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Vice President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
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Dear Mr. Vice President:

On behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), I am writing to raise a number of issues for your consideration as you prepare for your upcoming visit to Greece and Turkey.

The core issues of concern to the Greek American community are all based within the universally accepted principles of the rule of law and international law, including U.S. laws. Our positions support the best interests of the United States.

Vice President Biden, because you championed the issues of the Greek American community for decades in the Congress—dating back to 1974—we know there is no one else in the Obama administration that is as familiar and aware of these issues than you.

President Barack Obama swept into victory three years ago and proclaimed, “The time for change is now!” However, nothing has changed significantly as it relates to issues of importance to the Greek American community. In some instances one can claim we have digressed. A recent example is the increase in provocative actions and extremely belligerent rhetoric directed at Cyprus by Turkey.

A quick review of our issues since President Obama came to office shows the following:

- The illegal occupation of Cyprus, now in its 37th year, by more than 40,000 Turkish troops, continues;
- Provocations in the Aegean Sea continue as Turkish military aircraft violate Greek national airspace with frequency. The Turkish threat of war (*casus belli*) if Greece exercises its legal rights in the Aegean Sea under the Law of the Sea Treaty and international law remains in effect. Turkey continues to claim sovereign rights in the Aegean Sea which are unfounded and devoid of any legal basis;

- The Halki Patriarchal School of Theology remains closed and the Ecumenical Patriarchate's rights, freedoms, and security continue to be threatened in violation of the U.S. International Religious Freedom Act; and
- The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) continues with its intransigent and provocative actions against Greece refusing to negotiate in good faith to resolve the name issue.

We have, of course, seen slight progress on certain issues. In March 2010, Greece entered the U.S. Visa Waiver Program. Turkey did return an illegally confiscated orphanage as ordered by the European Court of Human Rights and granted citizenship to a number of Orthodox clerics that will help to address concerns about sustaining a line of succession for the Ecumenical Patriarch.

In 2008, Presidential Candidate Obama's campaign statements on the community's issues were frankly the most favorable ones that we have seen in quite some time from a presidential candidate. However, they have largely gone unfulfilled during his first term.

Obstacles to U. S. Interests in Southeast Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean

The projection of U.S. interests in southeast Europe and the eastern Mediterranean depend heavily on the region's stability. Therefore, the United States has an important stake in fostering good relations between two NATO allies, Greece and Turkey, and in achieving a just and viable settlement of the Cyprus problem.

However, Turkey's continuing occupation of Cyprus, its intransigence in solving the Cyprus problem, its refusal to recognize the Republic of Cyprus and its veto to the accession of Cyprus to international organizations; its continuing violations of Greece's territorial waters and airspace, and continuing religious and human rights violations in Turkey, all prevent stability and damage U.S. interests. In addition Turkey has amplified its saber-rattling rhetoric against U.S. allies Cyprus and Israel as they explore for gas and oil, has committed detrimental actions toward Israel, and has supported Iran in the UN Security Council. As a result, the American Hellenic Institute expressed disappointment with the Obama administration for pushing through a \$111 million arms sale to Turkey in late October/early November 2011.

Of further concern to region's stability is the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), which through its intransigence and highly provocative actions toward Greece, is preventing the resolution of the name issue dispute between the two countries (see below).

Greece: NATO Ally, Strategic Partner

Despite the economic problems that Greece continues to face, she has not wavered from her commitments and obligations as a NATO member.

Greece is home to the most important naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea, NSA Souda Bay, in Crete. There are numerous annual visits by U.S. military ships and planes to Souda Bay and its adjacent air base. Souda Bay has been critical to the delivery of U.S. troops, cargo, and supplies to Afghanistan, and most recently, NATO operations in Libya. This has been acknowledged by President Obama, others in the administration and Congress.

In addition, Greece is a top contributor to NATO's defense efforts, spending an estimated 2.2% of its GDP on defense. In addition, Greece is an active participant in peacekeeping and peace-building operations conducted by international organizations, including the UN, NATO, the EU, and OSCE.

It is important to note, that unlike Turkey, Greece has never asked for any financial assistance from the United States in return for lending its support and cooperation.

