the Greek government⁴⁰. In this context, the Ankara government decided to ban the Patriarchate's publications *Orthodoksia* and *Apostolos Andreas* (Ορθοδοξία and Απόστολος Ανδρέας)⁴¹. Both journals were highly

³⁷ Yellice, *op. cit.*, pp.351-352.

³⁸ "İnönü dedi ki: Münasebetlerimiz karanlık bir yönde", *Milliyet*, 14 Nisan 1964.

³⁹ "Gürsel Türk-Yunan dostluğu öldü dedi", *Milliyet*, 17 Nisan 1964.

⁴⁰ Özyılmaz, *op. cit.*, pp.92-96.

⁴¹ Spyridon-Georgios Mamilos, *To Patriarcheio Konstantinoupoleos Sto Epikentro Diethnon Anakataseton: Exoteriki Politiki kai Oikoumenikos Prosanatolismos, Ethniko kai Kapodistriako Panepistimio Athinon*, Unpublished PhD, 2009, p.313; Bu süreçte

significant publications for announcing Theological, religious, and cultural activities of the Greek Orthodox Church.

Another significant decision during this period involved gradually withdrawing subsidies for schools providing Greek-language education and closing some of these schools altogether. The Ministry of National Education proposed a bill to close Greek-language schools on the islands of Imbros and Bozcaada, which was subsequently supported by parties in parliament⁴². Additionally, some clergy members were stripped of their citizenship on the grounds of threatening political security and engaging in alleged Greek propaganda⁴³. The first major impact of these developments and the tense atmosphere on Theological School emerged when the Ministry of National Education decided to ban the enrollment of external students at the school. This decision was a critical turning point for the seminary, as a significant portion of its students came from abroad⁴⁴. As mentioned earlier, in 1953, only 10% of the school's students were Turkish citizens. When foreign students were prohibited from attending the school in the 1964-1965 academic year, the internationally renowned institution suffered a severe blow. This development marked the first significant breaking point in the process leading to the seminary's eventual closure.

The Decision to Close Theological School

The second turning point in the process leading to the closure of Theological School occurred during the 1967 Cyprus Crisis. This crisis further weakened the position of Turkish Cypriots against the Greek Cypriots and once again brought Türkiye and Greece to the brink of war. Despite the tensions following the 1963-1964 crisis in Cyprus, Türkiye and Greece had made significant efforts to find a definitive resolution to

Patrikhane iki önemli süreli yayın çıkarmıştı. *Orthodoksia* (1926-1963/önceden Ekklesiastiki Alithia (1880-1923) ve *Apostolos Andreas* (1951-1964). Vasil T. Stavridis, "A Concise History of the Ecumenical Patriarchate", The Greek Orthodox Theological Review, (trans. and ed. by George Dragas), Vol. 45, No. 1-4, 2000, p. 57-153, s.117.

⁴² *Milliyet*, 12 Nisan 1964.

⁴³ "İki metropolitin zararlı faaliyeti açıklandı", *Yeni İstanbul*, 18 Nisan 1964; "Patrik Vekili Emelianos Vatandaşlıktan çıkarılıyor", *Milliyet*, 13 Nisan 1964.

⁴⁴ Abacis, *op. cit*, p.33.

the issue. After a series of inconclusive negotiations⁴⁵, the two sides finally managed to sit at the table in March 1966. Between March and December 1966, a series of discussions were held between Greek Foreign Minister Evangelos Toumbas and Turkish Foreign Minister İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil to seek a final solution to the Cyprus issue. The central proposal in these talks involved transferring one of the British bases on the island, preferably Dhekelia, to Türkiye in exchange for Cyprus's union with Greece. On December 17, 1966, a protocol signed by Çağlayangil and Toumbas indicated that the parties had reached an agreement in principle. This resolution suggested placing Cyprus under NATO control, a move directly supported by the United States. For the first time, the two countries came very close to a definitive solution on Cyprus⁴⁶. However, the advent of the Greek military junta (1967–1974) derailed the process.

The junta, seeking to consolidate its power, needed a foreign policy success and thus pursued a unilateral approach to resolving the Cyprus issue. During this period, the National Guard (*Εθνική Φρουρά*), established in 1964 to advance the goal of *Enosis*, became more active. The militarization of the island and increased pressure on Turkish Cypriots peaked during this time. Türkiye demanded the dissolution of the National Guard, arguing that its actions violated the Zurich and London Agreements, which caused tensions to escalate rapidly. Türkiye began preparations for another intervention in Cyprus. In response, the United States intervened once again to mediate the crisis. Under the leadership of President Lyndon B. Johnson, the U.S. appointed Cyrus Vance as a mediator, sending him to both Ankara and Athens to de-escalate the situation. Vance conducted a series of meetings with Turkish and Greek leaders to prevent military conflict and calm the crisis. As a result of pressure from the U.S. and the international community, Greece agreed to withdraw its troops from Cyprus⁴⁷. Although the immediate crisis was resolved, the core issue of Cyprus remained

⁴⁵ Miltiadis Hristodoulou, *I Poreia Mias Epohis, H Ellada, H Kipriaki Igesia kai to Kipriako Problima*, I Faoros, Athina, 1987, p.474.

⁴⁶ Glafkou Kliridi, *I Katathesi Mou*, Tomos II, Ekdoseis Alitheia, Nicosia, 1988, p.195.

