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President Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), I write in advance of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Washington to raise the Institute's concern about how Turkey is a significant force of instability. In recent months, Turkey has elevated tensions in the Aegean Sea with NATO ally Greece, threatened Cyprus' sovereign right to explore for natural gas within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and has infringed upon Cyprus' EEZ, and President Erdogan has directed alarming rhetoric toward the European Union and its citizens. In February, I wrote to urge the administration to act to uphold the rule of law and to call on Turkey, the provocateur of these tensions, to cease and desist with its actions that have dire implications to U.S. security interests. Now, AHI requests these issues, which demonstrate the instability for which Turkey is responsible, to be placed on your meeting agenda with President Erdogan on May 16.

Aegean Sea

Historically, Turkey 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 recent years, the Institute notes Turkey's frequent and egregious violations of NATO ally Greece's sovereignty in the Aegean Sea:

- 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

In fall 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has elevated tensions unnecessarily by publicly calling into question the integrity of the Treaty of Lausanne.¹ Now, on one day during the week of January 29 to February 4, 2017, Greece's Ministry of Defense recorded **138 violations** of Greek airspace over islands in the Aegean Sea, which had to be intercepted.² This is unprecedented. 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.³

These Turkish provocations have caused Greece's Defense Minister, Panos Kammenos, to state, "The Greek armed forces are ready to answer any provocation."⁴

President Trump, Greece's sovereignty in the Aegean Sea and respect for the Treaty of Lausanne, both of which are in the best interests of the United States, must be respected. Greece must expend immense financial resources to defend its sovereignty—upwards of \$400 million a year—during an economic crisis from which it is in the best interest of the United States for Greece to emerge. Moreover, despite its economic difficulties, Greece continues to be of vital importance for the projection of U.S. strategic interests by its geographic location and its strong, unwavering support for NATO. As home to the most important naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea, NSA Souda Bay, Crete, Greece has been critical to the delivery of U.S. troops, cargo, and supplies, providing access and extending the U.S. and NATO's reach into the Middle East and North Africa. To illustrate, in 2015, more than 70 U.S. Navy and NATO ships and vessels visited Souda Bay and more than 2,830 U.S. Air Force and NATO planes utilized the 115th Combat Wing on Crete. Also, more than 65 U.S. ships and more than 1,200 trainees utilized NMIOC.

- **In addition, Greece is a top contributor to the defense efforts of NATO, spending an estimated 2.38% of its GDP on defense. Greece is second behind only the United States in this regard.**

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 which the U.S. is bound to enforce. Turkey's ongoing dispute of Greece's sovereignty in the Aegean was reaffirmed by policy analysts following Turkey's National Security Council meeting held in late March 2017, according to a press report. The analysts observed "...fiery rhetoric emanating from Ankara is not just to win over a domestic audience, saying that it underlines its core policy objectives with regard to the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean."⁵

Cyprus

In March 2017, the Turkish Foreign Ministry condemned Cyprus' research for natural gas within Cyprus' exclusive economic zone (EEZ).⁶ In recent years, Turkey has violated international law by practicing

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

² <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-turkey-tensions-idUSKBN15G5AQ>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/30/greek-and-turkish-warships-in-standoff-in-aegean-sea>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/27/tensions-flare-greece-turkey-answer-provocation-erdogan>

⁵ <http://www.ekathimerini.com/217313/article/ekathimerini/news/aegean-and-cyprus-are-high-turkish-priorities>

⁶ <http://www.tornosnews.gr/en/tourism-businesses/new-investments/24162-turkey-threatens-again-to-take-actions-regarding-cyprus%E2%80%99-natural-gas.html>

“gunboat diplomacy” in the eastern Mediterranean with an incursion into Cyprus’ EEZ. This has led Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades to express concern about Turkey sparking a “hot incident” in the eastern Mediterranean. He stated, “I fear the period from now until the referendum in Turkey, as well as the effort to create a climate of fanaticism within Turkish society,”⁷ To further illustrate Turkey’s provocative actions are ongoing, Turkey issued a Navtex on April 19, 2017 that according to one press report reserves “an area inside the island’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), off Famagusta, to carry out seismic surveys between April 30 and June 30.”⁸ The report elaborates on coverage of the Navtex, stating it not only includes Cyprus’ EEZ, but it also extends into a part of Cyprus’ territorial waters. Adding to this development is Turkey’s intensified military presence in an area stretching south from Rhodes to the coast of Paphos in Cyprus and the issuance of three consecutive Notices to Airmen (NOTAM) for military exercise over Turkish-occupied northern Cyprus.⁹ Moreover, these threats in Cyprus’ EEZ are an endangerment to U.S. companies, such as ExxonMobil and Noble Energy, who have been, or will be, working to explore for hydrocarbons in the eastern Mediterranean.

