

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3891/07

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to the Commission

Subject: Diplomatic representations and policy measures to protect the cultural and religious heritage in the Turkish part of Cyprus

Within the last few days the Orthodox Archbishop of Cyprus, Chrysostomos II, has addressed a twofold appeal to the Turkish authorities in the occupied part of the island for the occupying forces and the Turkish Cypriot community to let the Orthodox Church restore its churches – at its own expense – and for six monks aged over 80 to be allowed to return to the St Barnabas Monastery in the occupied North. The Archbishop speaks of the plight to which places of worship in northern Cyprus have been reduced. That subject was also raised not long ago when he visited Rome and held meetings with the Pope, the President of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI), Archbishop Angelo Bagnasco, Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and many representatives of the Roman Curia. The intention is to halt the decay and increase awareness within the international community, and to recover the purloined works of art and take them back to the Republic of Cyprus so that they can be restored and preserved. In 2006 Parliament adopted Written Declaration No 21/2006, after 403 signatories had given their support: the text was based on Rule 116 of the Rules of Procedure and addressed to the Council and Commission; its subject was protection and preservation of the religious heritage in the northern part of Cyprus. Paragraph 34 of Parliament's resolution P6\_TA(2006)0570 on the Union budget for 2007 provided for funding for a survey on the condition of, and the estimated cost of restoring, churches in Turkish-occupied northern Cyprus. A recent census shows that, out of 520 places of worship, over 200 churches, chapels, and monasteries have been desecrated and converted into discos, restaurants, barns, or arms depots, and that more than 15 000 sacred icons taken away illegally are circulating on the art world's black market. It is a known fact that the Turkish Cypriot community has received EUR 286 million from the EU.

Can the Commission spell out in detail what policy and diplomatic measures it will take to make Turkey agree to the restoration of churches in northern Cyprus, bearing in mind that Archbishop Chrysostomos II is willing to finance such a project?