⁴⁷ For a detailed analysis of the process, see Cihat Göktepe, "The Cyprus Crisis of 1967 and Its Effects on Türkiye's Foreign Relations", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 41/3, 2005, pp. 431-444.

unsolved. The Greek junta did not abandon its policies regarding Cyprus and continued its efforts to achieve *Enosis*. This situation set the stage for larger and more complex crises in the years to come.

During this period, public opinion in Türkiye became increasingly agitated due to the Cyprus issue, directly affecting the Greek minority and Theological School. A telegram sent from the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul to the embassy in Ankara reported that police in Istanbul had advised minority communities to close their businesses as a precautionary measure. This recommendation led to the closure of many shops in the city center. The Consul General highlighted a significant development related to Theological School: "Leaders rightist student organization MTTB [National Turkish Student Union/ *Milli Türk Talebe Birliği*] left wreath at Patriarchate November 17 with black band inscribed "Leader of intrigue, no matter what happens we shall eliminate you". Students also demanding closing of Seminary at Heybeliada which is "den of bandits."⁴⁸. These developments clearly illustrate how tense the atmosphere was during this period.

The final stage of the school's closure took place in 1971. During this process, developments in domestic politics in Türkiye and Greece, as well as events surrounding the Cyprus issue, played a significant role in the lead-up to the closure of Theological School. At the beginning of 1971, the Cyprus issue continued to appear as a complete deadlock. Each actor involved in the matter pursued a different agenda, preventing a unified effort or focus on finding a resolution. On the island, leaders Makarios and Denктаş (Rauf Raif) were engaged in negotiations, while also dealing with "misunderstandings" stemming from internal factions. These misunderstandings, frequently leaked to the press, revolved around issues such as federalism and partition⁴⁹. The leaders were compelled to clarify these points amidst internal criticisms⁵⁰. While the Turkish side accused the Greek Cypriots of attempting to establish a

⁴⁸ National Archives (United States) (NA), The Cyprus Crisis in 1967, Cyprus Crisis Telegraphic Traffic From: Adana, Ankara, etc. November 22- December 7, 1967. "D" (Folder 1 of 2), İstanbul to Ankara, Nov.1967.

⁴⁹ "Ο Προεδρος Μακαριος θα ελτι stas Athinas kai tha ehi sinomilias", *Eleftheria*, 8 Iouliou 1971.

⁵⁰ "Η Ενωτική Παράταξις Καταγγελλει τον Προεδρον Μακαριον", Γνώμη, 18 Ιουλίου 1971.

Greek Republic on the island, the Greek Cypriots claimed that Türkiye's ultimate goal was partition. Progress in negotiations seemed unlikely⁵¹.

The efforts of the junta in Athens to intervene in the island's internal affairs constituted a major obstacle to the development of a moderate and positive climate for discussions. Makarios was summoned to the "national center"⁵² to engage in talks but remained resistant to control despite the warnings he received. These warnings insisted that he act in accordance with directives aimed at achieving Enosis. However, Makarios preferred to act independently, much to the dismay of the junta. In response, the junta took a highly dangerous step during this period, one that had the potential to escalate the crisis between Türkiye and Greece: they decided to send Grivas back to the island. This time, Grivas, along with the newly established EOKA B organization, not only pursued the goal of Enosis but also began devising plans to neutralize Cypriot President Makarios, whom they suspected of attempting to establish closer ties with the Soviet Union⁵³.

One of the most significant factors influencing the closure of Theological School within the framework of Türkiye's domestic dynamics was the radical changes in internal politics. Following the military memorandum of March 12, 1971, the Turkish Armed Forces forced the resignation of Süleyman Demirel's government, leading to the establishment of a nonpartisan technocratic government under the leadership of legal scholar and academic Nihat Erim. One of the first steps taken by the new government in foreign policy was to initiate efforts to resolve the disputes with Greece over the Cyprus issue. During the NATO summit held in Lisbon on June 3-4, 1971, secret talks between Turkish Foreign Minister Osman Olcay and his Greek counterpart Hristos Xanthopoulos-Palamas resulted in an agreement to continue consultations⁵⁴. However, the failure to find any concrete solutions to the existing problems during these discussions directly influenced the

⁵¹ "Rumlar Kıbrıs'ta Rum Cumhuriyeti Kurmak çabasında", *Cumhuriyet*, 15 Temmuz 1971.

⁵² "Ο Μακάριος στην Αθήνα", *Ο Αγών*, 22 Ιουλίου 1971.

⁵³ At the beginning of 1968 the Junta was compelled to withdraw the military units sent to the island in 1964, suffering not only a significant loss of prestige but also a serious disadvantage on the island-both in relation to Türkiye, with the potential threat of intervention, and against Makarios.

⁵⁴ "Olcay: Kıbrıs'ta ihtilaf Çıkmamasını istiyoruz", *Milliyet*, 7 Haziran 1971.

new Turkish government's policies regarding Theological School and the Patriarchate⁵⁵. The Cyprus agenda had politically exhausted Türkiye and led to significant disappointment with Greece's stance. This sense of disappointment and fatigue completely eroded tolerance regarding Theological School issue. As mentioned in the previous section, from the 1950s to the early 1970s, discussions about the privileges granted to the Patriarchate and the seminary, as well as their reduction or abolition, had been a recurring topic. Although some measures had been taken to send a warning signal, successive Turkish governments had refrained from implementing any regulations that could lead to the closure of the seminary. However, the technocratic government led by Nihat Erim, which was also preparing to take significant steps toward amending the constitution, decided to adopt a firmer and more decisive stance on this matter⁵⁶. It appears that a decision had been made to no longer "tolerate" the school remaining at the university level.

