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The Honorable Ed Royce
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dana Rohrabacher
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee
on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging
Threats
5210 O'Neill House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Eliot Engel
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
2066 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gregory Meeks
Ranking Member
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee
on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging
Threats
315 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, Chairman Rohrabacher, and Ranking Member Meeks:

I write on behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI) to convey our appreciation for the actions taken recently by the legislative bodies over which you reside. The unanimous passage by the Committee of H.Res.354, that condemns the violence against peaceful protesters outside the Turkish Ambassador's residence and calls for the perpetrators to be brought to justice, is welcomed. AHI looks forward to its passage by the United States House of Representatives. Furthermore, the Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats Subcommittee's hearing "Violence Outside the Turkish Ambassador's Residence: The Right to Peaceful Protest," held on the same day as the Committee's vote was an important step to further delve into the brutal attack by President Tayyip Recep Erdogan's security detail upon peaceful American protesters on United States soil. The bipartisan congressional rebuke, and in some instances, outrage conveyed by individual members of Congress, is justified.

However, the erosion of democratic ideals in Turkey did not begin May 16, 2017. As the Greek American community is well-aware, I respectfully point out Turkey has been a habitual violator of the rule of law, including United States law, for decades. As a result, Turkey is a significant force of instability and its acts have dire implications to U.S. security interests. It is this behavior by a so-called ally that the Institute requests the House Committee on Foreign Affairs takes under further examination in a comprehensive hearing on Turkey that reassesses United States relations with Turkey. Please take into consideration the following examples:

Aegean Sea

Greece aspires to achieve complete normalized relations with Turkey, however, the latter, as official policy, continues to threaten Greece with war (casus belli) and promotes territorial claims that are unfounded and devoid of any legal basis. These claims disregard all relevant treaties and agreements in force, including the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty under which the Dodecanese Islands and adjacent islets were ceded by Italy to Greece. Because the U.S. is a signatory to the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, this Treaty is U.S. federal law and the U.S. is bound to enforce.

Because of Turkey's territorial claims, Turkey historically has violated Greece's sovereignty in the Aegean Sea on an almost daily basis. In 1996, Turkey's claims to the Imia islets nearly led the two NATO allies to war over the islands. In fall 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan elevated tensions unnecessarily by calling publicly into question the integrity of the Treaty of Lausanne.¹ Since then, AHI cites the following two egregious, and previously unprecedented, violations of NATO ally Greece's sovereignty in the Aegean Sea—**both of which occurred on a single day**:

- On May 15, 2017, Turkish aircraft and helicopters illegally entered Greece's airspace **141 times**, the Hellenic National Defense General Staff reported. Twenty Turkish F-16, five CN-235 maritime surveillance aircraft and 19 helicopters entered the Athens flight information region (FIR) without submitting a flight plan. Turkey's act prompted a formal response from an EU spokesperson, urging Turkey to respect the sovereignty of EU-member nations.²
- On February 1, 2017, Greece's Ministry of Defense recorded **138 violations** of Greek airspace over islands in the Aegean Sea, which had to be intercepted.³ On the sea, Greek and Turkish ships were involved in a "faceoff" when a Turkish navy missile boat, and supporting crafts, entered and violated Greece's territorial waters by the Imia islets.⁴

These two violations are the most recent in a long list of incidents over the past three years:

- In 2014, there were 3,045 total violations of Greek national airspace and Infringements of Air Traffic Regulations (ICAO) that resulted in eight engagements with Hellenic Air Force interception fighters, according to the Hellenic National Defense General Staff.
- On March 1, 2015, Turkey unilaterally issued a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM), a move to reserve extensive airspace over the Aegean Sea for military maneuvers that Greece protested. On March 3, 2015, Turkey canceled the NOTAM thanks to pressure from the U.S. and NATO.
- On July 15, 2015, six Turkish fighters crossed into Greek airspace 20 times – in a single day.
- On February 15, 2016, six Turkish fighter jets and a CN-235 maritime patrol aircraft violated Greek airspace 22 times – again, in a single day.
- In sum, **2,573** infringements and violations of Greece's airspace occurred in 2016.

These Turkish provocations have caused Greece's Defense Minister, Panos Kammenos, to state, "The Greek armed forces are ready to answer any provocation."⁵

Cyprus

In 1974, Turkey invaded the Republic of Cyprus with the illegal use of U.S.-supplied arms and equipment in violation of the **U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1961**, as amended, the UN Charter article 2 (4), the preamble and article 1 of the NATO Treaty, and customary international law. Unfortunately, on the eve of the 43rd anniversary of Turkey's illegal invasion, Turkey continues its illegal occupation of 37% of the

¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-turkey-idUSKCN12021J>

² <http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2017-05-17/eu-warns-turkey-after-141-greek-airspace-violations-single-day>

³ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-turkey-tensions-idUSKBN15G5AQ>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/30/greek-and-turkish-warships-in-standoff-in-aegean-sea>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/27/tensions-flare-greece-turkey-answer-provocation-erdogan>

Republic of Cyprus—an EU nation. In doing so, Turkey continues to violate U.S. law on an ongoing basis by transferring American-made weapons from mainland Turkey to Turkish-occupied Cyprus.

- Congress must put a stop to this illegal transfer of weapons or otherwise it is complicit in breaking its own laws.

Additionally, Turkey's illegal occupation of Cyprus has had an impact upon The Committee on Missing Persons's ability to access certain Turkish military installations on Cyprus for the purpose of excavating the remains of Cypriots missing since the tragic events that occurred on the island for proper identification.

Furthermore, instead of helping to provide stability by promoting a just settlement supported by both Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, Turkey continues to insist on antiquated and obstructive stances. For example, Turkey's insistence on maintaining the Treaty of Guarantee allows for future unilateral Turkish military interventions, which is completely unacceptable and contradicts the governing principals of a European Union member state. Furthermore, Turkey refuses to withdraw its 40,000 illegally-stationed troops on Cyprus. The withdrawal of Turkish troops would be a significant confidence building measure in the peace process.

Ecumenical Patriarchate

The Turkish government has tolerated assaults against its Greek Orthodox Christian religious minority, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and continues the illegal closure of the Greek Orthodox Halki Patriarchal School of Theology in Istanbul. These actions violate U.S. principles and law on freedom of religion as expressed in **Section 2804 of the FY98 Omnibus Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act (PL 105-277)**. This law calls for the Turkish government to safeguard the Ecumenical Patriarchate, its personnel, and its property, and to reopen the Halki Patriarchal School of Theology. Moreover, Turkey stands in violation of **The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA)**, which obligates the president of the United States to oppose violations of religious freedom in any country whose government "engages in or tolerates violations of religious freedom and promote the right to religious freedom in that country." The Act further obligates the president to take one or more of 15 enumerated actions with respect to any such country. IRFA also created the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), which continues to designate Turkey a "Tier 2" status in its annual report. In 2012, the USCIRF designated Turkey a "country of particular concern (CPC) nation.

In conclusion, the actions of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs are to be applauded. However, the brutal attack perpetrated outside the Turkish ambassador's residence on May 16, 2017, is not the first time Turkey, its government, and representatives, have violated blatantly United States law. Instead, Turkey has a rather lengthy history of doing so; a history the American Hellenic Institute contends must be examined thoroughly by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, especially because Turkey is a force of instability that adversely affects U.S. security interests in the region. Therefore, AHI requests the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to hold a hearing to examine this critical and timely topic.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Nick Larigakis