



AHI

AMERICAN HELLENIC INSTITUTE, INC.

Dear Editor:

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Nick Larigakis

President

James Lagos, Esq.

Vice President

Nicholas G. Karambelas, Esq.

Treasurer

Kostas Alexakis, Esq.

Secretary

Leon Andris

Dr. Athina Balta

Peter Bota

Nicholas E. Chimicles, Esq.

Van Coufoudakis, Ph.D.

Dimitrios Halakos

Aleco Haralambides, Esq.

James L. Marketos, Esq.

James Pedas

Gene Rossides, Esq.

George Tsetsekos, Ph.D.

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

Louis Katsos

President, AHI-New York

Constantine Larigakis

President, AHI-New Jersey

Spiros Mantzavinos

President, AHI-Delaware

Paul Sogotis

President, AHI-California

Jim Stoucker

President, AHI-Northern VA

STAFF

Yola Pakhchanian

Publications Director

Elias Gerasoulis

Legislative Assistant &

Special Projects Coordinator

Kudret Ozersay, deputy prime minister and minister of Foreign Affairs of the so-called “Republic of Northern Cyprus,” wrote an op-ed “Ending the Cyprus arms embargo will increase tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean” (May 20) criticizing the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Partnership Act, which Senators Robert Menendez and Marco Rubio introduced in April. Ultimately, Ozersay’s article is marred by self-contradiction and simplistic argumentation. Furthermore, he is fond of glossing over pertinent and essential points that need to be pointed out.

First, Ozersay is inaccurate to call it an “arms embargo” on Cyprus. Rather, the accurate term is “arms prohibition.” According to Ozersay, lifting the “arms embargo” on the Republic of Cyprus would be “the worst move for the region” and “do nothing to encourage both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to seek resolution of the Cyprus issue.” Ozersay, in the same paragraph, acknowledges that this “embargo” has been in place since 1987. Ozersay’s central point is built on a shaky foundation. Unfortunately, a resolution to the “Cyprus problem” has been elusive for forty-five years due to Turkey’s intransigence. By his own admission, the arms prohibition has been in place for over thirty years. No progress toward a peaceful and just settlement has occurred during this time. The arms prohibition has utterly failed its ostensible purpose of helping end the continued division of the island. Furthermore, Turkey engages in extensive weapons transfers to the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). What would be the benefit of prolonging this failed policy? Conversely, what would be the threat of repealing the arms prohibition? Who is this prohibition threatening?

On that note, it is important to clarify the reasons why the arms prohibition should be lifted. Ozersay’s assertion the Republic of Cyprus is interested in, or capable of, having an armed conflict or arms race with the so-called “TRNC” is nonsense considering there are 40,000 illegally staged Turkish troops in occupied Cyprus. In addition, a Republic of Cyprus capable of buying arms from the U.S. does not pose an existential threat against Turkey, which has the second largest army in NATO. This anachronistic arms prohibition needs to be lifted, considering the importance placed by the United States and other members of the region on Cyprus as an anchor of stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. Together with Greece and Israel, and in training exercises with the United States,

Cyprus is providing security to the region, including in counterterrorism. For example, Cyprus is a valued partner in the Global Coalition against ISIS. Moreover, Cyprus was the first EU nation to sign the U.S.' Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). Lifting the arms prohibition on Cyprus will only deepen United States security cooperation with the Republic of Cyprus and thus is in the best interest of the United States.

The focus of scrutiny, as it relates to the "Cyprus issue," should be aimed toward the Republic of Turkey, not Greek-Cypriots. Ozersay conveniently leaves out the fact that the so-called "TRNC" is simply an unincorporated association created by Turkey, an illegitimate entity both propped up and supervised by President Erdogan's 40,000 troops. All decisions are made by Ankara. The first and foremost fact to remember is that Turkey is an occupying nation which illegally invaded Cyprus in 1974. It still maintains its foothold on the island to this very day, almost forty-five years later. Furthermore, Turkey is also a provocateur in the Eastern Mediterranean, illegally sending drillships to Cyprus' exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and constantly violating Greece's airspace. The Republic of Cyprus is a nation that follows the rule of law and possesses geostrategic significance. This is something the West is beginning to recognize, as shown by the near-universal denunciation of Turkey's most recent violations of the Republic of Cyprus' EEZ. In fact, EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, in response to this egregious violation, stated "[I am a Cypriot](#)."¹

The government of Turkey, led by a president motivated by an ideology of neo-Ottomanism coupled with Islamic theocracy, is not at its current point capable of being a genuine partner in solving these issues. The United States should urge Turkey, the root cause of the "Cyprus issue," to stop exacerbating the crisis on the island and to cease immediately its provocative actions in the region.

Sincerely,


Nick Larigakis

From Nick Larigakis, President of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), Washington, DC

¹ <http://www.ekathimerini.com/240283/article/ekathimerini/news/junker-sides-with-cyprus-on-issue-of-turkeys-drilling-activities>