⁵⁵ Hristodoulou, *op. cit.*, pp.544-546.

⁵⁶ This study primarily argues that the Cyprus crises and Greek attitude reduced tolerance towards the Patriarchate and the Theological School in Türkiye, brought the traumas of the Lausanne Treaty back to the surface, and that these factors played a role in the closure decision. The closure was ostensibly based on a legal provision, but it was not the underlying reason. However, particularly in the Turkish literature, there are studies that argue the closure decision was not a deliberate act specific to the Theological School. Mehmet Çelik's approach, stating that "Extraordinary developments were taking place in Türkiye during the period when the school was closed. There was a serious problem of terrorist acts in universities; therefore, the state adopted a policy of bringing universities under control. Thus, the closure of the school should be evaluated within this framework," should be compared and evaluated alongside the arguments presented in this study. see Mehmet Çelik, *Türkiye'nin Fener Patrikhanesi Meselesi*, Akademi Kitabevi, İzmir, 1998.) It is also understood that Emre Özyılmaz, who cites this argument, shares a similar perspective. (Özyılmaz, *op. cit.*, pp.131-132.). To better understand my argument regarding Türkiye's approach to the issue, my modest suggestion is to also read my 2018 article titled "*The Trial of Ta Hronika: The Ta Hronika Newspaper and the Insult to Turkishness Case, 1929-1930.*" ("*Ta Hronika'nın Muhakemesi: Ta Hronika Gazetesi ve Türklüğü Tahkir Davası, 1929-1930*" *Turkish Studies*, 13/1, 2018, pp.111-136) This article analyzes the crisis triggered by the term "barbarian" published in the *Ta Hronika* newspaper, Türkiye's reaction to this crisis, the judicial processes, and how the issue was quickly removed from the agenda for the sake of maintaining Turkish-Greek relations. Had Turkish-Greek relations not been in such a tense atmosphere due to the Cyprus Issue, Türkiye's stance might have resembled its approach in 1930. In both cases, the impact of historical memory and the sensitivity surrounding ethnic identity on the existence of the issue should not be overlooked.

The term “tolerance” is one of the most important key concepts in the issue of The School. According to a long-standing and deeply rooted belief in Türkiye, the school’s fundamental mission since its establishment was to instill the “Hellenic spirit” in its students and graduates. It was thought that priests graduating from this school were working toward Greek independence, the expansion of Greek territories, and the realization of the “Megali Idea.”⁵⁷ It was a topic frequently brought up in the press and even in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye during the periods when the Cyprus crises escalated. For instance, during a discussion on private schools on June 25, 1964, Coşkun Kırca made the following remarks in response to a statement by the Minister of National Education: *“Unnecessary tolerance and indulgence have been shown to the Halki School. However, according to this law, the Halki School is a private institution established by foreigners, and it is in no way subject to the exchange of letters at Lausanne. The Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Türkiye can today revoke the privileges once granted as a result of tolerance and indulgence”*⁵⁸. By 1971, Turkish authorities may no longer have been willing to tolerate it further.

Therefore, the current debates on the reopening of the The School should also be evaluated within this framework. For Elçin Macar’s short views on the Cyprus-Heybeliada connection, see

<https://www.indyrturk.com/node/411341/haber/k%C4%B1br%C4%B1s%C4%B1n-kurban%C4%B1-ve-d%C3%BC%C5%9Fman%C4%B1-heybeliada-ruhban-okulu-50-y%C4%B1d%C4%B1r-kapal%C4%B1>

⁵⁷ Özyılmaz mentions that state authorities (especially after 1964) closely monitored some of the Pan-Orthodox and Pan-Christian meetings held at the school, See, Özyılmaz, s.92-96; See also, Emruhan Yalçın, “Heybeliada Ruhban Okulu Yeniden Açılabilir mi?”, CTAD, Yıl 9, Sayı 17 (Bahar 2013), p.111.

⁵⁸

https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/MM_d01/c031/b113/mm_01031_1130248.pdf. In 1964, during a period of escalating tensions between Türkiye and Greece due to developments in Cyprus, Coşkun Kırca was serving as a Member of Parliament for İstanbul from the Republican People’s Party (CHP) in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. During this time, he played an active role in Türkiye’s Cyprus policy and issues related to minorities. For his views on the Cyprus issue as reflected in newspapers, see Yılmaz Bardak, Türk Siyasal Yaşamında Coşkun Kırca, Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi, Unpublished Master Thesis, Eskişehir, 2015

The legal basis for the closure of Theological School was the decision of the Turkish Constitutional Court, which abolished private higher education institutions in Türkiye (January 12, 1971). Certain articles of the 1965 Private Education Institutions Law were annulled on this date⁵⁹. Despite the Patriarchate's efforts, no progress was made during the period leading up to July. With the closure of the seminary becoming a pressing issue, the Patriarchate attempted to prevent this by engaging directly with the government. In this context, correspondence and telephone conversations took place between the Ministry of National Education, the Patriarchate, and the seminary. By early July, the closure of the seminary was all but certain, prompting the Patriarchate to establish direct contact with Prime Minister Nihat Erim⁶⁰. In his appeal, Patriarch Athenagoras argued that the purpose of the Clergy School, which had been in operation for 128 years, was to professionally train clergy to meet the religious needs of Christians affiliated with the Patriarchate. He claimed that this purpose placed the school outside the scope of the Constitutional Court's closure decision and that it could not be classified as a private higher education institution. However, his plea failed to convince the government⁶¹. The government maintained its position that, in terms of its educational method and operational structure, Theological School functioned as a higher education institution and, therefore, fell within the scope of the Constitutional Court's ruling. No changes were made to this stance.

