

Washington, DC (December 21, 2011) – Rep. Gus Bilirakis (FL-09), a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Co-Chair of the House Hellenic Caucus and member of the International Religious Freedom Caucus, has introduced H. Res. 506, which calls on the government of Turkey to reopen the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Theological School of Halki without conditions or further delays.

The Halki seminary had been the premier location for training Eastern Orthodox clergy for nearly 150 years. However, Turkish authorities forcibly shut down the seminary in 1971. The resolution simply requires that Turkey allow its citizens and institutions to be free of harassment based on religion.

"It is time that the Theological School at Halki is immediately reopened with no preconditions. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, as the leader of nearly 300 million Orthodox Christians, has a record of reaching out and working for peace and reconciliation among all faiths and has fostered dialogue among Christians, Jews, and Muslims," Bilirakis said. "What the Greek Orthodox community and all religious freedom watchdogs throughout the world are asking for in return is simply that Turkey abides by its constitution, which secures religious rights for all of its citizens and institutions."