Therefore, when promoting a multilateral approach to diplomacy and foreign policy, the U.S should look to Greece as an immensely valuable link in this region. With its close cultural, political and economic ties to Mediterranean countries, Western Europe, the Balkans, Eastern Europe and the Middle East, Greece is an ideal strategic partner for the U.S.—in the present—and in the *future*.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) – Name Recognition Issue

Greece has made a major compromise by proposing “a compound name for the country; a name that will distinguish it from both the Greek and Bulgarian part.” Greece's position is unambiguous. It has gone the extra mile. It wants a negotiated, mutually acceptable solution that will be valid internationally, in accordance with the U.N. Security Council resolutions. This is a serious shift of tremendous importance from Greece's initial position. Unfortunately, this gesture was not reciprocated by FYROM. Instead, FYROM has been the intransigent party and not Greece. FYROM must realize that to join NATO it must focus on the fulfillment of NATO's good neighborly relations principle and the immediate settlement of the difference over the name issue. However, it continues to provoke Greece and refuses to negotiate a solution in good faith, especially since Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski came to power in August 2006. The time is now for FYROM to demonstrate the maturity and the responsibility that is required of a nation that aspires to become a NATO and European Union member.

In our view, and in the view of many others, U.S. actions since 1992 regarding the FYROM name dispute have constituted an American foreign policy blunder that has damaged U.S. interests in the Western Balkans and harmed Greece—our key ally in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean—for no sound reason.

As a senator, President Obama was one of three original lead co-sponsors of Senate Resolution 300, which urged FYROM to work with Greece within the framework of the United Nations process to reach a mutually acceptable official name for that country and achieve longstanding U.S. and U.N. policy goals.

Therefore, during your visit to Athens, we ask that you issue a statement that would send a clear message to FYROM that the United States wants this matter resolved as soon as possible and that FYROM:

- Needs to negotiate in good faith with Greece to resolve the name issue and to cease immediately their irredentist propaganda against Greece, propaganda which violates the UN-brokered Interim Accord, as stated in Article 7 paragraph 1 of the Accord, signed in New York on September 13 1995 between FYROM and Greece.

A name that satisfies both countries and the immediate halt of all provocative actions against Greece will satisfy the interests of all the parties.

Turkey's Violations of the Rule of Law

Cyprus Invasion and Occupation

Cyprus is an important nation for U.S. interests in the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, and it is a key partner on counter-terrorism and security issues. Cyprus shares the U.S.' core values of freedom, democracy and adherence to the rule of law. It is also a member of the EU, and the first EU nation to sign the U.S.' Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

July 20, 2011 marked the 37th anniversary of Turkey's illegal invasion and occupation of 37 percent of the Republic of Cyprus in violation of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, the UN Charter article 2 (4), the preamble and article 1 of the NATO Treaty, and customary international law. Today, Turkey contributes more than \$350 million annually in direct economic support to the regime in the occupied part of Cyprus, and it is estimated that the total cost to Turkey of its illegal occupation amounts to \$1 billion annually. This is money that can serve a more useful purpose in the collective fight to combat international terrorism.

In October of 2008, in a campaign statement released to the Greek American community, Presidential Candidate Obama stated:

"As president, [I] will show U.S. leadership in seeking to negotiate a political settlement on Cyprus. [I] believe strongly that Cyprus remain a single, sovereign country...within a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation...A negotiated political settlement on Cyprus would end the Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus and repair the island's tragic division while paving the way to prosperity and peace throughout the entire region."

We support a settlement of the Cyprus problem through negotiations based on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation in a state with a single sovereignty and international personality, incorporating the norms of a constitutional democracy embracing key American principles, the EU acquis communautaire, U.N. resolutions on Cyprus, the pertinent decisions of the European Court of Human Rights and of other European Courts--as in the best interests of the United States.

Mr. Vice President, we call upon you to urge Turkey to:

- demilitarize Cyprus now;
- withdraw its 43,000 occupation troops illegally in Cyprus (Turkey's troops can be more useful if deployed in Afghanistan or other theatres);
- return to Turkey the 180,000 illegal settlers/colonists from Turkey in violation of the Geneva Convention of 1949;
- tear down the green line barbed-wire fence across the face of Cyprus which, together with Turkey's 43,000 occupation forces, is the real cause of the alleged isolation of the Turkish Cypriots in the occupied northern part of Cyprus; and
- warn Turkish leaders not to manipulate the current talks or restrict Mr. Eroglu at the bargaining table.