The closure of Theology Department meant the elimination of the school's fundamental purpose. Keeping only the high school section active carried little strategic importance for the Patriarchate. During the Ottoman and Republican periods, this school was regarded as the most significant educational institution of Orthodoxy, primarily fulfilling its mission of training clergy in line with the Patriarchate's ideology. Over the course of its operation, 12 patriarchs serving at the Patriarchate graduated from this school. Athenagoras's claim that the school was merely a vocational high school did not reflect reality. It was well known that the school did not hold vocational high school status and had been

⁵⁹ For legal justifications and details, see bkz. Özyılmaz, *op. cit.*, pp.96-102.

⁶⁰ "Erim Patrikhane heyetini kabul etti", *Milliyet*, 7 Temmuz 1971.

⁶¹ Özyılmaz, *op. cit.*, p.103.

elevated to the level of a higher education institution, though not a university, during the Menderes era. The Patriarchate interpreted and effectively regarded this status as equivalent to a university. Indeed, Athenagoras made statements to this effect during his speech at the 1953 graduation ceremony. Furthermore, the fact that graduates of the school could achieve the status of theology teachers further disproved this claim. This argument, which was advanced as a tactical approach, failed to yield the desired outcomes.

The government, if it deemed appropriate, could have amended the relevant legal provisions to prevent the closure of the school. However, just as the arguments put forward by the Patriarchate during this process were ineffective, Türkiye's decision was equally based on political dynamics. This decision was connected not only to current political dynamics but also to historical reasons. While the primary dynamic behind the closure decision was the Cyprus Issue, it was also a reflection of a deeper, structural problem: the mutual loss of trust between the two countries. One of the main factors underlying this loss of trust was the historical events embedded in the collective memory of both nations. Although the Treaty of Lausanne had put an end to longstanding hostilities, both sides struggled to fully process past events and eliminate the psychological traumas left in their minds. The Turkish side, in particular, was troubled by the perceived political role attributed to the Patriarchate during World War I and the Greco-Turkish War. In this context, the perception that the Patriarchate aimed to unite Ottoman Greek citizens around the "Hellenic spirit" diminished after Lausanne but never completely disappeared. Turkish authorities continued to believe that the seminary-trained clergy had played a role in pursuing the Megali Idea (the vision of a Greater Greece) during the Ottoman period and that this mission persisted in a different form after Lausanne. Türkiye perceived the Patriarchate as seeking to regain the privileged status it held during the Ottoman era, despite the Treaty of Lausanne explicitly negating this. The debates surrounding Theological School can be seen as an attempt to curb these aspirations. At the same time, this decision may have also served as a warning to the Patriarchate. During the period when Athenagoras was working to enhance the international reputation of the Patriarchate, debates about relocating the institution abroad were also taking place. These

discussions intensified during times when Turkish-Greek relations were strained due to the Cyprus crises.

Theological School was closed in 1971 as part of constitutional regulations that led to the shutdown of private higher education institutions in Türkiye. The Constitutional Court's decision dated January 12, 1971, and its justification published on March 26, 1971, mandated the closure of institutions classified as private higher education schools. On August 12, the Ministry of National Education communicated the decision to Theological School as follows: *"Based on the Constitutional Court's decision dated January 12, 1971, and its justification dated March 26, 1971, your institution falls within the scope of this decision. Therefore, as with other private higher education institutions, Theology Department, which operates as a private higher education entity, has ceased to have any legal status as of July 9, 1971"*⁶². Following the closure of Theology Department, the seminary continued to operate as the Halki Private Greek Boys' High School from the 1971–1972 academic year onward⁶³. However, as a result of the decision, the school, which had been providing education since 1844, largely lost its function and mission. Consequently, the Patriarchate decided to terminate the school's activities entirely in 1972. Amid ongoing debates and objections from the Patriarchate, the reasoning for the closure decision was explained on July 19, 1971, as follows:

"The Constitutional Court's decision regarding private higher education institutions also applies to the higher division of Theological School. This is because the school was established approximately 150 years ago at the high school level and was transformed into a Theology University in the 1950s with the addition of a four-year higher division. It has no connection to the provisions of the Lausanne Treaty. For this reason, appeals made to the government have yielded no results in the face of the Constitutional Court's decision. Authorities have stated that the higher division could be affiliated with Istanbul University, similar to the case of Robert College, which was in the same situation. They explained that if such affiliation were established, the continuation of the school could be ensured. However, the Patriarchate declined this

⁶² Özyılmaz, *op. cit.*, p.101.

⁶³ Yalçın, *op. cit.*, p.112.

*proposal, arguing that it would compromise the school's original character. As a result, Theological School's higher division will close, and only the high school-level section will continue to operate."*⁶⁴.

