

WRITTEN QUESTION P-5836/08  
by Antonios Trakatellis (PPE-DE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Reopening of the Halki Theological School and suspension of accession negotiations with Turkey

The protection of fundamental rights, in particular respect for religious freedoms, is a fundamental principle of the Union and one of the political criteria for accession (Copenhagen criteria) which must be met by all applicant countries. As underlined by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in his recent address to the European Parliament (25 September 2008), the EU's fundamental principles are closely linked to religious freedom. In view of the increasing number of attacks being directed against churches in Istanbul, the confiscation of property belonging to religious communities, for example the recent infringement by Turkey of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's property rights, the questioning of the right of the Patriarch and Patriarchate to make use of the ecclesiastical title 'Ecumenical' and, finally, the repeated refusal of the Turkish authorities to reopen the Halki School of Theology;

1. Does the Commission consider such illegal actions by Turkey, an applicant Member State, in particular the closure of the Halki Theological School belonging to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, compatible with the principles on which the EU is founded?
2. Does the Commission intend to take action to have the School of Theology reopened in accordance with the express wishes of European and American leaders and political figures?
3. Given that the Commission avoided giving a direct answer to my previous question on the matter (P-4459/08), will it finally indicate whether it will use the possible suspension of accession negotiations as a lever against non-compliance by Turkey with the EU's principles of religious freedom and with the legislation recently adopted by the Turkish National Assembly?