The Republic of Cyprus has the sovereign right under international law to explore and exploit its natural resources within its EEZ. The United States has repeatedly stated it supports Cyprus’ sovereign right to explore energy in its offshore areas. Cypriot government officials, such as Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides, have stated the island’s natural resources belong to all its people and that once a settlement is reached, potential revenues would be shared.

Furthermore, regarding the Cyprus settlement talks, which are at a near stand-still, instead of helping to provide stability by promoting a just settlement supported by both communities, Turkey continues to insist on antiquated and obstructive stances. For example, Turkey’s insistence 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. Moreover, 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.

Meanwhile, Turkey’s relations with the European Union are at low-point. President Erdogan’s consolidation of power following the referendum vote of April 15 is of concern, leading to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to announce it will begin re-monitoring Turkey and also leading some members of European Parliament to state the EU will have to reassess its position on Turkey.¹⁰ In the lead-up to the April 15 referendum, President Erdogan called Europe the “center of Nazism.”¹¹ This does not bode well for the fragile EU-Turkey deal on the migrant crisis, which if it falls apart, will have a detrimental effect on Greece, which took the brunt of the crisis in 2015-16 with more than one million arrivals.

Finally, AHI understands fully well that defeating ISIS will be at the top of your agenda with President Erdogan. However, the United States cannot depend on, or trust, Turkey as an ally in this important fight. *“Erdogan long played footsie with the Islamic State; his government apparently helped arm, sell oil from, and open Turkish territory for use by ISIS. More recently he has targeted the Syrian Kurds, U.S. allies*

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/27/tensions-flare-greece-turkey-answer-provocation-erdogan>

⁸ <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/04/25/turkish-seismic-vessel-sails-northern-coast/>

⁹ <http://www.ekathimerini.com/217691/article/ekathimerini/news/turkey-ups-the--ante-with-cyprus-over-gas-fields>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/26/council-of-europe-turkey-human-rights-pace>

¹¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-referendum-idUSKBN17826N>

against ISIS," writes Doug Bandow, senior fellow at the Cato Institute, an April 26, 2017 opinion piece.¹² Bandow concludes, "In the case of Turkey, President Erdogan has abandoned its long-standing affinity for the West." Moreover, in a 2015 article, Robert Ellis cited a UN Security Council report that he states concludes: "Turkey has also provided the primary routes for arms smuggled to ISIL and the Al-Nusra Front, an Al-Qaida affiliate."¹³ Additionally, Turkey only agreed to help after the Turks "forced the U.S. into a yearlong negotiation" to use Incirlik air base to strike the Islamic State, according to *Wall Street Journal* commentary.¹⁴ As a result, policy analysts have openly questioned whether Turkey should be a NATO member. To further illustrate this point, Turkey undermined the coalition's efforts to combat ISIS when it killed partner forces in a series of airstrikes in Syria and Iraq on April 25th.

Therefore, AHI cautions that whatever future assistance Turkey should grant the United States on ISIS must not come at the expense of true and tried allies who promote and advance U.S. national interests in the eastern Mediterranean region.

President Trump, AHI's perspective on these pressing issues are founded on the rule of law and are based on what is in the best interests of United States security in the region. Given the conduct and policies of the Erdogan regime, it is essential that the U.S. fundamentally re-assess our alliance and overall relationship with Turkey. We hope that you will make this point to President Erdogan.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Nick Larigakis
President

Cc: Vice President Mike Pence
U.S. Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson
U.S. Secretary of Defense, James Mattis
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Jonathan Cohen
Deputy Assistant to the President & National Security Advisor, Colonel Andrea Thompson
Deputy Assistant to the President & Senior Director for European and Russian Affairs, Fiona Hill
U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, John R. Bass
U.S. Ambassador to Greece, Geoffrey Pyatt
U.S. Ambassador to Cyprus, Kathleen Doherty
U.S. Department of State Cyprus Desk Officer Larina H. Konold
U.S. Department of State Greece Desk Officer Wendy Stancer
U.S. Department of State Turkey Desk Officer Matthew Habinowski
Congressman Gus Bilirakis, co-Chair of the Congressional Hellenic Caucus
Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, co-Chair of the Congressional Hellenic Caucus

¹² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dougbandow/2017/04/26/turkeys-erdogan-plays-dictator-in-constitutional-fight-divides-nation-as-popularity-wanes/6/#18e0111442e6>

¹³ "Turkey, Our Ally," by Robert Ellis, *Frontpage Magazine*, June 3, 2015 ([web site](#))

¹⁴ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/turkey-is-no-longer-a-reliable-ally-1470869047>