The most critical point to note in the reasoning of the Constitutional Court's decision is its response to the argument put forward by Greece and the Patriarchate: "The school has been operating as a university since 1840, and this status was indirectly recognized in Lausanne." The Court countered this claim by stating, "It became a Theology University in the 1950s with the addition of a four-year higher division." This statement was made to demonstrate that the arguments presented by the Patriarchate did not hold up on legal grounds. Following the decision, discussions about the school's status and alternative solutions continued. While it was suggested that private universities could be established under state supervision, the Patriarchate refused to accept these conditions. Additionally, the Patriarchate filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of National Education on October 17, 1971. In this lawsuit, it was argued that the school should not be classified as a higher education institution, as it was essentially a vocational school, and that the closure decision violated the "protection of minorities" principle of the Lausanne Treaty⁶⁵. However, this lawsuit also yielded no results.

At this point, the school faced two significant disadvantages. First, the Cyprus issue was growing increasingly serious and appeared likely to continue negatively affecting Turkish-Greek relations. While relations between Athens and Nicosia grew increasingly tense, the Junta in Greece seemed inclined to resolve the issue unilaterally. Second, and more importantly, Türkiye appeared to have radically changed its stance toward the Patriarchate and the school within the framework of its minority policies. Compounding these challenges, from the perspective of the Patriarchate and Theological School, one of the greatest misfortunes faced by these two institutions-aside from the Cyprus issue and developments in domestic politics-was perhaps the limited influence of Nihat Erim as a political decision-maker. In fact, Nihat Erim did not exhibit the characteristics of an anti-Greek politician. On the contrary, he advocated for a resolution between the two countries

⁶⁴ "Heybeliada", *Milliyet*, 20 Temmuz 1971.

⁶⁵ Macar, *op. cit.*, p.193.

based on reconciliation. For instance, unlike many other politicians, Erim supported a federation-based solution rather than the partition of Cyprus. Under normal circumstances, Athenagoras, known for his exceptional ability to establish dialogue, could have developed a productive relationship with Erim and managed this process more effectively. However, the international conditions of the time, Türkiye's accumulated tensions over the Cyprus issue, and the shifting perspective towards the Patriarchate left Athenagoras with no room to maneuver. This situation further complicated the Patriarchate's position in Türkiye and became a factor that also limited its influence on the international stage. Despite Athenagoras's leadership abilities, it was impossible to devise an effective solution under these circumstances.

However, this period was not without challenges. During the events of September 6-7, the Patriarchate faced a major crisis, and its relations with the Democratic Party were significantly weakened. Additionally, the Patriarchate faced intense criticism during the Cyprus crises. Nevertheless, Athenagoras managed this difficult period strategically, maintaining and even strengthening the Patriarchate's position through the relationships he cultivated with Turkish politicians. Athenagoras's leadership vision, supported by the dynamics of the era, enabled him to take steps that made the Patriarchate more visible on the international stage. In 1964, prior to Pope Paul VI's visit to Jerusalem, Athenagoras took the initiative to travel to Jerusalem himself, where he held a historic meeting with the Pope on January 5, 1964. This meeting marked a turning point for the Christian world, as it was the first direct dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church since 1439⁶⁶. The primary aim of this meeting was to heal centuries-old divisions and initiate a new era of dialogue between the two churches. These historic steps were further solidified in 1967 when Pope Paul VI visited Istanbul. The Pope's visit to Istanbul demonstrated to the international community that relations between the two churches were improving⁶⁷. The British newspaper *Daily Mail* described the meeting with the words, "They exchanged kiss of peace"⁶⁸ This phrase indicated that the meeting

⁶⁶ Meeting in Jerusalem, Jan. 4, 1964, *Economist*; The Pope, *Daily Mail*, 6 January 1964.

⁶⁷ "The Pope's visit", *Daily Mail*, 15 July 1967.

⁶⁸ "Kiss of Peace", *Daily Mail*, 26 July 1967.

was not merely a religious gesture but a powerful symbol of the possibility of overcoming the divisions between the two churches⁶⁹.

Athenagoras's leadership during this period was a defining moment in history, strengthening the international position of both the Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church. However, during the events leading to the closure of Theological School, he had become an unwanted figure to some extent, primarily due to the tensions caused by the Cyprus issue. The political climate had shifted, and Turkish governments' willingness to engage in dialogue with the Patriarchate had diminished. Athenagoras lacked the psychological energy and capability to control the process through his political connections and prevent the school's closure. According to Greek historian Vasil Stavridis, known for his work on the history of the Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate: *"With the rapid worsening of life conditions for the Greeks, the Greek Orthodox population of Constantinople was diminished in a very short period of time from 100,000 to 2-3,000. Thus, Patriarch Athenagoras, who had arrived in Türkiye with great pomp, became towards the end of his life a persona non grata. Events somehow seem to run parallel to those that took place in the time of Meletios Metaxakis (1921-1923)."*⁷⁰

With the death of Athenagoras in 1972, the Patriarchate lost significant momentum in its efforts to reopen the school. However, it continued to bring the issue to the agenda intermittently. Systematic efforts were made both in Türkiye and on the international stage to restore the school to its former status. Proposals were put forward to classify the school as an institution providing higher education in Türkiye or to integrate it into Istanbul University's Faculty of Theology. Nevertheless, these attempts did not yield any concrete results. Most recently, during the meeting between President Erdoğan and Patriarch Bartholomeos on December 26, 2024, it was reported in the Greek press

⁶⁹ For a detailed analysis of Athenagoras's activities during his tenure at the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, see, Hikmet Öksüz, *Amerikan Belgelerine Göre Fener Rum Patrikhanesi'nde I. Athenagoras Dönemi (1949-1972)*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 2021

⁷⁰ Stavridis, *op. cit.*, p.73.

that the reopening of the school was requested. This indicates that such efforts are still ongoing⁷¹.

