

BRAD SHERMAN
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
SERVING THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

Mr. Nick Larigakis
President
American Hellenic Institute
1220 16th St NW
Washington, DC 20036-3202

Congressional Report on Hellenic Issues

Dear Mr. Larigakis:

As a senior member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and a member of the Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Issues, I am a supporter of a strong U.S.-Greek relationship. We are all watching the financial situation in Greece, and hope that Athens can resolve its debt crisis and begin rebuilding its economy. Here are a few of the initiatives I have been working on to improve U.S. relations with the Hellenic world.

Cypriot Reunification

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, and Cyprus must be reunified.

In March 2015, I joined my colleagues in the Hellenic Caucus, as I have done in past years, in submitting a letter to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs urging them to stipulate that all monetary assistance from the U.S. for Cyprus should support measures by the United States aimed at the reunification of Cyprus and the establishment of a unified government on Cyprus that guarantees the human rights of all Cypriots.

I am cautiously optimistic that recent developments in the region bode well for the prospect of reunification. Both the leader of northern cypriots, Mustafa Akinci, and Cyprus' President Nicos Anastasiades have publicly expressed their desires to make the reunification of Cyprus a reality, and have restarted reunification talks.

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Support for the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople

Religious freedom is a fundamental human right, and support for the rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the spiritual home to the world's oldest and second largest Church, is no exception. Turkey refuses to recognize the 2,000-year-old Sacred See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's international status, has confiscated the large majority of the Church's assets and properties, and maintains that candidates for the position of Ecumenical Patriarch must be Turkish citizens.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee sent a clear message regarding Church properties wrongfully confiscated and held by the Turkish Government when it passed the *Turkey Christian Churches Accountability Act (H.R.437)* by a unanimous vote on June 24, 2014. I strongly advocated for this legislation, which was introduced by the House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Ed Royce and Ranking Member Rep. Eliot Engel, and was cosponsored by thirty-one Members from both parties, including myself. During the Committee hearing to discuss the bill, I argued that legislation was needed to address the ongoing destruction of Christian religious heritage in Turkey. I will continue to fight to protect religious properties.

Turkey's discrimination against the Church, such as the requirement that only Turkish citizens can be selected as the Ecumenical Patriarch, is unacceptable. **I have cosponsored legislation urging Turkey to respect the rights and religious freedoms of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in every congressional session since it has been introduced.** Such resolutions call upon Turkey to eliminate discrimination based on race or religion, and grant the Ecumenical Patriarch appropriate international recognition and ecclesiastic succession.

The Greek Orthodox Theological School of Halki remains closed, as it has been since 1971, despite promises and public statements of support for its reopening by the current President of Turkey, President Erdogan and Turkey's former President Gul. The Greek Orthodox Halki Seminary, located on Halki island, was closed in 1971 by the Turkish government and remains closed today. I cosponsored legislation calling upon the Government of Turkey to facilitate the reopening of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Theological School of Halki without condition or further delay.

I will continue to work with my colleagues on the Foreign Affairs Committee and the International Religious Freedom Caucus to fight for the rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate until they are fully restored.

Support for Greek Cypriot Rights in the Exclusive Economic Zone

The Republic of Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is recognized by the United States, the European Union, and by its neighboring countries, Israel, Egypt and Lebanon. Turkey does not recognize the rights of the EEZ and has violated the rights of Greek Cypriots in the EEZ, threatening the peace and stability of the region.

In October of 2014, Turkey issued a Navigational Telex, or NAVTEX, stating it was sending a seismographic vessel to explore areas within the Cypriot EEZ in the Republic of Cyprus's southern waters and would be reserving areas for seismic surveys from October 20 to December 20 of that year. Subsequently, three naval vessels, one research and two military, were sent to carry out a series of seismic surveys in the EEZ. As a result, Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades suspended reunification talks. I joined Representatives Carolyn Maloney, Gus Bilirakis, and Ted Duetch in sending a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry to draw attention to Turkey's actions on October, 24, 2014. The letter urged Kerry to convince the Turkish government to withdraw warships from Cypriot waters so that reunification talks could resume.

I have opposed the transfer of the naval vessels to Turkey several times throughout my time in Congress. I have also spoken out on the House floor and publicly in opposition to such transfers and Turkey's exploration of Cyprus's EEZ.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I look forward to further strengthening the relationship between the United States and Greece. Please do not hesitate to contact me on this or any other issue of concern.

Sincerely,



BRAD SHERMAN
Member of Congress

P.S. Please visit my website at www.BradSherman.house.gov and click on the link to my Federal Issues Questionnaire. Also, please give us your email address, so we can send you updates on Congressional activity.