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PRUDENTIAL LINES, INC.

September 25, 1969

SPYROS P. SKOURAS  
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Dear Mr. President:

I have just returned from a visit to Turkey and an extended stay in Greece and, if you will permit me, I would like to take a few moments of your time to give you a report on both countries, and also -- more importantly -- to talk to you about His Holiness, Patriarch Athenagoras, with whom I had an audience when I visited Istanbul.

I do not know if you are aware of it or not, but I have been endeavoring to see you for the past six months in order to discuss this subject and deliver the message that His Holiness had entrusted to me.

As I have written you previously, His Holiness lived in the United States for a long time as a prelate of the Greek Orthodox Church and Archbishop of North and South America. He became an American citizen and he was a firm believer in and supporter of our principles, ideals and policies.

His Holiness was a most progressive Church dignitary and among his many achievements was the initiation of the Ecumenical movement, looking toward the unification of all the Christian faiths, and his active participation in the establishment of the World Council of Churches.

It was at that time that our great American, the late General George Marshall, then Secretary of State under President Truman, invited me to go to Washington to see him. He wanted to inquire about His Holiness, then the Archbishop, as he was greatly concerned about the successor to Maximus V, who was the Patriarch, and who was quite ill.

General Marshall subsequently endorsed His Holiness, Patriarch Athenagoras, and he duly succeeded Maximus V as Patriarch. General Marshall's wisdom and foresight were amply justified because Patriarch Athenagoras proved to be of tremendous help in stemming the tide of atheism in Soviet Russia and its satellite states, where the majority of the people are Greek Orthodox.

While His Holiness had to become a Turkish citizen when he became Patriarch, he still has the highest esteem for the United States and remembers with great pleasure the many years he spent here. His spiritual leadership of the 250,000,000 people of the Greek Orthodox faith (including those in the Soviet Union and behind the Iron Curtain) has greatly strengthened their hope for eventual freedom as well as their confidence in the United States as the bastion of democracy.

(continued)

His Holiness electrified the world a few years ago when His Holiness, Pope Paul VI announced that he was going to Jerusalem and the Patriarch cabled him: "I will meet you in Jerusalem and open dialogue", -- a courageous gesture which broke the silence that had existed for over 900 years between these two great basic Christian faiths.

Because I had acted as intermediary between His Holiness and General Marshall, the Patriarch sent me a message, about six months ago, with one of his bishops, which he requested me to convey to you personally.

When I saw His Holiness on my recent visit to Istanbul, naturally I explained that I had been unable to see you as yet, due to your extremely heavy schedule on so many vital matters. His Holiness understood and expressed the hope that I would be able to see you soon.

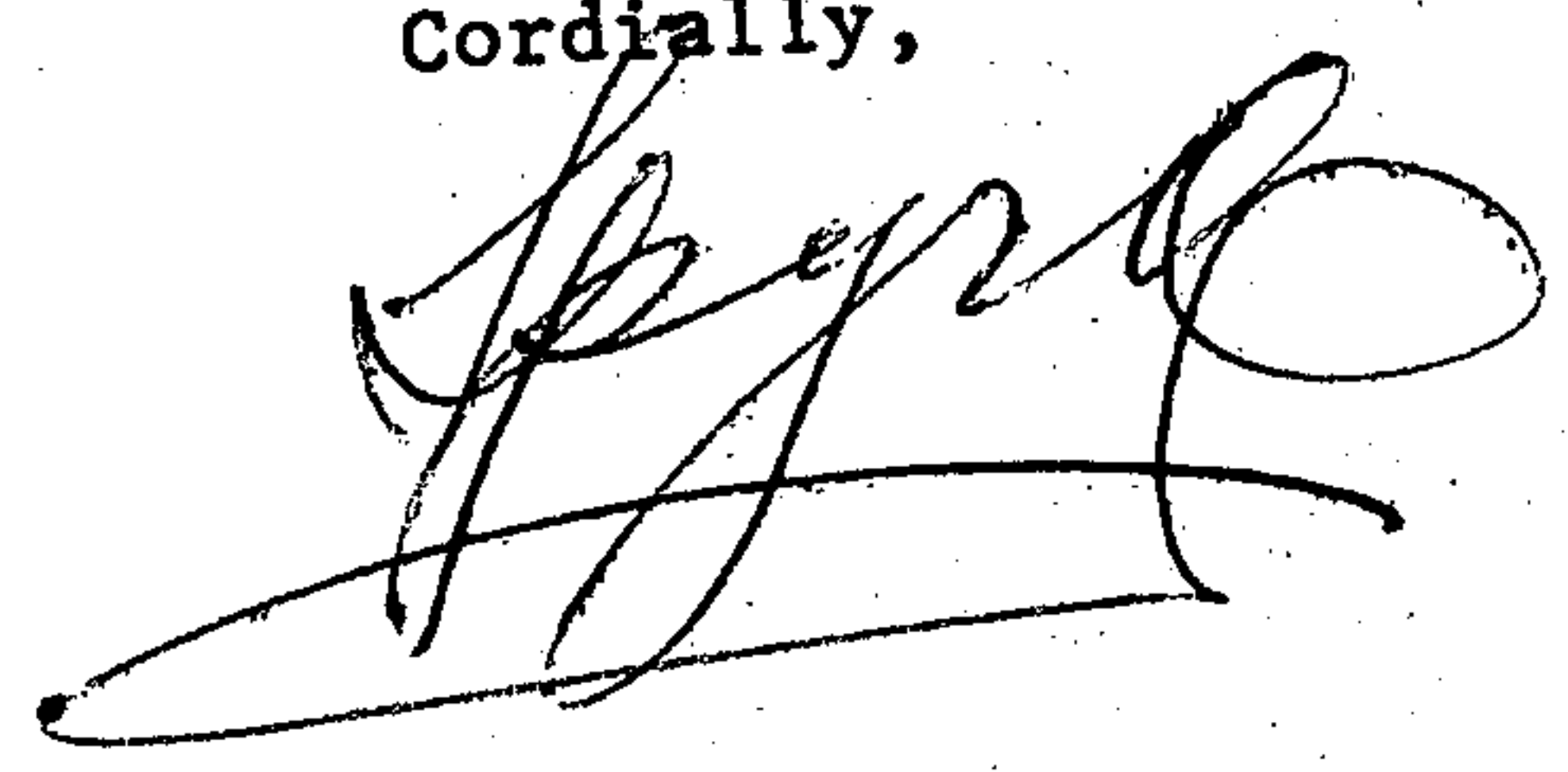
His Holiness spoke of you very highly and praised your indefatigable efforts in behalf of peace.. He was particularly elated at your recent visit to Romania and said that it was made at a most propitious time and would have a very good influence.

His Holiness is now 84 years of age and while his health is good, he is not as strong as he used to be. He is naturally concerned about the matter of his successor and he feels that the situation today is just as critical as it was twenty years ago, when General Marshall so wisely selected him to become Patriarch, and that it warrants our interest and attention.

I sincerely hope, Mr. President, that you will be able to designate a time soon when I may come to see you to discuss this important matter and to deliver to you the message entrusted to me by His Holiness.

With best wishes and kindest regards,

Cordially,



The President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, D.C.

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SEP 20 1969  
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PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE

Letter to President Richard M. Nixon from Prudential Lines, Inc. chairman Spyros Skouras regarding a summary of his discussion with Greek Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras I, who now resides in Istanbul, Turkey. Skouras provided Nixon with a brief biographical sketch of His Holiness. White House, 25 Sept. 1969. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349525822/USDD?u=birm97026&sid=USDD&xid=c8df2de8>. Accessed 20 July 2020.