Repercussions of the Decision in Greece

Today, Greece, together with the Patriarchate, is waging a major campaign to reopen The School. It is claimed that the school is vital for the Patriarchate and that the Patriarchate meets the personnel it needs from here. Considering all these efforts of Greece, its reaction at the time of the school's closure is quite surprising. Contrary to today's approach, Greece did not attach any serious importance to the issue in the historical process. This stance, though it may not have appeared so within the dynamics of that period, was actually just as significant as Türkiye's decision.

The decision to close Theological School provoked a strong reaction from the Greek military junta; however, the government refrained from engaging in a public debate that could create a polemic. Greece did not want to enter into a new crisis with Türkiye over this issue. Greek Foreign Minister Panayotis Palamas, in a press conference held on July 20, 1971, stated that they had expressed their reaction to Türkiye regarding the closure of the seminary in the strongest possible terms but did not go beyond this statement⁷². Compared to the discussions and initiatives during the years when the Cyprus Issue was not on the agenda, the junta's lack of serious public efforts on this matter beyond diplomatic protests was primarily due to its cautious approach against Türkiye's potential use of the situation as leverage. Determined to maintain a firm stance on the Cyprus Issue, Greece did not want to turn a relatively

⁷¹ The outcome of this meeting will soon be reflected in the public domain. If, as claimed by the Greek press, a consensus was reached during the discussions regarding the reopening of the school, it would support one of the key arguments of this study: "Restrictions on the school have paralleled the fluctuations in Turkish-Greek relations. When relations deteriorated, pressure on the school increased, and when they improved, the pressure decreased. "It is evident that relations between Türkiye and Greece have recently been following a positive trajectory.https://www.orthodoxtimes.gr/synantisi-vartholomaίου-me-erntogan-ti-syzitisan-gia-syria-theologiki-scholi-tis-chalkis/#google_vignette,<https://www.tanea.gr/print/2024/12/27/politics/mikropolitik-os/synantisi-vartholomaίου-erntogan-gia-tous-xristianous-tis-syrias/>

⁷² "Seira Ellinikon Diavimaton Pros Tourkian Dia tin Halki", *Atlantis*, 20 Iouliou 1971.

"insignificant" matter like Theological School into a bargaining chip over a strategically critical issue like Cyprus. The Greek junta's primary strategy was to deliberately adopt a policy of silence. This approach stemmed from concerns that escalating the seminary issue in relations with Türkiye could lead to catastrophic consequences for more pressing foreign policy priorities such as Cyprus. The possibility that Türkiye might use the seminary issue as leverage in the context of Cyprus reduced the importance of this "minor issue" in the eyes of the junta.

Upon assuming power in 1967, the Colonels' Junta in Greece focused all its foreign policy attention on Cyprus. Their primary goal was to neutralize Archbishop Makarios, who was acting independently and without alignment, and to implement their own strategic agenda. However, the junta avoided direct and sincere negotiations with Türkiye on the issue and concentrated on achieving results based on their own plans for Cyprus⁷³. The secret return of Grivas to the island was part of this strategy. In this context, the junta chose to ignore the issue of reopening Theological School, believing that engaging in negotiations with Türkiye on this matter would weaken Greece's position on Cyprus. In 1922, although Greece acknowledged the failure of the Megali Idea project, which aimed at Western Anatolia and Istanbul, it pursued a foreign policy after the Treaty of Lausanne that sought to incorporate Northern Epirus, the Dodecanese, and Cyprus into its territory. During the process of transferring the Dodecanese to Greece, Türkiye, influenced by its neutral stance in the war, chose to remain silent. However, it firmly demonstrated its determination not to consent to the incorporation of Cyprus into Greek territory. Seeking a foreign policy success to consolidate its domestic authority and legitimize its rule, the Greek Junta adopted a radical stance on this issue, leading to a deadlock in relations between the two countries and escalating the Cyprus Problem⁷⁴. During the debates surrounding the school's closure, on July 25, 1971, Turkish Prime Minister Nihat Erim gave an interview to the Athens News Agency in which he emphasized that Makarios was the

⁷³ This approach was to have serious consequences in the long term, leading to the developments in 1974; a coup against Makarios would be organized, and these consequences would be one of the most important factors in the overthrow of the junta.

⁷⁴ The Junta's approach also played a significant role in resurfacing mutual traumatic and revanchist sentiments.

root cause of the problem. Erim stated that Greece needed to intervene in this situation for the sake of Turkish-Greek relations and argued that geopolitical necessities made closer cooperation between the two countries inevitable⁷⁵. These remarks supported the arguments underlying the Greek junta's policy of deprioritizing Theological School issue while maintaining a strong strategic stance on Cyprus.

Nihat Erim's failure to receive a response to his direct and indirect calls during this process may have influenced his stance on the issue of Theological School. Erim had proposed various solutions for a definitive resolution of the Cyprus Issue, including the idea of a federation, and had repeatedly called on Greece through diplomatic channels to address the matter. Nihat Erim constantly complained about the lack of necessary communication and dialogue with Athens and called on the Junta administration to resolve the Cyprus Issue through peaceful means. To emphasize his willingness for peace, he did not refrain from making statements that were unexpected given the conditions of the time. During a meeting with U.S. Ambassador Mr. Handley on April 27, 1971, he expressed the following regarding Turkish-Greek friendship: "Prime Minister Nihat Erim stated that, as Atatürk had suggested, he was in favor of Türkiye and Greece uniting in a federation. However, he noted that this idea had been sabotaged by Makarios due to the experiences in Cyprus." Erim also pointed out that the negotiations between the two communities had dragged on for too long, emphasizing the importance of resolving the issue in cooperation with Athens⁷⁶.

