

# AHI

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January 2, 2019

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President Donald J. Trump  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

On behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), I write to convey our gratitude for your invitation of a White House visit to Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on January 7, 2020.

It is in the United States' best interest for Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean to be politically, economically and socially stable, and for democratic principles to flourish, including adherence to the rule of law. Greece is an immensely valuable link as "a pillar of stability" in the region as several high-level U.S. government officials have noted.

The U.S.-Greece relationship has reached new heights by virtue of an ongoing Strategic Dialogue, where avenues for cooperation among many sectors, including: regional cooperation, defense and security, and trade and investment, among others, are plotted for implementation.

### Defense, Security and Counterterrorism

Greece is a pivotal and dependable NATO ally to advance U.S. interests and is a frontline state against terrorism. The recently revised Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement between the United States and Greece illustrates the two allies' commitment to address over a longer term the security challenges in the region. For its part, Greece further demonstrates its commitment to the Alliance as one of five NATO members to meet NATO's minimum standard on defense expenditures; which is second only to the U.S., by percentage. To demonstrate further:

- **NSA Souda Bay, Crete:** the most important U.S. military facility in the Mediterranean Sea from where joint USN/USAF reconnaissance missions and air refueling support for Operations Desert Shield/Storm, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom were implemented successfully.
- **NATO Joint-Command HQ:** Thessaloniki hosts a NATO Rapid Deployment Corps combined with its Third Army Corps for two years.
- **Operation Atlantic Resolve:** Greece enables a substantial portion of the U.S. Army's 10th Combat Aviation Brigade to enter the European theater through the port of Thessaloniki and to depart through Alexandroupolis.
- USAF temporarily operates MQ-9 Reaper Drones from Greece's Larisa Air Force Base.
- Increased aircraft and soldier involvement at Stefanovikio Hellenic Army airbase improves NATO transit capability.

It is evident Greece contributes significantly to U.S. interests. However, it becomes increasingly challenging for Greece to fulfill this important role when it constantly is expending valuable resources to defend itself against aggressive and provocative behavior emanating from a fellow NATO member, Turkey. Turkey's routine challenges to Greece's sovereignty must cease and desist.

- The most recent example is Turkey's breach of Greece's airspace 40 times in one day in mid-December 2019, which leads to mock dogfights, as reported by *Stars and Stripes*.<sup>1</sup>

Another example which has thrown the Eastern Mediterranean into further unrest and turmoil is the maritime border Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Turkey and Libya. It is an act which U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt called "unhelpful" and "escalatory" in nature. The ambassador also affirmed the internationally recognized legal concept that "inhabited islands as a matter of customary international law are entitled to the same treatment as continental territory."

- AHI urges that the principles Ambassador Pyatt articulated in his statement be applied with equal force to the threats which Turkey has made against the Greek island of Kastelorizo and other Greek islands in the Aegean Sea as well as its violations of Greek sovereign airspace.

### **International Commerce and Trade**

Greece also is an important player in international commerce and trade, especially via its shipping industry. According to Greek shipping industry statistics, 22.5% and 20.3% of the Greek-owned fleet's activity is dedicated to the U.S. and the European trade, respectively; and "Greek-owned ships represent almost 21% of the global tonnage."<sup>2</sup> We commend your Administration's engagement with Greece on economic relations, which has occurred at the high levels. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross visited Athens in September 2019, where he conveyed the United States' support for Greece's efforts to "attract investment, deregulate, lower taxes, and spur economic growth." Moreover, in December, Secretary Ross commended Greece's economic recovery and the IMF's projection for Greece's economic growth in 2020 at an investment conference in New York. AHI welcomes future U.S.-Greece economic relationships to pursue commercial partnership and opportunities for more U.S. investment in Greece.

However, Mr. President, it is important to note that Turkey also threatens Greece's economic development. Turkey exploits its control over the flow of migrants to Europe. Greece has carried the heavy burden of migrant flows to Europe, which has had a detrimental impact upon Greece's economy. Prime Minister Mitsotakis has been very clear to state that Turkey bears its responsibility due to Turkey's ability to control "the flows in the Aegean."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stripes.com/news/europe/turkey-breaches-airspace-of-greece-40-times-in-a-day-triggering-mock-dogfights-between-the-nato-allies-1.611611>

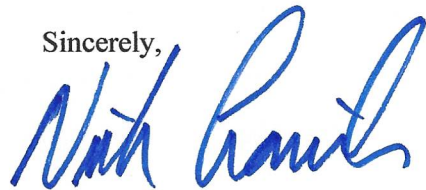
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/greek-shipping-and-economy-2019-the-strategic-and-economic-role-of-greek-shipping/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-greece/greece-says-turkey-can-and-must-control-migrant-flows-to-europe-idUSKBN1WJ14Q>

Mr. President, the United States-Greece relationship is a strong and healthy one and your invitation to Prime Minister Mitsotakis underscores the excellent state of relations. The opportunity must be taken during your meeting with Prime Minister Mitsotakis to commit to ensuring Greece's security and economic development, which are being challenged in a multitude of ways by Turkey. Turkey is the perpetrator of instability in the Eastern Mediterranean and broader region which is detrimental to U.S. security interests. Turkey is a failed NATO ally that cozies up to Russia and Iran. However, your personal relationship with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan can be an asset and yield an opportunity to open the door to peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. The U.S. must demonstrate strong, unequivocal support of Greece by continuing to strengthen relations across all sectors and by applying the rule of law to Turkey for its illegal actions.

Respectfully submitted,

Sincerely,



Nick Larigakis  
President

CC: Michael R. Pence, Vice President of the United States  
Michael Pompeo, Secretary of State  
Robert C. O'Brien, National Security Adviser to President Donald J. Trump  
Philip T. Reeker, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs,  
Department of State  
Matthew A. Palmer, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European & Eurasian Affairs, &  
Special Representative for the Western Balkans, Department of State  
Maria Olson, Director of the Office of Southern European Affairs, Department of State  
David Berns, Deputy Director of the Office of Southern European Affairs, Department of State  
Geoffrey Pyatt, Ambassador of the United States to Greece  
Ross G. Johnston, Greek Desk Officer, Department of State  
The Congress