Advancing these positions will underscore support for the rule of law and respect for international law. It will demonstrate that the United States is serious about fostering a solution to the near 37-year-old Cyprus problem. The U.S can play a crucial role by getting realistic with Turkey and eliminating its

double-standard policy that has rewarded Turkish aggression and ignored countless violations of the rule of law in Cyprus—a valued ally of the U.S. on counter-terrorism and security issues in the Eastern Mediterranean. It does not serve the United States’ best interest to continue with failed policies and the appeasement of Turkey.

Suppression of Religious Freedom, Violations of Minority Communities

We commend the Obama Administration for demonstrating support for the Ecumenical Patriarchate. However, the Turkish government continues to tolerate assaults against its Greek Orthodox Christian religious minority (including in Istanbul, Imbros and Tenedos) and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and it continues the illegal closure of the Greek Orthodox Halki Patriarchal School of Theology. We condemn these actions as violations of U.S. principles on freedom of religion and U.S. law as expressed in Section 2804 of the Omnibus Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act of 1998 (PL 105-277). The law states that the United States should use its influence with the Government of Turkey to suggest that the Government of Turkey:

- recognize the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its nonpolitical religious mission;
- ensure the continued maintenance of the institution’s physical security needs, as provided for under Turkish and international law, including the Treaty of Lausanne, the 1968 Protocol, the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the Charter of Paris;
- provide for the proper protection and safety of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Patriarchate personnel; and
- reopen the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s Halki Patriarchal School of Theology.”

Under the International Religious Freedom Act (IFRA) of 1998, the president of the United States is obligated to oppose violations of religious freedom in any country whose government “engages in or tolerates violations of religious freedom and promote the right to religious freedom in that country.” The Act further obligates the president to take one or more of 15 enumerated actions with respect to any such country.

Therefore, we call on you to urge Turkey to fulfill its obligations to:

- recognize the international legal personality of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its nonpolitical religious mission;
- ensure the continued maintenance and security of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its personnel and the safety of the Ecumenical Patriarch as required under all applicable treaties; and
- remove all legal obstacles to the functioning of the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s Halki Patriarchal School of Theology.

The United States should not tolerate such violations from an ally. The U.S. should call on Turkey to immediately implement and enforce strictly the guarantees of religious freedom and human and minority rights set forth in the Treaty of Lausanne, the UN Charter, other international agreements, and U.S. laws.

In 2009, you hosted a wonderful dinner for the Ecumenical Patriarch at your residence on the occasion of his visit to Washington. As a follow-up, we urge you to visit the Ecumenical Patriarch at the Ecumenical Patriarchate to state your continued support for this Holy See and to send a strong

message to the Turkish government that the United States will not tolerate future violations against the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This sentiment can be underscored by issuing a joint communiqué with His All Holiness Bartholomew I.

Violations of Greece's Sovereignty in the Aegean Sea

Turkey has made an outrageous claim to one-half of the Aegean Sea in total disregard of all the relevant international treaties and agreements in force, has engaged in provocative activities in the Aegean and does not agree to the referral to the International Court of Justice of the issue of the delimitation of the continental shelf. Despite the opening of accession negotiations with the EU and Greece's sincere efforts to achieve complete normalization in relations with Turkey, the latter continues to threaten Greece with war (casus belli) and promotes claims that are unfounded and devoid of any legal basis.

Because Turkey aspires to become a full member state of the EU she should be more respectful of international law and the commitments she has undertaken in the context of the EU accession process, including the full respect for the principle of good neighborly relations.

Therefore, we call on you, to impress upon Turkey to:

- adhere to international law and legal procedures with respect to any dispute it has with Greece in the Aegean Sea; and
- immediately abandon its provocative actions in its violations of Greek territorial waters and airspace.

Our Positions Are Founded in the Rule of Law

The issues presented above and the recommendations offered for their successful resolution are all embodied within the fundamental principles of democracy and are founded on the rule of law and what is in the best interests of the United States. I appreciate the opportunity to bring them to your attention. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Nick Larigakis
President

cc: Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton
Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Phil H. Gordon
U.S. Ambassador to Greece Daniel B. Smith
U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Francis J. Ricciardone
Department of State Director, Office of Southern European Affairs, Kathleen H. Allegrone
Department of State Turkey Desk Officer Meghan Gregonis
Department of State Greece Desk Officer Christopher Snipes
Department of State Turkey Desk Officer Lindsay Coffey
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