Under the censorship of the junta, the Greek press largely supported the developments regarding the closure of Theological School and addressed the issue in line with the military administration's perspectives. From the standpoint of Greece and particularly the dynamics of "Hellenism," the closure of the school carried symbolic significance and provided an opportunity for criticism against Türkiye.

⁷⁵ "ΕΡΙΜ: Να Παραμβει η Ελλάς", *Fileleftheros*, 25 Ιουλίου 1971. Similar statements were frequently made by Foreign Minister Olcay. "Και ο Ολτζαύ επιδιώκει παρέμβαση της Ελλάδος κατά του Μακαριωπατού", *Kypros*, 26 Ιουλίου 1971.

⁷⁶ Ahmet Gülen, "Nihat Erim Hükümetlerinin Kıbrıs Politikası", *Yeni Türkiye*, 128/2022, p.231

However, the issue was not debated in the Greek press to the extent it “deserved,” nor was provocative or fanatical language employed. Instead, the matter was handled with routine reporting. The newspapers that covered the closure generally sufficed with showing that the Greek military administration was not silent, asserting that Türkiye had taken a provocative step and that Greece had issued a strong diplomatic note in response. For instance, the July 18, 1971, issue of *Makedonia* reported that the Greek Foreign Minister had summoned the Turkish Ambassador in Athens to protest the decision, stating that it was deliberate and aimed at provoking Greece. The July 20, 1971, issue of *Akropolis* featured an article titled “Halki School,” suggesting that the law mandating the school’s closure should be amended and that the military government could achieve this without much difficulty⁷⁷. Nevertheless, as evident from these examples, the newspaper did not discuss the significance of the school for the Patriarchate or the necessity of initiatives for its reopening. In the subsequent period, the Greek press made no evaluations of Greece’s approach to the issue or the discussions between the Patriarchate and the Turkish government in Ankara.

The press in Athens approached the closure of Theological School primarily with suggestions to amend the law, opting to address the issue softly and without stirring controversy. This “hands-off” approach avoided escalating the matter. However, the diaspora and Cypriot press adopted a different approach, using harsh and angry language to respond to this development. The central argument in these outlets was that the closure of the school was politically motivated, with the primary goal being to teach Greece a lesson on the Cyprus issue and provoke the country. It was also emphasized that this move would severely damage Türkiye’s reputation and, more specifically, the friendly relations between Türkiye and Greece, while deeply offending the national and religious sentiments of the Greek people. As such, it was argued that the closure decision should be reconsidered. The diaspora and Cypriot press, using similar arguments, worked to generate international public opinion from January—when the law was enacted—until July, when it came into effect, advocating for the reopening of the seminary’s

⁷⁷ “Η Σχολή της Χαλκίδος” *Akropolis*, 20 Ιουλίου 1971.

university division. Within this context, they made concerted efforts to persuade Türkiye to reverse its decision, presenting various justifications.

Two newspapers closely followed developments regarding Theological School: *Atlantis*, published in the United States, and *Taxidromos*, published in Egypt. Among these, *Taxidromos* presented the issue to its readers with the argument of Türkiye's "illegal actions." In its article titled "Opinions and Crises," dated July 25, 1971, *Taxidromos* harshly criticized the closure of the school. According to the newspaper, the school was not only an important educational center for Greeks but also for the Greek Orthodox community in Istanbul. It claimed that the school trained clergy not only for Orthodoxy but also for other denominations. The newspaper argued that by closing this school, Türkiye was preventing students from Rum, Greek, Ethiopian, and Arab countries from receiving an education. *Taxidromos* described this action as an outright assault on Orthodoxy and asserted that it negatively affected the entire Orthodox world. Additionally, *Taxidromos* claimed that the closure of Theological School was merely the first step in a plan to neutralize Archbishop Makarios. In its article titled "The Turks Are Provoking Us Again: They Are Closing the Halki School," the newspaper stated that the decision to close the school had sparked significant outrage. It alleged that Türkiye took this action to bring the matter to the brink of war and force Makarios to back down⁷⁸.

⁷⁸ Οι Τουρκοί παλιν μας προκαλούν, Καταργούν την Σχολήν Χαλκίδος, Ταχυδρομος., Ταχυδρόμος, 18 Ιουλίου 1971



In its article titled "Theological School," the *Atlantis* newspaper attempted a detailed analysis of the closure decision, successfully summarizing the general sentiments and perspectives of the Greek side. The newspaper’s central claim was that the decision was an arbitrary measure, and such a historically significant institution should not be shut down so easily. According to *Atlantis*, the school had played a critical role for Hellenism and Orthodoxy during the “period of slavery and freedom,” serving as a spiritual and intellectual center over time. It was in this school that important traditions and customs were established, and numerous significant clergy members were trained. The knowledge acquired by these clergy had played a vital role in enlightening the Greek Orthodox Church. The seminary, *Atlantis* argued, was not just a school where faith and spirituality were cultivated but also a place that laid the groundwork for the sacred texts of Christian churches and served as the cradle of the Greek Orthodox Church's centuries-long vitality. The newspaper described the closure of the school on "ridiculous and utterly insignificant grounds" as not only a blow against the “Ecumenical Patriarchate” in Istanbul but also an attack on Greek independence and, allegedly, on the Turkish-Greek friendship that Turkish authorities had disrupted.

