

Congressman Brad Sherman: Record on Hellenic Issues

I have had the honor of serving on the House Foreign Affairs Committee since 1997, where I am now the second-ranking Democrat. I am also a longtime member of the Caucus on Hellenic Issues.

I have worked on several initiatives to improve U.S. relations with the Hellenic world—supporting Cypriot reunification, the Republic of Cyprus' rights to its Exclusive Economic Zone, support for the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and support for Greek debt relief.

At the 33rd Cyprus and Hellenic Leadership Conference in 2017, I was honored to receive the prestigious Frizis Award, presented annually to a prominent member of the Jewish community who has made significant contributions to Hellenic issues.

GREECE

As a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I have always been a strong supporter of strengthening U.S.-Greece ties. That is why I was pleased when the U.S. and Greece held their first strategic dialogue in December 2018. I joined my colleagues in sending Secretary of State Mike Pompeo a letter applauding this move.

In March 2009, I wrote a letter to the Department of State urging that Greece be included in the visa waiver program. The State Department replied that “along with our interagency partners, we are moving forward with Greece's accession to the program.” In March 2010, Greek citizens became eligible to travel to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program.

As many of you know, on March 2, 2018, Turkey arrested two Greek soldiers who were patrolling a heavily forested part of the border with Turkey when the weather conditions deteriorated, and they briefly found themselves on the wrong side of the dividing line. In May 2018, I sent a letter to Secretary of State Pompeo urging him to call on the Turkish authorities to release both soldiers and to return them to Greece. Thankfully, as a result of this pressure, Turkey released the Greek soldiers in August 2018.

CYPRUS

This year marks the 46th anniversary of the illegal Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Turkey has kept an estimated 40,000 soldiers on the island since invading. I am strongly opposed to Turkey's illegal occupation of Cyprus. I believe that the Turkish military occupation of Cyprus, a sovereign EU member state, must end. Therefore, I cosponsored the *End the Cyprus Arms Embargo Act* to repeal the provisions which prohibit the export and transfer of defensive articles to the Republic of Cyprus. The bill was subsequently signed into law. Nevertheless, this was a one-year, partial lifting of the ban. The U.S. must fully lift its arm prohibition in earnest.

I continue to follow developments in the region related to reunification. In recent years, I have joined my colleagues in the Hellenic Caucus in submitting a letter urging Congress to stipulate that all monetary assistance from the U.S. for Cyprus should support measures aimed at the reunification of Cyprus and the establishment of a unified government that guarantees the human rights of all Cypriots.

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN & AEGEAN SEA

In September of 2011, Turkey and the so-called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC),” an illegitimate entity, signed an Exclusive Economic Zone border agreement contesting the Republic of Cyprus’ claim to its standing 12-nautical mile ocean boundaries. Turkey immediately began disrupting the Republic of Cyprus’ ocean gas exploration.

I have previously joined Representatives Carolyn Maloney, Gus Bilirakis, and Ted Deutch in sending letters to draw attention to Turkey’s actions. The letters have urged the State Department to convince the Turkish government to withdraw warships from Cypriot waters so that Cyprus reunification talks could resume. I have also opposed the transfer of naval vessels to Turkey throughout my time in Congress, and I have spoken on the House floor and publicly in opposition to such transfers.

GREECE, CYPRUS & ISRAEL

In 2017, I joined my colleagues from the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in sending a formal letter to then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, urging him to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to cooperation with Greece, Israel, and Cyprus, particularly regarding energy exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In addition, in recognition of Cyprus as an important partner in the Eastern Mediterranean, last June, I co-sponsored the *Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019*. This important bill supports an enhanced partnership between the United States and Israel, Greece, and Cyprus; authorizes funds for military education and training in Cyprus and Greece; prevents the transfer of F-35 aircraft to Turkey; and, requires the Secretaries of Defense and State to report all incidents where the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus or the sovereign territory of Greece in the Aegean Sea have been violated. The Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act must be implemented fully.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

Religious freedom is a fundamental right, and the status of the Ecumenical Patriarch is no exception to this rule. Turkey refuses to recognize the 2,000-year-old Sacred See or the church’s international status, and Turkey has confiscated vast amounts of the church’s properties. Throughout my time in Congress, I have consistently co-sponsored legislation calling on Turkey to respect the rights and religious freedoms of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

In September 2020, I co-sponsored H.Res.1050, which calls on Turkey to eliminate all forms of discrimination, particularly those based on race or religion, and immediately grant the Ecumenical Patriarchate appropriate international recognition and ecclesiastic succession and respect human rights and property rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

In June 2020, I co-sponsored Rep. Titus’ amendment to the annual State and Foreign Operations spending bill calling on the State Department to denounce Turkey for taking formal action to change the status of Hagia Sophia, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, from a museum to a mosque; and to engage with Turkey to return its status to a museum so as to welcome people of all faiths and those who have marveled at its architectural and artistic splendor. This amendment passed the House unanimously.

TURKEY

I applaud Turkey’s removal from the F-35 joint strike fighter program. The F-35 is one of the most sophisticated defense systems the U.S. develops, and recent actions underscore the importance of not

sharing it recklessly. When Secretary of State Pompeo testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I told him directly that the F-35s would be used against Greece.

I am proud to have been part of the bipartisan effort here in Congress to prevent the planned delivery of F-35 Lightning II jets to Turkey, and to that effect I joined with Rep. Sarbanes in sending a bipartisan letter to Secretary of Defense Mattis on the matter. Most recently, I asked for language in the 2021 budget prohibiting the delivery of F-35s to Turkey.

I have also supported legislation expressing concern for the United States-Turkey alliance, including the implementation of CAATSA sanctions against Turkey, and in 2017, joined my colleagues in condemning the violence against peaceful protesters outside the Turkish Ambassador's residence and calling for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

In my first term in Congress, I opposed transferring U.S. frigates to Turkey, since the Turkish navy was critical to the invasion and occupation of Cyprus.

For twenty-four years, I was a key supporter of the Armenian Genocide Resolution, and other resolutions recognizing the ethnic cleansing of Greeks from Anatolia and condemning the massacre in Smyrna.