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November 25, 2024

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The Honorable Joe Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As the American Hellenic Institute (AHI) reflects on the closing days of your administration, we are compelled to express our feedback regarding the lack of significant progress over the past four years on critical issues related to the actions of Turkey that oppose U.S. interests in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Given your long-standing commitment to these matters—first as a Senator, then as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and eventually as Vice President—we had hoped for a more decisive stance in addressing the pressing challenges faced by our allies and partners in the region due to Turkey's actions, particularly concerning the ongoing occupation of the Republic of Cyprus as we recently marked the 50th anniversary of Turkey's illegal invasion.

For five decades, the illegal occupation of the Republic of Cyprus has remained unresolved. The implications of this prolonged crisis extend beyond the Republic of Cyprus itself, as the occupation affects stability throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, the occupation detracts from U.S. regional policy interests involving energy security, maritime safety, anti-terrorism, trade, and more. This situation has persisted despite your previous acknowledgment of its importance and the commitments you made to promote peace and security in the region.

- As a U.S. Senator in 1989, you wrote to AHI, stating: "...we cannot lose sight of the fact that the rights of Greek Cypriots have been trampled upon, and we must ensure that their claims to ancestral land and property seized during the 1974 invasion are not compromised. Finally, we must send a signal to Turkey that until it has removed every last soldier from Cyprus, it will never be recognized as a full member of the international community."
- Upon your historic arrival to the Republic of Cyprus as Vice President in 2014, you stated, "And it's long past time -- 40 years -- that all Cypriots are reunited in a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. Many of you know that I've been personally following events in Cyprus for more than 40 years, long enough to know that only Cypriots can decide on a vision for your future, and only Cypriots can exercise the courage necessary to make that vision real."

There is a profound need for a comprehensive approach that prioritizes diplomatic engagement, supports the rights of Cypriots, and promotes a resolution to the occupation of the Republic of Cyprus based upon the rule of law, international law, and U.S. law. The U.S. can play a crucial role in facilitating dialogue and providing the necessary support for the reunification of the Republic of Cyprus.

We also urge you to also further expand the growing level of cooperation between the United States and the Republic of Cyprus. We commend the steps taken by your Administration to strengthen this partnership, such as establishing the first Strategic Dialogue, signing a Roadmap for Bilateral Defense Cooperation, increasing levels of military cooperation, and engaging in collaboration on a humanitarian aid corridor for the on-going conflict in the Middle East. To this end, we recommend you take actions to further bolster the role of the Republic of Cyprus in promoting the regional interests of the U.S. by supporting its entry into NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), and other cooperative roles with NATO through Individually Tailored Partnership Programs (ITPPs), which would establish it as a "NATO partner." Mr. President, you have already worked to strengthen the critical ties between NATO Allies and NATO partners in the Indo-Pacific - we urge you to do the same in the Eastern Mediterranean.

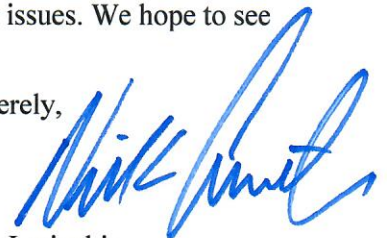
The Eastern Mediterranean is a geopolitical focal point, and the lack of action to address Turkey's destabilizing behavior sends a message that may embolden further aggression. Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who you referred to as an "autocrat" that the United States needed to "take on and defeat" in 2019 while you were campaigning for the U.S. presidency, has aligned Turkey increasingly closer with adversarial nations like Russia and Iran, supports Iran-back terrorist organizations such as Hamas, opposes Western multilateral structures by requesting to join BRICS, perpetuates domestic human rights abuses, erodes democratic values, and expands authoritarian rule in Turkey. Your administration has an opportunity to make a meaningful impact to address these important issues, which, while limited as you approach the end of your term, is still possible if you act diligently and effectively.

Furthermore, we urge you to continue your work to protect the religious freedoms severely jeopardized by Turkey. You have consistently expressed a strong commitment to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, emphasizing the importance of religious freedom that resonates with the Orthodox community. As Vice President, you visited His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I at the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 2011, and as President, you welcomed Patriarch Bartholomew to the White House in 2021. Upon your acceptance of the 2015 Patriarch Athenagoras Humanitarian Award, you stated, "I believe so firmly that the Greek Orthodox Church must have the right to control its own destiny, free from interference from any government and I said it in Turkey. The protection of holy sites is imperative." Your recognition of the challenges faced by the Ecumenical Patriarchate reflects an understanding of the need for dialogue and protection of the Patriarchate and Orthodox Christian minority community in Turkey.

In closing, we thank you for your service and commitment to the issues that matter to the Greek American community. As we look to the future, we hope you will prioritize the resolution of the occupation of the Republic of Cyprus so that the nation is finally whole, free and at peace. We also hope you use your remaining days in office to counteract the destabilizing actions of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. Your final months in office present a critical opportunity to make a lasting difference, and we urge you to seize it.

Thank you for taking the time to hear from us on these critically important issues. We hope to see meaningful action in the time that remains.

Sincerely,



Nick Larigakis
President