Calling on Nihat Erim to reverse the decision, *Atlantis* claimed that the closure of the seminary for political reasons could have grave consequences for Turkish-Greek relations. The newspaper emphasized that significant steps had been taken throughout history to foster this friendship. It pointed to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's expressed respect for Eleftherios Venizelos, Greece, and the Patriarchate as a key foundation of this relationship. *Atlantis* argued that Nihat Erim had the intellectual capacity to comprehend the gravity of the criticisms regarding the closure decision. While the government claimed that the enacted law could not be reversed, *Atlantis* highlighted that, as the entity that had implemented the law, the government indeed had the power to annul it. The newspaper called on Erim to take action to revoke what it described as an arbitrary, unjust, and destructive decision. According to *Atlantis*, reversing the closure decision was essential to maintaining stability in Turkish-Greek relations⁷⁹.

The reaction of the international press reflects the existence of a censorship atmosphere in Athens. It can be considered that what was written in the international press might align with the views of the Athens press, but that such thoughts could not be openly expressed due to the prevailing conditions of censorship.

The press in Cyprus, one of the most critical components of Theological School issue, also showed interest in the developments. The *Agon* newspaper, in its article titled "Türkiye is Closing the Halki School," published on July 18, claimed that the Erim government was pursuing a policy of blackmail targeting the Greek Orthodox community in Istanbul. The newspaper argued that the real aim behind the closure of the school, one of the most significant centers of the Hellenic Orthodox world, was to weaken the authority of the Patriarchate. According to *Agon*, Türkiye had previously taken the first step in this process by banning the enrollment of foreign students at the school. Ultimately, the closure of the university division of the school represented the most severe blow within these policies.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ "Η Θεολογική Σχολή Χάλκης", *Atlantis*, 23 July 1971

⁸⁰ "Η Τουρκία κλείει τη Σχολή Χάλκης", 18 Ιουλίου 1971.



As observed, the diaspora press and the Athens press took notably different approaches to the closure of Theological School of Halki, highlighting a clear contrast in their responses. While the Athens press, constrained by the censorship of the junta, addressed the issue in a restrained and routine manner, avoiding provocative language, the diaspora press adopted a far more critical and outspoken tone. Publications like *Atlantis* and *Taxidromos* framed the closure as a deliberate political move by Türkiye, presenting it as an attack on Hellenism and Orthodoxy, and calling for international action. This divergence suggests that while the Athens press operated within the limits imposed by the military regime, the diaspora press, free from such restrictions, felt empowered to openly challenge and criticize the decision, reflecting a broader and more vocal defense of Greek cultural and religious interests.

Conclusion

Theological School of Halki maintained its status as one of the most prestigious schools of the Orthodox Christian world from its

establishment until its closure in 1971. The school was not only an institution perpetuating the ideology of the Patriarchate but was also regarded as a symbol of Hellenism and Orthodoxy. Despite Turkish-Greek crises, the War of Independence, and the radical changes that occurred in both countries afterward, it succeeded in maintaining its presence in Istanbul. However, following the Treaty of Lausanne, the Patriarchate and the Seminary remaining within Türkiye's borders marked the beginning of a new, conditional, and precarious period. It was not easy for the newly established Republic of Türkiye, shaped by ethnic sensitivities, to leave behind its skeptical, damaged, and even traumatic past with the Patriarchate and start anew.

The status of The School, like the Cyprus Issue, largely depended on the harmony and cooperation between Türkiye and Greece. Throughout the Republican era, the school's authority was sometimes restricted and sometimes expanded according to political conditions, reflecting the dynamics of this relationship. Although the Democratic Party in its early years provided the school with a broad scope of freedom, the emergence of the Cyprus Issue as a crisis in the mid-1950s marked the beginning of the process leading to its closure. The events of 1963-1964, the effective collapse of the Republic of Cyprus, the obstruction of Türkiye's intervention efforts by the United States, and the perception that the island was lost created deep anxiety and distrust among Turkish officials. During this period, Greece's abandonment of cooperation and its persistence on Enosis further diminished tolerance towards The School.

At the beginning of 1971, Türkiye, invoking a previously enacted law, terminated the operation of Theology Department of The School and decided to keep the institution's status—deemed as "exceeding its scope and mission or striving for universalization"—balanced and limited within its domestic dynamics. While Greece protested this step by referring to the balance established by the Treaty of Lausanne, it ignored Türkiye's demands and grievances regarding Makarios' actions aimed at undermining agreements that upheld the Turkish-Greek balance in Cyprus. The efforts of the Greek Junta to unilaterally resolve the Cyprus Issue in Greece's favor caused significant discomfort in Türkiye and deepened the mutual distrust between the two countries.

These developments introduced a new dimension to the cause-and-effect dynamics of Turkish-Greek relations and led to significant fractures in bilateral ties. While Greece, fully focused on Cyprus, failed to provide the “expected reaction” regarding The School, this issue became a critical breaking point in the process leading to the 1974 Cyprus Crisis. The ongoing debates today highlight the significance of The School issue for Greece and demonstrate that hopes for its reopening are closely tied to the political trajectory of bilateral relations. If The School is reopened, the experiences of the 1955-1971 period must be carefully analyzed, and lessons from that era must be seriously taken into account.

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